

# FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS DI GESÙ

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833

October 2024

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

## GENERAL NOTES 30<sup>TH</sup> Consulta (September 2024)

### Appointments by the Holy See

On 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024, the Holy Father appointed *Father Víctor-Hugo Castillo Matarrita*, Bishop of the Diocese of Kaga-Bandoro, in the Central African Republic. Congratulations to the new bishop with our prayers for his new ministry.

### Appointments by the General Council

- On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2024, the Superior General, having heard the view of his council, appointed *Father Cosimo De Iaco* Postulator General of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus as from 1.10.2024. Father De Iaco will continue his service as procurator general until a possible replacement is found. The Council thanks Father Arnaldo Baritussio for his many years of service to the Institute as postulator and procurator general. Father Baritussio is still available to carry out functions of consultation at the General Postulate in specific concerns requested by Father De Iaco.
- On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2024, the Superior General, having examined the results of the elections completed and having heard the view of his Council, appointed *Father Likingi Wasato Henry* Vice Provincial of the Province of Congo as from 25.9.2024 until the end of the mandate of the current administration (i.e. 31.12.2025).

### XI Meeting of Comboni Bishops

The meeting of the Comboni Bishops took place in Rome, at the Generalate, from 17<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2024: 12 of them participated in person, while the others sent a message through a video call or voice and written messages. It was a beautiful opportunity to share the experiences of their respective dioceses and reflect together on the new challenges of the mission. At the end of their meeting, the bishops sent a message to all the members of the Comboni Family, in which they expressed their

gratitude to the Comboni Institute and words of encouragement to continue the missionary work together, animated by the hope founded in Jesus Christ.

### **Novitiate of Magambe – Isiro (Congo)**

The General Council, considering the suggestion of the ASCAF circumscription superiors to have only two novitiates and to close the one in Magambe, has decided to close it starting on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024. The GC thanks the province of Congo which has hosted this novitiate for French-speaking Africa for many years.

### **Central African Republic**

The General Council, taking note of the appointment as bishop of Mgr. Víctor-Hugo Castillo Matarrita, former delegate of the RCA delegation, called a special assembly of the delegation in which the General Assistant in charge of ASCAF participated. The assembly had as its objective listening and dialogue with the confreres and organising a survey process in view of the appointment of the new delegate, who will exercise his service until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025, the normal end of the mandate of the current administration.

### **Communication**

At the General Assembly of Formation, held in Rome from 8<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July 2024, the importance of the “use of the means of communication and information in the context of Comboni formation” was discussed. At the same time, a study was presented that reflects the current situation of our 49 formation communities regarding the use of the means of communication and their presence in the “digital continent” in an official way. The study offered some practical suggestions, starting from some good practices already present in some formation communities.

The General Council recommends that these texts be the object of reflection by the formators and the *formandi* during this academic year. To this end, the General Secretary of Formation will send the texts (in Italian, English, Spanish, French and Portuguese) to the superiors of the circumscriptions and those responsible for formation.

Greater investment in the sector of communication and a more significant and constant presence in the multiple platforms for the dissemination of digital information would help us to reach a wider audience, especially young people.

## **General Assembly of Formation**

More than fifty brothers participated in the general assembly of formation from 8<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July 2024. In three weeks of mutual listening, prayer, sharing and debate on experiences, five priorities were identified: spirituality-missionary identity, the requalification of formation, discernment starting from vocations promotion and along the different stages of formation, the *Educational Model of Integration* and the formation of Brothers. In addition to these priorities, three other issues were highlighted: formation in economy to live the vow of poverty; formation in the mass media and their wise, responsible and missionary use, and the ongoing formation of the formators. The assembly is part of the process that the Institute is carrying out in terms of reviewing and requalifying formation, aware that today's challenges await a courageous response.

## **Bursars' Formation Meeting**

From 28<sup>th</sup> October to 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024, the economics course will be held in Rome. It is a course open to all confreres, in particular to those who will assume the service of provincial treasurer.

Given the difficulty that the Institute has in finding qualified confreres for the economics sector, the General Council encourages all the circumscriptions to identify confreres available to commit themselves in this sector.

We know that economics is a strategic sector for the circumscriptions and, considering the socioeconomic changes in all countries and the realities of the circumscriptions themselves, it is of capital importance to raise the skills of the confreres to understand the complexity of the situation and contribute to the generation and consolidation of those economic innovations that are part of the driving force of sustainability.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for all our councils (general, district and community) to find themselves experiencing first-hand that there are administrative managements among us with reduced efficiency, frequent errors, increased costs, difficulty in making informed decisions, non-compliance with regulations, and above all difficulty in growing in the ability to self-sustain and face new challenges.

## **Meeting with the General Council of the Comboni Missionary Sisters**

On 13<sup>th</sup> September, the two General Councils met for their annual meeting at the Generalate of the Comboni Missionary Sisters. It was an opportunity to share the common reality that we are living in Sudan and the commitment that we are carrying out in some common ministries. It was also an opportunity to learn about the paths that each institute is following.

## The Next Consulta

The next consulta, an extraordinary one, will be held from 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> November.

