

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

827

March 2024



**HAPPY RESURRECTION
EASTER 2024**

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL NOTE FROM THE 24th CONSULTA (EXTRAORDINARY)

Comboni Year of Ongoing Formation (CYOF) 2024/25

After the checks were carried out, the CG concluded that it is possible to proceed with the organisation of the CYOF according to the planned calendar, i.e. starting from September 2024. It therefore asks that the procedures for confreres who need an entry visa to Italy begin immediately, particularly for those confreres who must have Italian lessons.

Perpetual Professions

Sc. Fernando Uribe Mendoza (M)	Xochimilco (M)	31.01.2024
Sc. Madalitso Castomo Supia (MO)	Elukwatini (RSA)	03.02.2024

Ordinations

Fr. Alule Deogratus (U – EGSD)	Mbuya/Kampala (U)	03.02.2024
Fr. Mukaaya Achireo Kiwanuka (U–T)	Mbuya/Kampala (U)	03.02.2024
Fr. Got Tob Emmanuel (KE)	Kitale (KE)	10.02.2024
Fr. Roger Alexander Cerritos Abarca (PCA)	Ilopango (San Salvador) (PCA)	24.02.2024

Holy Redeemer Guild

March 01 – 07 CO 08 – 15 E 16 – 31 DSP
April 01 – 15 CN 16 – 30 EC

Prayer Intentions

March – That in this world marked by wars and situations of violence and injustice, women may be the artificers of peace, building up in daily routine and in the sacred space of life gestures of love and reconciliation. *Let us pray.*

April – That the Lord may grant all missionaries a share in the Paschal Mystery of Christ – the mystery of that life which is stronger than death – that they may learn to strip themselves of the old man and put on the sentiments of Christ: tenderness, goodness, humility, patience, magnanimity, and closeness to the least in history. *Let us pray.*

Meaningful Anniversaries

MARCH

17	Saint Patrick, bishop	London Province
19	Saint Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Central Africa

APRIL

Meaningful anniversaries

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

Publications

Kasereka Amini Wasingya, mccj, *Le cri de la terre et le cri des pauvres, un appel au dialogue interreligieux sur la création*, Afriquespoir, RDC 2024. Cardinal Fridolin, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kinshasa, presents this new book on interreligious dialogue which appeals not only for peaceful co-existence between human beings but also, and above all else, for co-responsibility in the protection of the planet, following the teaching of Pope Francis and the magisterium of the Church. "As communities and individuals – Father Kasereka writes – we must promote a new way of thinking, new policies that include the poor, a new educational programme and a lifestyle and spirituality that generate resistance to the continual consumption of what we do not produce."

HOLY SEE

Appointments by Pope Francis

Pope Francis has appointed four new members of the Council of the Section for Relations with States and International Organisations of the Secretariat of State. The new members are: Cardinals Luis Antonio G. Tagle (pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation in the Section for the first evangelisation and the new particular Churches), Michael Czerny (prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development), Claudio Gugerotti (prefect of the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches), and Father Giulio Albanese, mccj (director of the Office for Social Communications and the Office for Missionary Cooperation between the Churches of the Vicariate of Rome). The task of the Council is to be a "think-tank" at the service of Vatican diplomacy.

Our warmest congratulations to Father Giulio Albanese.

SECRETARIAT OF FORMATION

International conference on the ongoing formation of priests

The Dicastery for the Clergy, in collaboration with the Section for first Evangelisation and the new particular Churches of the Dicastery for Evangelisation, and the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches, organised the International Conference for the Ongoing Formation of Priests held from 6th to 10th February on the theme “Rekindle the gift of God that is within you (2 Tim 1.6)”. Against the background of the reference to the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*: “The beauty of being disciples today. A unique, integral, community and missionary ongoing formation” (See *RFIS*, Intr. 3).

Around 800 priests participated, coming from 60 nations, each bringing their own contribution of challenges, proposals and experiences during the various group works, now all modelled on the synodal method. Also present were four Comboni Missionaries: Father Fernando Domingues, provincial of Portugal and consultant to the Dicastery of the Clergy; Father Alberto de Oliveira Silva, coordinator of the Permanent Formation Centre of Rome; Father José de Jesús Villaseñor Gálvez, general secretary of Formation, and Father Luis Enrique Ibarra, in Rome for studies. Monsignor António Manuel Bogaio Constantino, Auxiliary Bishop of Beira, also offered his contribution online.

The methodology adopted, characterised by that of a workshop, offered a paradigmatic experience of ongoing formation which it is hoped today, will be increasingly carried out with a participatory and synodal style. Among the objectives highlighted, that of sharing the beauty and good present in current pastoral practices, the strengths, the urgencies, and the challenges in each individual context clearly stood out. In the background of the Conference, the definition of Ongoing Formation given by Pope Francis was always present: “An experience of permanent discipleship, which brings us closer to Christ and allows us to conform more and more to him.”

Everyone felt the need to rethink training as a ‘*continuum*’, that is, a path that begins with initial training and continues throughout the various phases of the life and service of the ordained minister. It must be an “integral” formation, capable of harmoniously articulating the human dimension (which is its basis) and its spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral extensions.

It was surprising – given that we were dealing with diocesan clergy – to see the clear emphasis given to “the necessary community dimension of ongoing formation”, with the bishop understood as the main animator. The ‘priestly fraternity’ has been defined as “good medicine” for the priest

in the ordinary moments of life so as not to fall into a sense of isolation, and “a shoulder of support” in the most critical phases of his pastoral life. The challenges highlighted were: the complexity of the present moment and the widespread sense of loneliness; the reduction of staff and the super-activism of priests; a certain vision of the priest which would like him to be almost “bodiless”, an “asexual” and emotionless person, always ready to respond to everything and everyone.

The solutions suggested to overcome this situation are: pay attention to your personal balance; give space and time to a profound spiritual approach to one’s life and ministry, with a clear contemplative note; learn to manage maturely your own sensitivities, emotions and relationships in pastoral activity, including one’s sexuality, which can no longer be a taboo in formative development; rediscover the ‘necessity’ of spiritual direction; recognise the need for accompaniment; demand that priests feel the care of their bishops; the wise use of social networks.

Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, hoped that this conference will be the beginning of a path of reflection, comparisons and proposals to continue over time, also through the new dialogue platform. (*Father José de Jesús Villaseñor Gálvez, mccj*)

BRASIL

Ongoing Formation

On 27th and 28th January 2024, two Ongoing Formation meetings were held in São Paulo: one was for Comboni Missionaries with less than ten years of perpetual vows (10 confreres) and the other for Comboni Missionaries over seventy years of age (17 confreres). The meetings were directed by Mrs. Georgia Moura, a psychologist and counsellor of the Findway Institute who assists dioceses and religious institutes by proposing a ‘*percorso di interezza*’, a methodology of integration and the search for what is essential to reach the unity of being, as a response to personal and social fragmentation. These were moments of fraternity and deep sharing, evaluated positively by the participants.

Provincial Retreat

The provincial assembly took place on 3rd and 4th February 2024, again at the Emmaus Meeting House. There were 44 priests and brothers and 2 scholastics present. The first day, dedicated to reporting on the activities of 2023, began with the Provincial’s report and continued with the presentation of the reports of the Secretariats of the Mission, Formation

and Missionary Animation, Finance, the Communication Commission and the Health and Quality of Life Commission.

The Provincial then gave a summary of the final formulation of the Six-Year Plan 2023-2028, the result of a collective effort which saw the involvement of all the confreres.

Subsequently, Father Saverio Paolillo coordinated the formulation of the Action Plan for the two-year period 2024-2025. The confreres were divided into groups, based on the areas of missionary activity. They prepared action proposals which were presented, evaluated, and approved by the assembly.

The assembly ended with the celebration of Holy Mass presided over by Father John Bosco Mugerwa, who recently arrived in the Province. The assessment of the assembly was very positive. Some participants highlighted the need to dedicate more time to community sharing and discussion.

EGYPT-SUDAN

Sudan – No Telephone or Internet

Last February 4th, all of Sudan was left without telephone and Internet networks. At the time of writing, some telephone companies have partially resumed operation, but exclusively in Port Sudan. For us, this means that there is no way to communicate with our two communities of Kosti and El-Obeid, nor with all the other parishes of the two dioceses of Sudan. The lack of a network could cause problems in the supply of goods. We continue to pray for peace, as the war has already passed 300 days since it began.

Egypt: Cairo – *Shabaab Comboni* ('The Comboni Youth')

Last January 25th, about fifty young people from our various parishes in Cairo, gathered for the first meeting of Shabaab Comboni ('The young people of Comboni'). The objective is to accompany these young people in the search for God's will in their lives, to make Comboni and his charisma known, and to create missionary and vocational awareness. For this reason, a path has been created that is structured with fortnightly meetings, which include biblical catechesis on the Gospel of Mark, testimonies of missionary life and sharing of different people and realities. The journey will end with a missionary camp in the summer of 2024. (*Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, mccj*)

ESPAÑA

A practical workshop for missionary animators

From 13th to 15th February, the missionary animators of the Comboni province of Spain gathered at the provincial house in Madrid to attend a 'practical workshop of missionary animation'. It had two main aims: to introduce some confreres who have recently returned to the province or have been assigned to this missionary service, which the province has always considered of primary importance, and to seek together new ways of disseminating our two magazines, *Mundo Negro* and *Aguiluchos*, in the hope of being able to increase circulation and the number of subscriptions.

Eight confreres took part in the workshop. They were from the communities of Palencia, Palas de Rei, Moncada and Madrid. Also present were Father Fernando González Galarza, general secretary of the Mission, and Father Javier Alvarado, European coordinator of Missionary Animation.

After analysing the figure of Saint Daniel Comboni as a "missionary animator in Europe," Mr. Jaime Álvarez Nistal, assistant administrator of *Mundo Negro*, offered an overview of the critical situation in which our two magazines find themselves in terms of circulation and subscriptions. We therefore proceeded with the in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and methods of action regarding the 'promotion campaigns' for magazine subscriptions, participation in the various book fairs and the knowledge and diffusion of our social networks.

Particular attention has been given to our participation in book fairs throughout Spain, which are proving to be valuable opportunities to present our products and make ourselves known. Last year we participated in nine book fairs, with very positive results.

We concluded the three days of the workshop by discussing and drawing up a program for the sale of our products.