## Visits and commitments of the members of the General Council

### Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie

- 29 September – 27 October: taking part in the Synod

### Brother Alberto Lamana

- From 1 to 31 October: visiting the Province of Uganda

### Fr. David Costa Domingues

- From 2 October to 2 November: visiting the Delegation of Asia

### Fr. Luigi Codianni

- From 5 October to 2 November: visiting the London Province and the Assembly of Provincials of Europe

### Fr. Elias Sindjalim Essognimam

- From 3 to 31 October: visiting the Province of Congo

## Holy Redeemer Guild

October	01 – 07 RCA	08 – 15 TCH	16 – 31 RSA
November	01 – 15 SS	16 – 30 T	

## Prayer Intentions

**October** – That the synodal Church encouraged by Pope Francis may strengthen the vocation and participation of all the baptised and especially our missionary commitment as the Comboni Family. *Let us pray.*

**November** – That the Comboni Family, rooted in hope and joy, may accompany the young people who are preparing to live the 39<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day, supporting their search for happiness and fullness, and helping them to become protagonists of a new humanity. *Let us pray.*

## Comboni Liturgical Calendar

### OCTOBER

1	Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, virgin and doctor of the Church, <i>Patron of the missions</i>	Feast
10	Saint Daniel Comboni, bishop, <i>Founder of the Comboni Family</i>	Solemnity
20	Blessed David Okelo and Gildo Irwa, martyrs	Optional memorial. (North Uganda)

## NOVEMBER

Commemoration of deceased confreres, relatives and benefactors	Date to be decided
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## Meaningful anniversaries

### OCTOBER

12	Our Lady of Aparecida	Brazil
16	Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, virgin	
19	Saints Jean de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, priests and companions, martyrs	United States and Canada

### NOVEMBER

21	Our Lady of Quinche	Ecuador
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## Publications

**Alessio Geraci mccj**, *Reflexiones a quemarropa para creyentes de hoy*, 2024, pp. 154, Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas, Lima, Perú. Two years after the publication of *Buenas noticias en tiempo de pandemia* (August 2022), in which the author asked: “How is God speaking to us in this moment?”, here is the very recent new volume in which Father Alessio, a missionary in Peru, focuses on other questions: How can we form Christian communities of “missionary disciples”, men and women who know how to announce the Kingdom of God with joy, passion, enthusiasm and courage, concretely demonstrating that the God in whom we believe and whom we announce is the God of Life? How can we be credible believers in today’s “epochal change”, knowing how to read the “signs of the times” and living synodality to the full? The author shares some of his “point-blank” reflections – supported by numerous observations by Pope Francis and thinking, in particular, of the Peruvian Church – trying to answer these and other questions, born from his pastoral experience in these first years of his missionary priestly ministry.

## CURIA

### Comboni Year of Ongoing Formation opens in Rome

The Comboni Year of Ongoing Formation (ACFP) 2024-25 officially began on September 23, 2024. Eighteen Comboni Missionaries, sixteen fathers and two brothers, from twelve Provinces, will walk together for about eight months “towards more life,” as the motto of this year’s course says.

In the mass that inaugurated this journey, Father Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, recalled the importance of this initiative, in which missionaries are invited to participate after 10-15 years of mission, to reread their missionary experience – in the light of the Word and the Comboni charism – and then return to the mission with more strength and energy. Father Tesfaye emphasised that this journey is a gift and a privilege, considering that many lay people would also like to be able to stop for such a long time, to renew their strength, and cannot do so.

In the initial week, the two members of the Ongoing Formation Commission – Father Alberto Silva and Brother Alberto Degan – presented the formation charter that, after an overview of the history of the Comboni Year, explains the formation proposal of the course, which focuses on four ‘pillars’: the deepening of the relationship with God and his Word; a renewed encounter with Saint Daniel Comboni and with our Institute, the review of one’s missionary experience and a deepening of the challenges of today’s mission; and greater self-knowledge in truth, acceptance and integration.

A fundamental element of this journey will be the experiential sharing among the eighteen participants, who already in this first week had the opportunity to share their expectations regarding the course. Here is what one participant said about the journey that awaits them: “I hope to be able to reconnect with myself, to relate more deeply with the person of Comboni and with Christ, the master of the Mission”.

The first week of the Comboni Year will end with a Mass celebrated in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

The second week will see the start of the conferences. The Comboni Year will count on the collaboration of about 30 speakers, some Comboni missionaries and some not.

Three words sum up the meaning of this sabbatical period: gift, right and duty. The Comboni Year is first of all a gift, that is, a period of grace, offered to all Comboni Missionaries who are in the “mid-life” stage; it is a right, in the sense that all Comboni missionaries have the right to participate in this journey to renew their motivation and their energy; and it is a duty, in the sense that the participants are called to live this journey with a participatory and responsible attitude and then return among their people with renewed commitment.

Let us pray for these confreres so that they can fully live this experience of growth and renewal.

## BRAZIL

### **Visit to the Province by Fr David Costa Domingues**

From 13<sup>th</sup> July to 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2024, the Province of Brazil received the official visit of Father David Costa Domingues, Vicar General. Father David visited all 14 Comboni communities, including the houses of formation (postulancy and scholasticate), the parishes, the projects and the movements that the confreres accompany.

During the visit, the Vicar had a personal meeting with each confrere and, subsequently, a meeting with all the members of each community gathered together. Depending on the circumstances, there was also a meeting with those responsible for human promotion projects, the pastoral leaders of the parishes, the bishops of the local Churches, the religious men and women, the Comboni Missionary Sisters and the Comboni Lay Missionaries.

In each meeting, Father David took the opportunity to thank, animate and encourage each confrere and each community, and also to motivate in a missionary way the leaders of the ecclesial communities, of the projects of human promotion and integral ecology, and of the human rights centres that he visited.