The final evaluation of the meeting was positive, and we agreed to meet again for more meetings in the future, as we wait to see up close the work of the next Missionary Animation Assembly which will be held in Rome from 22nd to 26th April 2024. (*Father Jaume Calvera Pi, mccj*)

EUROPE

GERT meeting in Bressanone

The European Group for Theological Reflection (GERT), composed of some Comboni missionaries working in the old continent and belonging to the circumscriptions of Portugal, Spain, the German-speaking Province, the London Province, Italy and the General Curia, or personally

interested in theological and pastoral issues related to their missionary context, met in Bressanone/Brixen from 12th to 16th February.

The reflection began with a biblical look at creation. We revisited the various 'creation stories' present in the Bible and underlined how these stories do not intend to give us a chronology or a historical reading of past events, but rather underline the aspects of the relationship between God and creation, and, consequently, the relationship between creatures. This awareness has an impact on our missionary ministry in Europe in terms of supporting the paths of community regeneration and conflict resolution, to imitate the creative capacity of God himself in our practical lives.

We then addressed the topic of multiculturalism and its obvious repercussions on the type of presence we must have as religious in our local Churches. This area also requires our attention and our important contribution. The experience we have had in other countries - where we were guests of other cultures - requires us to share with the local European Churches the need for meetings, dialogue, hospitality, and a new reflection on our faith.

We concluded our work by reflecting on the "climate crisis" and the repercussions this has on evangelisation. It concerns supporting the birth of a new culture and an 'other' vision of the world. Building the Kingdom of God today can only involve the formation of a new mentality, capable of taking into consideration a "conversion" to respect nature and the plan that God has for the cosmos. In this, we are guided by the magisterium of the Church, in a special way by the teaching of Pope Francis.

The discussion of the various texts presented to the group was fruitful. Now, the various authors - strengthened by the suggestions received - will be able to prepare the final versions of their contributions and share them with the Comboni Family present in Europe. (*Brother Alberto Parise, mccj*)

MÉXICO

Perpetual vows and diaconate

On 31st January 2024, the scholastic Fernando Uribe Mendoza, having completed his formation and after the experience of missionary service in the community of Sahuayo, made his perpetual religious profession. The ceremony took place in the Comboni Seminary of Sahuayo and was marked by the emotion felt when he decided to leave everything to serve the Lord and, above all, when he received the blessing of his mother and sister who were present to accompany and support him in this very important moment in his life.

Three days later, on February 3, Fernando received the diaconal ordination at the hands of Monsignor Francisco Figueroa, auxiliary bishop of Zamora (Mexico), in the sanctuary of the Patron Saint, James, of Sahuayo.

Fernando will continue to render his missionary service in Sahuayo until his ordination to the priesthood, due to take place in a few months. (*Father Ismael Piñón, mccj*)

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AMERICA

Priestly Ordination

A small parish, as its name also indicates, Santa María Niña (Santa Maria Bambina), in San Salvador (El Salvador), recently opened its doors to welcome the priestly ordination of one of its sons, the Comboni deacon Roger Alexander Cerritos Abarca, born in 1980 near the church.

Roger received the ministry of the priesthood at the hands of Monsignor José Luis Escobar Alas, Archbishop of San Salvador. The community prepared itself with a week of animation by the Comboni Missionaries of the province and was thus able to learn more about our charism.

At the ordination mass on Saturday 24th February, in a church packed with people – priests of the diocesan and religious clergy, men and women religious, and many of the faithful –, Monsignor José Luis underlined that it is only by the grace of God that a young man reaches the priesthood, after a long journey of prayer and formation.

The archbishop expressed his gratitude for all the Comboni Missionaries who worked in the archdiocese, remembering in particular those who are no longer with us, Fathers Giacomo Piccinelli († 2022) and Orlando Borghi († 2024).

Roger, who spent the time of his formation in Costa Rica, Mexico and Kenya, thanked everyone present, saying that he had never felt alone, but always accompanied by the Institute, the Comboni Missionaries, friends, benefactors and many people of good will. A community that, in its poverty, sends a missionary priest into the world is an invitation to young people to reflect on the gift of the missionary vocation and a call to everyone to experience this occasion as a gift of faith.

Roger's first mass was celebrated in the Comboni parish of Saint Daniel Comboni in Ilopango, a municipality in the department of San Salvador.

We pray that day and night, sun and rain will find our new priest always ready to serve his people, and to faithfully say 'yes' to his vocation, a gift from God.

(*Father Juan Diego Calderón Vargas, mccj*)

SOUTH AFRICA

Perpetual vows and ordination to the diaconate

On Saturday 3rd February, in the small church of Elukwatini (South Africa), in the complex where the convent of Benedictine nuns and a home for the elderly are located, Madalitso Castomo Supia took his final vows. They were received by Father John Baptist Keraryo Opargiw, provincial of South Africa, during the Mass presided over by the bishop of Witbank, Monsignor Thaddaeus Xolelo Kumalo, and concelebrated by various confreres and some local priests. The Eucharistic celebration combined perpetual profession with the celebration of the day for consecrated life, postponed by one day, to give more people the opportunity to participate.

In his homily, the bishop thanked the men and women religious who offer their service in the diocese with dedication and expressed words of gratitude for the many Comboni missionaries, especially those who preceded us who, in a spirit of sacrifice left their families and native countries to come and announce the Gospel on South African soil.