Finally, he met with the provincial council to share his impressions of what he heard and saw. Father David said: «The simple lifestyle of the Comboni communities is what brings them closest to the reality of the people among whom they are inserted».

Father David thanked Father Raimundo Nonato Rocha dos Santos, Provincial Superior since January 2023, for accompanying him throughout the visit and for helping him understand the different local realities and the work of the Comboni Missionaries in the Province. He also expressed his gratitude for the good organisation of the visit and for the fraternal welcome he received.

Father Raimundo said that this visit «offered moments of communion and great sharing on the current life of the institute and the Comboni mission today, especially in Brazilian territory». He added: “I think Father David was satisfied to see the fruits of the work we are doing in our province and, in particular, to have met personally and as a community the confreres and the people with whom they collaborate, both in the parishes and in the ongoing social projects. In this way, he was able to see that the Combonians enjoy esteem and credibility from both the bishops and the people with whom they work.” Finally, Father Raimundo thanked Father David for the visit and for all the support that the province receives from the General Council.

## **St. Daniel Comboni Chosen as the Patron Saint of a Missionary Area in the outskirts of Manaus**

The Comboni missionaries arrived in Manaus, Amazonia, Brazil, in 2006, and the Archdiocese of Manaus, on December 13 of that year, entrusted them with the pastoral care of a peripheral mission area in the city neighbourhood of Monte das Oliveiras.

In Brazil, mission areas differ from parishes both in the missionary spirit that animates them and in their organisation. A mission area does not have a 'mother church', being composed of autonomous communities that live in communion. The Monte das Oliveiras community brings together fifteen communities and is known by the name of the neighbourhood.

Earlier this year, the fifteen communities, gathered in a council, began a decision-making process aimed at gathering information, evaluating alternatives and making a final choice in order to make the best possible decision on who could be the 'Patron Saint' of their mission area. On 26<sup>th</sup> August, most of the communities chose St. Daniel Comboni, and the Auxiliary Bishop of Manaus, Mgr. Zenildo Lima da Silva validated the choice. The communities are now preparing to celebrate the first feast of their Patron Saint, on October 10, the liturgical memorial (for them the 'feast') of St. Daniel Comboni.

Today in Brazil there are three parishes (Guriri, in the State of Espírito Santo; Salvador, in the State of Bahia; São Luís, in the State of Maranhão) and a missionary area that have St. Daniel Comboni as their patron. There are also many Christian communities that proudly bear the name of this saint and missionary prophet.

We believe that through the intercession of St. Daniel Comboni, our missionary service rendered to these communities will be able to grow in fidelity to the charism of the Founder for the good of the people of this region, entrusted to the pastoral care of our Institute. (*Father Raimundo Nonato Rocha dos Santos, mcccj*)

## EGYPT-SUDAN

### **Webinar on Interreligious Dialogue and Islam in Africa**

A Webinar on interreligious dialogue and Islam in Africa was held from 9 to 11 September, organised by Father Mbuthia Simon Mwaura, director of Dar Comboni, Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, APDESAM reference person for the sector of interreligious dialogue, assisted by the General Secretariat of the Mission.

The Webinar, held in English with translation into French, was open to all interested confreres and saw the participation of over twenty confreres working in Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Benin, Italy, Mozambique and Mexico. The interactive online event was an opportunity for enrichment and updating on the different realities of dialogue with Islam in the various countries of Africa.

During the first day, the testimony of a West African religious man, coming from a Muslim family, opened some important considerations on the fact that dialogue is a process – often very long – and a path of conversion to peace and tolerance that often takes years, especially when faith is mixed with social dynamics and political interests.

During the second and third days, instead, the reality of Islam in Africa was presented, with its different dynamics and stories of development. Certainly, dialogue with Islam questions us Christians on the quality of our pastoral work. A very important part of the workshop was the sharing of different experiences of dialogue.

While in some nations the interreligious dialogue that we carry forward takes the form of the 'dialogue of life', especially through schools in which we educate in tolerance and mutual respect, in other nations, such as Mozambique and Kenya, we have access to forms of dialogue that include reflection and research at university level ('dialogue of theological exchanges and religious experience'), promoting the 'culture of dialogue' between cultures and the search for the common good.

A very important field of action for dialogue is the search for ethical criteria with which it is possible to develop, in the different countries of Africa, legislation that protects the rights of all religious groups, without discrimination.

The Webinar concluded with the desire of all participants to repeat this experience of reflection and sharing, possibly extending participation to more provinces and also to the Comboni Sisters. (*Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, mcccj*)

### **The Comboni community in Beirut (Lebanon)**

The Comboni Province of Egypt-Sudan has a formation community near Beirut, Lebanon. Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, Provincial Superior, visited the community – composed of five scholastics and a formator – to see for himself the situation in which the brothers find themselves.

According to the United Nations, there have already been over 720 deaths in Lebanon and 211,000 displaced people since last Monday, when the conflict in the Middle East escalated with Israeli raids on Lebanese territory.

On Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> September, Father Diego sent us the following message from Beirut.

«This time I am not sending you the ‘war bulletin’ from Sudan (where, in any case, the war continues, even though the media have forgotten about it), but from Lebanon, where I arrived last week to visit our scholastics and their formator. In the meantime, I took the opportunity to do spiritual exercises in a Jesuit house on the border with Syria, in the Zahle area. Despite the silence of the exercises, we have heard more than once at night – and today even in broad daylight – some explosions, but all far from us.