After communion, Sister Antoinette, a South African Benedictine, in a passionate speech, highlighted the beauty and meaning of religious consecration, urging the young people, present at the celebration in large numbers, to evaluate the possibility of God's call to follow Jesus by putting into practice the evangelical counsels.

Heartfelt thanks go to the Benedictine nuns of Elukwatini who welcomed the Comboni Missionaries and other guests for the celebration with such exquisite hospitality worthy of their founder.

On Sunday 4th, in the parish church of the Sacred Heart in Mashishing (Lydenburg), Madalitso was ordained deacon during the Sunday Eucharist presided over by Monsignor Thaddaeus. The participation of the faithful was numerous and enthusiastic, showing their affection and support for Madalitso, who spent a year of pastoral service in the parish after completing his theological studies in Pietermaritzburg.

The bishop encouraged the new deacon to continue his path with fidelity and joy and extended an invitation to other young people to follow his example.

At the end of the Eucharistic celebration, Father John Baptist Keraryo Opargiw thanked his confrere Father Charlemagne Dossavi Sitou, parish priest of the Sacred Heart, for having accompanied the young deacon in preparing for his diaconal ordination. Then, Father John Baptist did not miss the opportunity to remind the young women present in the church that Madalitso has consecrated himself totally to God for the mission and that, from now on, they will have to see him as if they were his sisters,

and he must see them as if he were their brother... and in no other way! Words that hit the mark, judging by the laughter and applause that resonated throughout the church. (*Father Efreem Tresoldi, mccc*)

Centenary of the Comboni presence in Pretoria Diocese

Communion in diversity was the theme chosen for the celebration of the centenary of the Comboni presence in South Africa, which was held on 17th February 2024 in the parish church of Saint Augustine in Silverton, in the diocese of Pretoria. The theme reflects the identity of the local Christian community which, until the early 1990s, was composed almost exclusively of whites, while today, people from various African nations are in the majority.

In his opening speech, Father John Baptist Keraryo Opargiw, Provincial Superior of South Africa, presented the relevance of the charism of Saint Daniel Comboni in today's world and, in particular, in Africa. After him, the Archbishop Emeritus of Pretoria, George Francis Daniel, who led the diocese for over thirty years, intertwined his personal history - from being an Anglican priest who converted to Catholicism, to being ordained a priest and then bishop - with stories of meetings with confreres who followed one another in our parish of Silverton.

Another archbishop emeritus, Franciscan William Slattery, then spoke. He recalled by name the various confreres with whom he worked in the past, first in the diocese of Kokstad and then in that of Pretoria. He recounted various experiences of pastoral life shared with some confreres who have marked the path of faith of the Christian communities.

The mass of the solemnity of San Daniele Comboni, which followed the presentations, was presided over by the current Archbishop Dabula Anthony Mpako and concelebrated by three bishops and several confreres. In his homily, the archbishop underlined the importance of the message of our founder who was able to combine prophetically the proclamation of the Gospel in Africa with the social and economic transformation of the living conditions of the peoples of Africa.

Once the mass was over, a PowerPoint presentation, prepared by Father Rafael Armada and Father Efreem Tresoldi, showed the faces of the many confreres – 28! – who were, in turn, at the helm of the parish from 1969, the beginning of our presence in Saint Augustine, until today.

The young auxiliary bishop of Pretoria, Mesimo John Selemela, then spoke, highlighting Comboni's dedication as the example of a pastor who lives among people and knows how to listen.

Finally, the testimony of the parishioners could not be omitted. Two women were moved to recall how their journey of faith was accompanied

and supported, in the various stages of their lives, by Comboni parish priests.

The busy morning ended with a hearty lunch for all participants, carefully prepared by a group of parish volunteers.

After the one held in Pretoria, other local celebrations of the Comboni centenary will follow in South Africa in the other three dioceses where we are present: Johannesburg, Durban and Witbank. (*Father Efrem Tresoldi, mccj*).

TCHAD

Polish volunteer and Comboni Brother kidnapped – later freed

On Friday 9th February, shortly before midday, at the Caritas-run Saint-Michel hospital in Dono Manga, in the Chadian province of Tandjilé, more than 400 kilometres south-east of the capital N'Djaména, four armed men burst into the dispensary and kidnapped the Comboni Brother, Dr. Carlos Salgado Ortiz, and Dr. Aleksandra Kuligowska, a Polish volunteer who had arrived in Dono Manga in mid-December 2023. The soldiers on guard were temporarily absent because they had gone to the nearby mosque for Friday prayers.

The story, after some police operations, ended with the release of the two hostages. We Comboni Missionaries thank the Lord for the safety of the confrere and the volunteer and all those who mobilised to achieve this outcome. We express our full solidarity with the hospital staff, with all our confreres and Sisters of the Tchad Delegation, and with the families of Dr. Carlos and the volunteers who work there. Let us pray that what happened remains an isolated episode and never happens again.

TOGO

Important meetings in the Province

In January and February of this year, important meetings have been held in the Province.

The first was marked by the presence of the General Bursar, Father Angelo Giorgetti, who spent his first week of stay, from 13 to 20 January, at the scholasticate of Cape Coast (Ghana) to instruct the scholastics on the Total Common Fund (TCF), asset management, economy, and transparency in accounting. Father Angelo found great interest in these topics among the scholastics.