From what we are given to understand, the ongoing attacks are only happening in strategic places. Lebanon is a small country, but divided into zones, and therefore, for those who do not live in the Shiite area, life seems to go on normally. We are north of Beirut, in a Christian area, and we are far from the explosions of the missiles and the columns of smoke rising south of the city.

Even today, however, as we were returning home along the main highway of the country, which runs along by the sea from south to north, we saw with our own eyes that, for every 4 or 5 cars headed north, one was a Shiite fleeing the war zone: cars and trucks packed with women, children, suitcases and mattresses, all fleeing north. Where exactly? Each family has its own destination on these journeys of hope.

As always, in the face of any kind of war, the question is: “Why? For what purpose? For whom?”. Lebanon is a pearl of rare beauty, but the cruelty of the powerful knows no reason. As always, I ask you for prayers. (*Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, mcccj*)

## ITALY

### **Castel Volturno – City Council approves a Comboni social project**

On Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> September, the City Council of Castel Volturno approved a project by the *Black and White Association*, in which the Comboni Missionaries who work here are also directly involved. It is a sport, culture, music, art and theatre centre that will be opened in the most depressed area of the municipality, in which there are no municipal services or other presences that bring relief and support to the thousands of citizens present. The work carried out by the Black and White association and by the Combonians - Fathers Daniele Moschetti, Daniel Gbedenya Kodzo and Filippo Ivardi Ganapini - who have worked and still work today in this area of the province of Caserta has been the subject of praise and thanks on several occasions by the city councillors and the mayor himself,

Pasquale Marrantino. Special recognition was awarded to Father Moschetti for his dedication and deep involvement in the proposed project to build a multipurpose sports centre, in an area of about 3 thousand square meters, which was approved unanimously during the same city council meeting. Immediately after the city council meeting, Father Moschetti expressed his satisfaction with the following words: “We are happy with all this because the approval comes after a journey of about four years. We were present with a fine group of members, parents, children and friends. Continue to follow us and to be in solidarity with so many men, women and children who come from other lands and whom we humbly try to serve with love and passion, so that they may have more and more dignity, rights and respect, and be considered truly brothers and sisters in the eyes of the world and all unique children in the eyes of God.”

### **Afrobrix – 5<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Afrodescendant Festival**

As usual, for 5 years now, the fifth annual edition of Afrobrix, the first Italian festival dedicated to Afro-descendants, took place in Brescia from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> September. Music, culture, art and cinema to enhance Afro-descendant and Afro-European realities starting from the socio-cultural context in which they live and, for the last year, in line with the decade dedicated to Afro-descendant people declared by the United Nations.

The mission of Afrobrix aims, on the one hand, to develop multiculturalism, understood as multiple cultural and identity belonging, and, on the other, to promote inclusion and interaction between 2G (second generation) communities and the citizens of Brescia. Afrobrix expresses the beauty and importance of Afro-descendants as a heterogeneous, multifaceted and complex social component, a force capable of enriching and transforming culture, art and societies as a whole.

For three days, Afrobrix consisted mainly of music, crafts and African food. Music is a vehicle for the message of Afrobrix, which is also a centre for socio-cultural and artistic activities at the house of the Comboni missionaries in Brescia.

The Afrobrix manifesto states: «We are a heterogeneous group of passionate people and professionals in fields ranging from music to cinema to social services, all united by a love for communication, creativity and social justice. Our union is founded not ‘despite’, but ‘in virtue of’ our differences. After the experience of the festival of the same name – the first of its kind in our city – the Afrobrix Centre was born in 2021 with the support of partners such as Fondazione Nigrizia».

To learn more about Afrobrix, visit the website [www.afrobrix.it](http://www.afrobrix.it).

## **A new Comboni mission experience in Milan**

“Dear faithful, I am writing to you to inform you officially that the Diocese has implemented the proposal to entrust the pastoral care of your community to the Comboni priests, missionaries by special vocation, as I mentioned in the meeting, I had with some of you a few months ago.” This is how the letter from Monsignor Giuseppe Vegezzi, Episcopal Vicar of Zone 1 of the Archdiocese of Milan, began, which reached the faithful of the parish of St. John Chrysostom, in Via Padova, on the second Sunday of last August.

As you can imagine, this is the conclusion of a journey, begun months earlier, undertaken by the Archdiocese of Milan and the Comboni missionaries, with the full involvement of the parish community. The letter invited the parish community to participate in the celebration of the installation of the new parish priest, Father Stefano Fazion, on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024, the day of the parish celebration of its patron St. John Chrysostom. The Christian community immediately understood that a new journey was beginning for them. In fact, at the beginning of the celebration, the spokesman thanked Archbishop Mario Delpini “for the care and attention he has shown towards [this] parish and [this] territory, and for the trust he has given them with the gift of the Comboni missionaries, who for the first time are taking on the responsibility of a parish in the archdiocese of Milan.”

This celebration was attended by several hundred of the faithful, including a group of Comboni Laymen and some Comboni Sisters, and was presided over by the Episcopal Vicar himself.

In his homily, Monsignor Vegezzi invited the new parish priest to be close to the people of God entrusted to him, not seeking compromises, but the truth that liberates and saves. He also reminded him that in the new ‘mission land’ of the archdiocese of Milan, in continuous change, he will certainly not have the crowds he had in the mission of the Central African Republic that he has just left. For this reason, the prelate invited him to practice patience.

At the end of the celebration, Father Fabio Baldan, Superior of the Comboni missionaries in Italy, thanked the diocese for the journey made and the parish community for the welcome they gave us. Father Fabio then presented the Comboni Family in its various components.

The Eucharistic celebration was followed by a shared festive moment that saw the contribution of the different ethnic groups present in the territory. In addition to Father Stefano Fazion, the new Comboni community is composed of Fathers Raoul Sohounou and Esdras Bimbo, and Brother Gianluigi Quaranta.

### **Medal of Honour awarded to Brother Fischnaller**

On Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> September, Brother Erich Fischnaller received the Medal of Honor from Monsignor Ivo Muser, Bishop of Bolzano-Bressanone, in recognition of his social and missionary work in serving the most needy. This diocesan honour is awarded each year to people who have distinguished themselves in service to the local community. The awarding of the honours traditionally closes, at the Cusano Academy in Bressanone, the Pastoral Convention for the launch of a new pastoral season of the South Tyrolean Church. The names of the candidates are proposed annually to the bishop by the Catholic associations and the Pastoral Council who, in this way, intend to say thank you to people who have distinguished themselves in a particular way in voluntary service at the diocesan level in favour of the local community. Brother Erich, born on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1949, in Rio Pusteria-Mühlbach, in Alto Adige, northern Italy, has been working in Africa for 50 years, first in South Africa and, since 2004, in South Sudan, providing professional training in various villages and starting the construction of schools and workshops that have given a perspective to many young Africans. In 2017, amid the civil war, he helped hundreds of people flee to Uganda. This year, he celebrated his half-century of mission in his hometown of Alto Adige but has already returned amongst the refugees in Africa.

## KENYA

### **First Continental Meeting of Brothers operating in Africa**

From 26<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024, the first continental meeting of the Comboni Missionary Brothers working in Africa took place in Nairobi. The event involved thirty brothers from different provinces of the continent, including Togo, Congo, Chad, South Sudan, Malawi-Zambia, Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda. The participants reflected on the meaning of the mission in a constantly evolving world.

The meeting saw the participation of key figures, such as Brother Alberto Lamana, General Assistant, and Father John Baptist Opargiw, Provincial Superior of South Africa, who helped to underline the importance of the event and the commitment of the Comboni Institute in the future of the mission.

The various sessions addressed crucial themes. Brother Dzinekou Yawovi Jonas presented an overview of the evolution of the Comboni mission, highlighting the need to adapt missionary strategies to current challenges. Next, Brothers Jean Marie Mwamba and Patrick Lumami spoke about the importance of ongoing formation, highlighting how it

must evolve to prepare missionaries for the complexities of modern missions.

Brother Christophe Yata spoke about sustainability, focusing on innovative strategies to ensure the long-term viability of the mission, in a context of limited resources and changing socioeconomic conditions.

Brother Alberto Lamana provided an analysis of the situation of the Brothers in the Institute, identifying challenges and opportunities for the future. The topic of the merger of circumscriptions was addressed by Father Opargiw, who discussed the potential benefits and challenges of a reorganisation of missionary structures.

Group discussions that followed the presentations fostered an exchange of ideas and experiences, allowing participants to reflect on practical solutions to address the challenges of the mission. A recurring theme was the need to adapt to change, without losing sight of the core values of the Comboni Missionaries.

The meeting concluded with the definition of practical resolutions, including the improvement of formation, adopting sustainable practices, and exploring new organisational structures to strengthen the effectiveness and visibility of the mission. This historic meeting was an important milestone for the Comboni Brothers in Africa, paving the way for new strategies to face future challenges with an innovative spirit and perseverance. *(Father Christopher Silwembe, mccj – summarised text).*

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Brother António Martins da Costa (3.1.1928 – 29.7.2024)**

Born on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1928, in Cepões (Viseu), he had a long life and returned to the Father's house after living for more than 96 years, dedicated to vocation and mission.

Brother António was the first Portuguese Comboni missionary. He was born in a small village a few kilometres from Viseu. Like all young people of the time, he attended the first three years of elementary school in his hometown and completed the last two only several years later in Oeiras, in 1960-1961. Ever since his childhood, he helped his parents with the work in the fields.

At the end of his military service (1949-1950), by chance, he met Father Angelo La Salandra, then a vocations promoter, who, looking at him during the recitation of the rosary, asked him point-blank: "Would you like to be a missionary?" António replied: "But at my age, and without having studied, can I be a missionary?" Without getting upset, Father Angelo replied that it was a little late to become a priest, but that he could become

a missionary brother: "In the missions we need fathers and brothers to make possible the coming of the Kingdom of God." These words of Father Angelo continued to hammer in António's head until, in February 1952, he began his vocational journey. After a brief period of postulancy, he left for the novitiate of Gozzano, in Italy, where he made his first religious profession on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1954. When he returned to Portugal, he was assigned to the community of Viseu, where he remained until 1960 as bursar and manager of the farm. In September 1954, he also entered the seminary of Viseu, still under construction, but already capable of hosting almost a hundred seminarians. In the five years I spent in Viseu (1954-1959), although the seminarians had more contact with the prefects, the vice-rector and the rector, I remember well the figure of Brother António, with his venerable beard, always busy with agricultural work, pruning trees, harvesting grapes and making wine, or busy taking care of the animals in the chicken coops and pens. This was the field in which Brother António, throughout his life, became increasingly expert.