The second week, from 22nd to 27th, saw him involved in the assembly of the district bursars of Francophone Africa, in Lomé, with the presence of the General Assistant, Father Luigi Codianni. The first day was spent answering questions from local bursars and those in the province who wanted more information on the TCF.

The second event was the assembly of the circumscription superiors of Francophone Africa, which took place in Lomé from 29th to 31st January, with the presence of the Assistant General, Father Elias Sindjalim Essognimam.

The third event was the annual provincial assembly, from 5th to 10th February, whose main theme concerned our community life in light of the XIX General Chapter.

The first day was led by Father Jacques Agbesi, a Jesuit and a Beninese psychologist, who helped us to make good use of fraternal correction to prevent possible community conflicts, alternating moments of lessons with periods of group work.

On the second day, the superior of each of the 13 communities briefly presented the life of his community, in the light of *John 15.5*: "I am the vine, you are the branches", answering the question: in what way does each of us, in the community, feel connected to Christ Jesus and to your confreres, in an attitude of true charity?

On the third day, the reports of the various secretariats were presented, starting with that of the provincial treasurer, followed by a long dialogue in the assembly on the following topics: the use of community assets, transparency in accounting, the importance of financial self-management, launch and management of social development projects and projects of provincial interest, such as the planning of a home for elderly confreres. Important reflections have taken place at a time when aid from abroad is continually falling.

Brother Pierre Ayih Teko Fafa, provincial procurator, having made a trip to Europe last year to contact benefactors and humanitarian institutions, presented the report of the trip and the concrete results for the economic life of the Province. Reports from the mission and training secretariat followed.

On the fourth day, the assembly had the opportunity to listen to the report of the provincial superior, Father Timothée Hounaké Kouassi. There was ample space for personal interventions, questions, clarifications, reactions, and comments.

The Province is going through an important moment because this year Togo celebrates 60 years since the arrival of the first 8 Comboni

Missionaries in Lomé (1964), while Ghana and Benin remember the 50 years of Comboni presence (1974).

It is important to take every opportunity to do missionary and vocational animation, and the question was asked: “Which initiatives should we adopt?” This was discussed in the presence of the provincial superior, after his report.

The assembly ended on Saturday morning, February 10th, with the celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by the provincial superior, who thanked everyone for their participation and dialogue.

There were 45 participants; not all the confreres were present. It is interesting to note that the main celebrants at the Eucharistic celebrations on the four days that preceded the final one were presided over by the 4 confreres ordained in 2023. (*Father Sandro Cadei, mccc*)

IN PACE CHRISTI

Father Eduard Falk (16.08.1935 – 01.01.2024)

Whenever Father Eduard celebrated his birthday in Peru, he always sang his favourite song: “*Yo quiero tener un millón de amigos, para así mas fuerte poder cantar*” (I want to have a million friends, so I can sing louder). Friendly relations with people, including his confreres, were particularly important to him. He never forgot to say thank you even for the smallest gesture of friendship. This was a fundamental trait of his character.

Eduard was born on 16th August 1935 in Terenten, in Val Pusteria, Alto Adige, into a large family of farmers. Today Terenten is a renowned tourist and ski resort, but back then the situation was very different. The living conditions were harsh.

Eduard was one of the first boys to enter the ‘Xaverianum’ seminary in Milland, which was reopened in 1946. Having passed his high school leaving exam in 1956, he began his novitiate in Bamberg, concluding it with the profession of his first religious vows on 24th September 1958. He then attended the faculty of philosophy and theology in Milland-Bressanone, where he took his final vows on 17th March 1961. On 29th June of the same year, he was ordained a priest, again in Bressanone.

The communities of the Missionary Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MFSC) had been developing very well in previous years. The growing post-war prosperity made both the renovation of old houses and the opening of new ones possible. For all this development, young confreres were needed. After ordination, therefore, Father Eduard was assigned to

the German province, in charge of missionary animation – characterised by missionary days also for fundraising – and vocational pastoral ministry. Some of our German confreres, still with us and engaged in the apostolate, decided to enter our Institute thanks to the commitment and missionary enthusiasm of Father Eduard.

In 1967, Father Eduard was assigned to the Peru mission. Some time earlier, the Holy See entrusted the Comboni missionaries already present in the country with a new field of work: the Prelature of Tarma, in the central mountain region of Peru, with numerous cities and villages, some at more than 4,000 meters above sea level, such as the mining town of Cerro de Pasco, at 4,500 meters. Living in places like these is a challenge even for a son of mountain farmers from Alto Adige like Father Eduard.

In 1976, after ten years of work in Tarma, Father Eduard was transferred to Cerro de Pasco and appointed vicar general of the Prelature.

In July 1982, he returned to his homeland, assigned to the German Province. The meeting of the two Comboni Congregations had already taken place (1979). Those were the years in which both the Institute and the Church as a whole were experiencing a profound change. Father Eduard spent those years as superior of the community of Bressanone, remaining there until October 1988, when he obtained the green light to return to Peru, and was assigned to the parish of Tarma, as parish priest.

Meanwhile, the terror of the '*Sendero Luminoso*' guerrillas had reached its peak. Father Eduard immediately realised how tense the situation was. A year later, he even ran the risk of falling victim to terrorists himself.