In 1962 he was assigned to the diocese of Nampula in Mozambique where he remained until 1969. After a few months spent in Portugal, he returned in 1970 to Mozambique where he remained for six years, assigned to various missions, always committed, with great dedication, to humble jobs but with the concern of preparing his collaborators so that they were able to support their families and manage their businesses. In 1976 he returned to Portugal, assigned to the community of Santarém, where the novitiate was located. The master of novices was Father Carmelo Casile who sent me his testimony which characterises the figure of Brother António very well. Father Carmelo describes him as a man of prayer, faithful to his vocation, serious in facing life, altruistic, more concerned with others than with himself and a great worker: "a community person, humble and authentic, who knew how to communicate the values of missionary life with fidelity to his duty and the care with which he did everything." The years during which I was Provincial Superior (1978-1984) coincided with Brother António's stay in the novitiate. When the time came to evaluate the novices for admission to first vows, I met with the novice master, his socius [assistant to the father master, ed.] and the community. I remember that I gave a lot of weight to Brother António's judgment, and when he was asked his opinion, he responded with simplicity and humility, usually after a short pause for reflection. Sometimes he expressed a negative opinion, but he was almost always right: his judgment was based on authenticity, joy and enthusiasm for the missionary vocation, love and attachment to the community and its goods, all

these values that he was able to discern in daily life with the novices and were sometimes not perceived by the two formators.

After the years spent in Portugal, two long stays opened up for Brother António in Brazil (1984-1993 and 1997-2009), always in the parish of Pastos Bons, in the diocese of Balsas, where he earned the deep admiration and esteem of the people.

In 2009, at 85 years of age, he agreed to return to Portugal and spent the last years of his life in the community of Viseu, where, despite his advanced age, he continued to work to provide the community with the vegetables he grew on our land. To make him happy, a small greenhouse was built where, even in winter, some vegetables could be grown to put on the table.

As time went by, his strength began to abandon him, and the last years were quite painful for him. He was hospitalised several times. The last hospitalisation in the hospital of Viseu took place in the last week of July 2024. He died there on the night of 29<sup>th</sup> July. His body was taken to the chapel of our community.

The next day, at 11:00, the Eucharistic celebration was held, presided over by the bishop of the diocese, Monsignor António Luciano in the presence of numerous missionaries from our communities, brothers on vacation from the mission, relatives of Brother António, and many faithful.

In the afternoon, the funeral was held in Cepões, his hometown, where he was buried. (*Father Manuel Ferreira Horta, mccj*)

### **Father Natale Basso (25.12.1929 – 25.08.2024)**

He was born on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1929, Christmas Day - hence the name his parents gave him - in Cervarese Santa Croce (Padua), the first son of Francesco and Antonia Tessari. In 1940, Natale entered the diocesan seminary of Vicenza, where he attended middle school and two years of high school. On 9<sup>th</sup> October 1946, he entered the Comboni novitiate of Venegono Superiore (Varese) where, on November 1, he took the habit. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1948, he took his first temporary vows in Gozzano (Novara), where the novitiate had recently been transferred. For his theological studies, he was assigned to the scholasticate of Rebbio (Como). Thanks to his character, his superiors immediately assigned him as prefect to the apostolic school of Carraia (Lucca), where he remained until 1950; then, he was assigned to the apostolic school of Crema, again as prefect. Here he attended theology courses at the local diocesan seminary. In September 1953 he was in Venegono for the last year of scholasticate. On 9<sup>th</sup> September, he made his perpetual religious profession

and on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1954, he was ordained a priest in the cathedral of Milan by the archbishop Card. Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster.

Father Natale wanted to go to Africa immediately, but his superiors assigned him to the apostolic house of Thiene as bursar. He remained there until November 1959, when he was assigned to Ecuador.

For Christmas 1959 he was in Esmeraldas, in the episcopal seat, together with Monsignor Angelo Barbisotti, apostolic vicar, and eight other confreres. He was vice superior of the community, but his true 'ministry' was the pastoral care of the numerous parishes of the city, which were emerging and developing.

In July 1966, Father Natale was in Bologna as the person in charge of missionary animation. In July of the following year, he was assigned to Peru, to Cerro de Pasco, at an altitude of 4,400 meters.

From July 1970 to June 1978, Father Natale was the full-time general spiritual assistant of the Comboni Secular Missionaries: his task was to 'accompany' the seculars in the spiritual and formative aspects, and he carried out this important service in an excellent way. But his activity was not limited to this. For a good eight years, he engaged in an incalculable number of missionary animation activities, especially among young people, offering vocational accompaniment to many of them, not only for the Comboni family but also for the universal Church. With young people he was a true leader, being an enthusiastic, decisive and dynamic person, three qualities much appreciated by the youth.

In July 1978, Father Natale was assigned to Ecuador, and appointed to the regional prosecutor's office in Quito. He was immediately made the secretary of missionary animation and began one of the most active and fruitful periods of his missionary life. In December of the same year, Cardinal Muñoz Vega, Archbishop of Quito, appointed him national head of missionary animation, in coordination with the Pontifical Missionary Works. With his team of religious men and women, Comboni lay people and Sisters, he travelled far and wide throughout the country, visiting every single parish and founding groups called 'Sin Fronteras'. Thanks to his ministry, new vocations were born, including missionaries and Comboni Sisters, both male and female. Very soon, Father Natale also became the promoter of the first national congresses of missionary animation, to which everyone was invited, especially young people.

In 1979 he also founded the Sin Fronteras publishing house, whose flagship is the missionary magazine *Sin Fronteras* (in 1990 it became *Iglesia Sin Fronteras*). At the beginning of 1982, the magazine already sold over 15,000 copies. He also wrote an impressive number of pamphlets, which were distributed everywhere, even beyond the borders of

Ecuador. Even today, his publications are used and distributed in Central America. In 1981 he was elected provincial councillor and appointed provincial treasurer.

In 1983, Father Natale was called to work in Colombia to organise and promote missionary and vocational animation there. In July 1995, he returned to Italy, assigned to the community of Messina, in charge of missionary animation. He remained there for eleven years.

In 2006, he returned permanently to Ecuador, to Quito, where he once again took on responsibility for the Sin Fronteras publishing house and the *Iglesia Sin Fronteras* magazine. In 2009, he was again appointed provincial treasurer and also procurator until 2013.

At the beginning of 2016, while he was rearranging books and magazines in the CAM warehouse, he fell from the ladder, hitting his head on the floor. Rushed to the hospital, the doctors expressed doubts about the possibility of his survival, but, little by little, Father Natale recovered. However, the provincial superior, also taking into account his age (87 years!), relieved Father Natale of his responsibility for the publishing house. It was a very hard blow for him, and it took him a few months to accept the fact. In 2020, he was chosen as Probus Vir of the province, a sign that the brothers placed their trust in him and truly appreciated him. Unfortunately, his health problems increased and on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2024, he fell asleep in the Lord.

Father Natale, especially in recent times, has been, for me, the author of this obituary, a great friend and advisor. He was a generous man and fully dedicated to the mission *ad gentes*. An upright, honest and demanding man, first with himself, then with others, especially with his collaborators from whom he demanded seriousness and dedication. He was a leader of the youth who appreciated him for his clarity, his dedication and his dynamism. He had an extraordinary capacity for work. I will certainly miss him. Many others will miss him too. (*Father Ottorino Poletto, mccj*)

### **Brother Vincenzo Pannice (6.12.1930 – 29.8.2024)**

Vincenzo was born in Naples on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1930, into a poor family. It is the logic of Christ to choose simple and poor people because the poor have a free heart, which can be inhabited by God's plans.

He entered the novitiate in Florence, where he took his first vows on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1956. Two years later, he was already on a mission in Ecuador, where he made his perpetual religious profession on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1962, in Santa Maria de los Cayapas.

Brother Vincenzo left us at the age of 94. Almost all of his life, distributed in various alternating stages, was spent in Ecuador and Mexico. Two

strong points of his 'charisma' were vocation promotion and missionary animation, through the distribution of magazines, especially those for children. He was always on the move, visiting parishes and schools. He was good at what he was doing and achieved excellent results.

In the community, he was very quiet. He was a discreet and reserved man, always 'out of the photo', as they say in Naples. He carried out his work with tenacity and perseverance. He had many defects, but no more than us. He did not know much about Comboni's 'literature', but he had captured his spirituality and his love for the mission.

Here are some 'Comboni virtues' that everyone recognised in him. First of all, the personal sacrifice for the 'arduous mission', as Comboni said, and Brother Vincenzo did not spare himself. He was ready for the effort and the total gift of himself because he loved his work and his vocation as a Brother.

His was a 'Comboni holiness': Comboni had wanted holy and capable missionaries, and Brother Vincenzo not only loved this thought of the Founder but also put it into practice. He shunned, however, that religious fanaticism which is the brother of stupidity. Comboni had wanted 'humble' missionaries and Brother Vincenzo did not boast of his work and service: yes, he possessed authentic humility.

Brother Vincenzo always put God first, and this led him to have a life of prayer. Everyone saw him retire to the chapel in the evening, sometimes even at night, when he returned late from the various places he had visited, and early in the morning there he was again, waiting for the recitation of Lauds. He was often seen walking along the avenue of the seminary, with his missionary rosary in his hand.

As already mentioned, he had missionary animation in his blood: he never missed an opportunity to speak about the Comboni mission in schools, parishes and religious institutes, both male and female. He was a tireless promoter of our magazines and books, always with good results. He was an unsurpassed vocations promoter: his favourite method was personal contact with possible candidates, whom he visited in their families and to whom he sent personal letters. The seminarians of the minor seminary of San Francisco del Rincón, in Mexico, held him in high esteem and enjoyed listening to him while he spoke Spanish with a Neapolitan accent. Not everything, however, went as he would have liked. There was no shortage of confreres who criticised him for his way of working. Some, perhaps jokingly, teased him by saying: "You do the work of the priests." He, however, kept quiet and put up with it. He deeply loved his vocation as a Brother, but he also believed - and he demonstrated

it firmly - that missionary animation is the task and mission of every Comboni Missionary.

In some communities where he was, he also found obstacles and opposition regarding his activities and initiatives, but no one was ever able to stop him. And for a simple reason: he believed in what he was doing. The results and the fruits proved him right.