For the next 30 years, Father Eduard would continue to work in the parish of Tarma, before moving, in 1994, to the rural parish of Palca with approximately 12,000 inhabitants, scattered throughout numerous locations in the mountains of the Peruvian Andes. There he carried out his apostolate with two other Fathers until June 2021, making Palca a sort of model parish.

Numerous base ecclesial communities were born and grew in the villages, including the '*Club de Madres*'. Father Eduard and his colleagues did their best to promote them. A deciding factor in their success was the fruitful partnership that Palca had with the parish of Rheinstetten, near Karlsruhe, Germany. That was the first 'twinning' made by the diocese of Friborg with a Peruvian parish, set up over 50 years ago, even before the arrival of Father Eduard.

A focal point of his work was Caritas, of which he was also the diocesan director. It was an enormous challenge that he had to face, taking into account the countless very poor families living in the area. Anyone who

asked for his help was sure to get something, even if sometimes it was just a kind word.

In July 2021, at the age of 86, Father Eduard left Peru for the last time. However, he did not return to his native South Tyrol, but went to Ellwangen to receive the necessary assistance for his now evident health problems. With his mind still very alert, he dedicated himself daily to his "hobby": reading books and newspapers.

In December 2023, he had to be hospitalised. Towards the end of the year, at his request, he entered a hospice where he died in the early hours of 1st January 2024. (*Father Reinhold Baumann, mccj*)

Bro. Giovanni Bonafini (14.01.1935 – 05.01.2024)

Giovanni was born in Bellori, Grezzana district (Verona), on 14th January 1935. After the novitiate in Gozzano (1954-1955) and in Sunningdale, Great Britain (1955-1956), he took his first vows on 9th September 1956 and his perpetual vows six years later, on 9th September 1962. In 1959, after three years in England, he was assigned to Uganda, where he spent his missionary service until his assignment to Italy for health reasons in 2022.

A year ago, Brother Giovanni agreed to answer the questions of a confrere who asked him about his life and his experience as a missionary Brother. From that long conversation – a true testimony – I would like to underline some points that struck me.

First of all, the trauma of his father who died in an accident on Christmas Day 1957, while carrying out the charitable work supplying the cloistered nuns with food and firewood. He was crushed by the horse-drawn cart and died, leaving behind seven children and a young wife.

The second point that struck me was the missionary spirit widespread in his town, Lugo, where there was already a beautiful tradition with fine missionaries like Father Luigi Zanini (a victim of Covid); Brother Arsenio Ferrari, who just turned 102 in Mexico; the missionary promoters who spread *Nigrizia*, *Il Piccolo Missionario* and the missionary press. Giovanni was moved as he read the life of Brother Giosuè Dei Cas who died a leper among lepers and decided to join the Comboni Missionaries as a Brother candidate.

Thirdly, the importance of the missionary testimony of the Comboni community of Thiene. Brother Gianni said: "Three years spent listening to the stupendous African experiences of the missionaries were enough to make me follow my vocation. Since then, I have never had any doubts or hesitation about my vocation."

Another point is his good and grateful view of the missionary confreres who opened up the path of the mission to him and the joy of having found in Ombaci “a stupendous Comboni community, with superior Father Luigi Ponzoni, a saint, good and experienced missionary who he wanted everything just right.”

His relationship with the other Brothers was not one of rivalry, but of great collaboration: “In Ombaci we were five brothers (Cometti, Menini, Staton, Fochesato and me). We got along very well, and no one did anything without the advice of the other four.”

Another providential fact that Brother Giovanni stressed was the fact of having lived alongside exceptional people, “like Father Bernardo Sartori (already Venerable and on the road to beatification), who had come to us from Otumbari because of the war. In church every morning I had him in front of me and I was struck by his strong and stupendous testimony of life apart from his prayers.”

We know that Brother Giovanni had the grace of being the first to help Father Bernardo, who died in church on Easter morning, while he was praying in front of the tabernacle.

Finally, he talks about his ‘last effort’: his return to Italy after 61 years of uninterrupted service to the mission in Uganda. “I returned to Italy with great suffering, because my heart remained and will always be in Africa. I keep dreaming of Africa. I have always been at the side of Africans and I feel that I could still continue to teach them to be honest and faithful Christians.”

In the long interview, it is surprising to note how Brother Giovanni does not talk much about what he did as a builder, mechanic, or bursar of the diocese. He speaks more willingly about the Christian life choices of his workers who, enlightened by his words and his example, all formed beautiful Christian families: “The whole group of bricklayers and even the driver got married in church.” This is his consolation: “My workers and my people over there call me four or five times a week, even just to hear my voice.”

Time and again he tried to convince Father General to allow him to return to Africa for his final years. “At first, he told me: ‘Yes, yes... we’ll see’. But just this morning I received a letter from him telling me: ‘Giovanni, I am sorry, but you are assigned to the Italian province.’ I did not think it would be so difficult to stay in Italy after so many years of mission.”

Brother Giovanni died on 5th January 2024, at the ‘Brother Alfredo Fiorini’ Centre in Castel d’Azzano, after a few weeks with his health progressively deteriorating. He was 88 years old. He passed away peacefully. In the last hours of his life, he had the fortune of being visited and comforted by

numerous confreres, relatives and friends who showed him all their attachment, esteem, and affection: a true viaticum for his last journey. On 8th January, we celebrated his funeral in our chapel in Castel d'Azano, in the presence of family, friends and brothers from different communities, including Father Fabio Baldan, provincial superior. The celebration was presided over by Father John Baptist K. Opargiw, a Ugandan Comboni missionary and current provincial superior of South Africa. (*Father Renzo Piazza, mccj*)

Fr. Mario Riva (09.02.1928 - 12.01.2024)

Mario was born in Lecco, in the diocese of Milan, on 9th February 1928. While still a boy, he entered the diocesan seminary of Venegono Inferiore. He remained there until the end of the secondary biennium which he left with excellent marks. He should then have begun his first year of high school, but he had other plans; in a letter addressed to the superior of the Comboni community of Venegono Superiore, dated 12th September 1945, he wrote: "For some time now, I have felt a strong impulse to become a missionary of Monsignor Comboni. Now, finally, with the approval of my superiors, my parents and also of His Excellency, Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster, I am applying for admission."

On 14th October 1945, Mario entered the Comboni Novitiate of Venegono Superiore. "Mario is a young man of great activity and vitality. He is lively, active, good, and generous. Good piety and great generosity. Well-liked and loved by all," is how his superiors saw him.

On 9th September 1947, he took his first religious vows and was sent to the Philosophical Scholasticate of Rebbio (Como). In 1948 he went to the Apostolic School of Crema as prefect: he took care of the young seminarians ('apostolini') and followed the theological courses in the diocesan major seminary. In 1951, he was prefect at the Apostolic School in Brescia and attended the third year of theology in the diocesan major seminary of Brescia. For the fourth course, however, he went to the Venegono Superiore scholasticate, where on 20th September 1951 he made his perpetual religious profession. On 7th June 1952, he was ordained a priest in the cathedral of Milan by Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster.

After ordination, Father Mario was assigned to the community of Trento with the role of vocations promoter (or 'recruiter', as they used to say at that time). He stayed there for two years. In July 1954, he was assigned to South Sudan and Mbili mission, in the then Bahr-El-Ghazal district. In 1957, he moved to the Nyamlel mission. Three years later, he went to

Aweil, and moved to Mayen in 1964, with the role of superior of the community and parish priest of the mission.

In July 1964 he returned to Italy, assigned to the Novitiate community of Gozzano as bursar. After continually pestering his superiors for just over a year, they allowed him to return to the mission, this time to Arua in Uganda. He spent a few years at the Comboni House in nearby Ediofe. Then, in 1969, he was sent to Gulu, until June 1974, when he was recalled to Italy, assigned as superior of the Bari community.

However, his 'patience' lasted less than three years: in 1977 he was allowed to leave again and was assigned to Kenya. A place was ready for him in the north, in Katilu, Lodwar diocese, in the Turkana district. South Sudan was a little further north, and he made frequent visits there. Five years later, in 1982, he returned to Italy, to the community of Naples, for the ministry of missionary animation. In 1984 he spent a sabbatical year at the General Curia in Rome. A year passed and he was once again back in Kenya, in the north. But the problems were in South Sudan, where he continued to go very often, so the superiors hurriedly assigned him to that Province. One year in Meridi, three years in Tombora, two years in Yiroi, one year in Arua-Ediofe to take care of Sudanese refugees in Uganda... always on the move.

Father Francesco Chemello wrote in his testimony: "In 1990, he was assigned to the diocese of Torit. He then moved to the Yiroi mission, in the diocese of Rumbek. Immediately afterwards, he went to the immense refugee camp of Kakuma (Kenya), to take care of the tens of thousands of young Dinka and Nuer people, who had arrived there after having already been displaced people in refugee camps in Ethiopia. From Kakuma he participated in numerous exploration attempts – all characterised by countless unknowns and terrible dangers – in search of places that could allow our Comboni presence in the territory of the diocese of Rumbek.

In July 1993, while he was helping the displaced Dinka people in Northern Uganda in dramatic situations, I went to see him and tried to convince him not to risk too much: 'Your life matters to us', I repeated to him. But he did not seem to hear: he only ever spoke to me about the impossible conditions in which those displaced people were forced to live. 'How can I abandon them?', he repeated. He lived with people; he spent the nights with them, never in a permanent and safe place."

In July 1995 he went to Rumbek, South Sudan, where he remained for five years, until the end of 2000. In January 2001, he went to Rebbio (Como); in July he moved to Casavatore where he remained until 2004; he then returned to Rebbio for a year.

In August 2005 he was in Mapuordit (South Sudan), where he dedicated himself to all sorts of pastoral ministry, but reserving a lot of time for the translation of liturgical and scholastic texts into local languages. From mid-2007 to 2012 he was constantly on the move; he would go wherever there was suffering to alleviate and people to help: you find him in Agang-Rial, in Malwal-Kon (where he opened a new mission), and again in Mapuordit and Rumbek.

Father Mario definitively returned to Italy in 2012 for health reasons. He was 84 years old. He was hosted in the Comboni communities where there are centres for elderly and sick missionaries: Milan (2012-2013), Rebbio (2013-2020) and Castel d'Azzano (Verona), from 1st December 2021.

In recent times, his health became increasingly fragile, with moments of crisis from which he always managed to recover. However, on the night before 12th January 2024, he suffered a serious general deterioration. Around 8.00 in the morning, he went to paradise, lovingly assisted by members of the Castel d'Azzano community and by the staff.

His funeral was celebrated on the morning of 16th January, in the community of Castel d'Azzano. In the afternoon, at 3.00 pm, a funeral mass was celebrated in the parish church of Valmadrera (Lecco). (*Father Franco Moretti, mcccj*)

Father Modesto Generali (18.10.1927 – 10.01.2024)

Modesto was born in Mombaroccio, in the province of Pesaro Urbino, on 18th October 1927. While still very young (1939), he entered the Apostolic School of Riccione, run by the Comboni missionaries. The following year, he moved to the new seminary in Pesaro (in Villa Baratoff), where he experienced difficult times due to the ongoing war. There, with his companions and teachers, he had to take refuge in safe places during the frequent bombings.

On 12th September 1945, he entered the novitiate of Venegono Superiore. After two years, on 9th September 1947, he made his first religious profession. For the three years of philosophical studies, he went to the Philosophical Scholasticate of Rebbio (Como), and then moved to the Theological Scholasticate of Venegono Superiore for theology. On 9th September 1953, he took his final vows and, on 12th June 1954, he was ordained a priest in the cathedral of Milan by Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster. A few weeks after his ordination, he was assigned to Mexico and destined for the House of Sahuayo, to assume the office of Professor and Prefect of the Apostolic School.

In Mexico, Father Modesto remained for 42 years, interrupted by 2 years in Spain, spent in the community of Corella (July 1977 – June 1979) as local superior. Wherever he went, he left his mark and a fond memory.

In Mexico, Father Modesto was mostly involved in seminaries, first as a professor or prefect of studies, later also as a formator in formation houses such as the pre-postulancy, postulancy and novitiate. From 1958 to 1960, he also had the satisfaction of being assistant parish priest of the parish of Santa Rosalia.

From July 1986 to 1995 he was provincial treasurer at the provincial headquarters of Ciudad de México. Those who met him testify that they have never found a more free, welcoming, and generous bursar than him. In 1998, when he was already 71 years old, he was asked to serve in the province of Italy. He then returned to the house in Pesaro – 53 years after leaving it as a seminarian! – And he remained there for another 25 years, until July 2022.

The superior of the house was Father Renzo Piazza, who says: “I was with Father Modesto from 2011 to 2015. Pesaro was the house for Ongoing Formation in the province, and many confreres recognised it as a welcoming community. It was he, Father Modesto who was the heart of the hospitality. He opened and closed the gate, prepared the chapel for mass, went to celebrate in the nearby parishes, went to buy bread, answered the telephone, and acted as a concierge. And it was always he who prepared and cleared the tables in the refectory. If the phone rang during lunch or dinner, he was the one who would hurry to answer it and then return to the table, often finding the food cold. It was he who distributed the various services requested. Once a week he used to go ‘on a mission’ to the hospital, to celebrate the Eucharist in the mental hygiene department... When groups of confreres arrived for a gathering or assembly, he registered attendance and assigned the rooms... And while he was doing all this, not once did he ever complain or show any anger; and he never raised his voice. He did this for over 20 years!

On 22nd June 2014, Corpus Domini Sunday, he celebrated the 60th anniversary of his priestly ordination. He had wanted an intimate celebration, with close relatives. His homily was beautiful.

“I have a special memory – Father Renzo further testifies – of that anniversary party and of the Eucharist that he solemnised that day. In his homily, Father Modesto never used the pronoun ‘I’, nor did he use a verb that had a direct reference to himself. Yet, he would have had every right: we were celebrating 60 years of his priesthood. No! He spoke only about Jesus, never about himself. This is a real missionary!”

“When I left the community of Pesaro to come to the ‘Brother Alfredo Fiorini’ Centre in Castel d’Azzano in 2014, he greeted me with the following words: ‘Dear Renzo, courage for your new ‘mission’. Go and work in the ‘peripheries’ of life!’”

In July 2022, Father Modesto also arrives at the ‘outskirts of life’ of Castel d’Azzano. Father Renzo remembers: “But he did not place himself on the margins of the new reality, but rather in the middle. He brought with him the ‘holy vice’ of serving. Just one example will suffice: for two years he was literally ‘the bodyguard’ of his confrere Father Piero Lampetti, ready to ‘serve’ him in all his needs. With the many confreres of the Centre, he celebrated his 95th and 96th birthday.”

In the last weeks of his life, he suffered serious health problems. On the night of 9th January 2024, he suffered a serious collapse. On the morning of 10th January, around 8.30, Father Modesto suddenly left us, lovingly assisted by members of the Castel d’Azzano community and the service staff.

On 12th January, the funeral was celebrated in the chapel of the Centre, in the presence of family and friends and some confreres from nearby communities, including Father Fabio Baldan, provincial superior. The superior of the Centre presided over the celebration. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE MOTHER: Clemenza, di padre Ottorino Bonvini (BR).

THE BROTHERS: Dennis Edwin, of Father David William Bohnsack (LP); Deo Byamugisa, of Father John Mungereza (NAP).

THE SISTER: Sr. Nicella, of Father Alois Weiss (PE).

THE COMBONI SISTERS: Sr. M. Luigina Marzinotto; Sr. M. Vittoria Cieben; Sr. Luisa Cecilia Suez Ibrahim Abdallah.

MISSIONARI COMBONIANI – VIA LUIGI LILIO 80 – ROMA