Brother Vincenzo lived a concrete, humble and simple faith. Franco Accardo, a Lay Comboni missionary from Ercolano, who often hosted Brother Vincenzo in his home when he returned for holidays in Italy, wrote this in his testimony: "The love for the mission and the Comboni style shone through his words, his looks and his gestures. You could feel that he was practising what he was preaching." (*Father Teresino Serra, mccj*)

### **Father Giuseppe Messetti (24.01.1952 – 30.08.2024)**

Love for the mountains and nature, love for the people of the Sierra, and a big and generous heart: I think this is how we can sum up the life of Father Pepe (I will call him that, as did the people of Peru) who spent 35 years of his life in the central Andes and died tragically in an accident during a mountain hike at 4,500 meters above sea level, in the area of the parish of 'Santo Domingo', in Palca, where he worked. Giuseppe was born in Caprino Veronese (Verona) into a family where trust in God was in the air. From an early age, he welcomed the call to the priesthood in his heart. He entered the diocesan seminary while still a boy. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1978, he was ordained a priest and assigned as curate to a parish in the diocese of Verona. However, a missionary vocation arose in him in a strong way and in October 1982 he entered the Comboni novitiate of Venegono Superiore. He made his first religious profession on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1984, and immediately left for the mission in Peru, where he remained until his death, with some brief interludes: vocation promotion-GIM in Lecce (1989-1990), missionary animation in Thiene (1990-1993), a sabbatical with two months of spirituality spent in Bethany in Israel, with the Comboni Sisters (January-May 2010), and the renewal course in Rome (2019).

In Peru, except for a 'tiring' year spent as a formator of postulants in Lima (2001), all his ministry took place in the Sierra: in the parishes of S. Miguel Chaupimarca and San Juan Pampa, in Cerro de Pasco, an insertion experience in the district of Chaulán, the parish of San Pedro in Huánuco, the parish of San Pedro in Yanahuanca, the parish of the Santísima Cruz in Baños, again the parish of San Pedro in Huánuco and, finally, the parish of San Domingo de Guzmán, in Palca. Pepe was a simple, austere, essential man. He easily related to people and was able to cultivate

friendships over the years. For many, he was a good friend, a counsellor, a father or an elder brother. The celebrations that accompanied his death were an eloquent sign of the abundant sowing of the Gospel and goodness that he made in his life. We have all seen the fruit of this sowing firsthand.

Father Pepe had good friends in Italy who helped him with their possessions. Thanks to them, he carried out important works, always thinking of the little ones, the poor, and the humble. I will mention only the latest: the construction of the 'Giuseppe Gariglio Educational Rehabilitation Center for the Blind' (CERCI-HCO), the foundation of the 'CREVAL, a physical rehabilitation centre' of Caritas-Huánuco, and a great effort to build an oxygen plant, very important during the harsh experience of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The silence of the immense Andean spaces, the mountain trails, the search for the path where no one had passed, the peaks and lagoons with their names, were the common thread of his life, not only in a physical sense but also spiritually. All this gave oxygen not only to his lungs but also to his friendship with God and his relationships with people.

Father Pepe was a true encyclopaedia of that part of the central Sierra where he worked and which he knew better than anyone else. He loved to show his friends the thousands of photos he had taken during his long walks. Very often he went alone to climb this or that peak: he liked it that way. And he also ventured alone on his last excursion, on August 29, 2024. He slipped and fell onto some rocks, suffering brain and chest injuries. Perhaps he died immediately, or the cold of the night, at over 4,500 meters, and the humidity of the lagoon led to fatal hypothermia. He was found lifeless on the morning of the 31st. According to the doctors, he must have died during the night between August 29 and 30. The circumstances of his death shocked everyone who knew and appreciated him, in Italy and Peru. All we can do is bow our heads before the mystery of life and death and, without asking ourselves too many questions, thank the Lord for the gift he has given us in his person. In the Sierra, especially in the afternoon, a strong wind often blows. Today, the wind that blows over the mountains of the Sierra Tarmeña whispers to us – and will whisper for a long time – the legacy of Father Pepe: faith, service and solidarity are the only important things.

Thank you, Father Pepe! We remain immensely grateful for the good you have given us. Hasta luego, querido cura andino, as you liked to sign yourself. (*Father Sergio Agustoni, mccj*)

## **Monsignor Lorenzo Ceresoli (18.05.1931 – 06.09.2024)**

Monsignor Lorenzo Ceresoli returned to the house of the Father on Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2024, in Castel d'Azzano (Verona), in the 'Fratel Alfredo Fiorini' Centre for sick and elderly Comboni missionaries. He was born in Nave (Brescia) on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1931, into a family characterised by an intense Christian life lived in simplicity and work, blessed by three sons and three daughters. We could summarise his life like this: 93 years of life, 70 years of consecrated life, 64 years of priesthood and 30 years of episcopate. Lorenzo attended elementary school in the village. After the fifth grade, his father placed him in work as an apprentice at a carpenter's shop. Monsignor Ceresoli said: "I have never been an altar boy, but I have always attended the oratory and meetings of Catholic Action." It is precisely at the school of Catholic Action that he grew in Christian life and daily commitment. The example and words of the delegate of Catholic Action helped him to cultivate the seed of his vocation that led him to follow the Lord. In the meantime, he attended evening classes at the institute that the Salesians had in Nave. He soon followed in his father's example and became a member of the town's musical band.

At 18, Lorenzo entered the diocesan seminary of Brescia, where he attended high school. But he did not want to be just a priest: he wanted to go to Africa! His parish priest, therefore, put him in contact with the Comboni missionaries who had a "Minor Seminary" in Viale Venezia in Brescia.

In October 1952, Lorenzo entered the novitiate of the Comboni Institute in Florence. The following year he went to Sunningdale, England, for the second year of novitiate. On 9 September 1954, he took his first vows and began his first theology course, again in Sunningdale. In 1956 he was in Venegono Superiore for the third year of theology. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1959, he made his perpetual religious profession and on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1960, he was ordained a priest.

His first destination was England, as a formator in the Comboni minor seminary in Mirfield. He would never forget this first experience: «I lived in a different cultural world, and I began to learn what it meant to live together and share with people of different nationalities and cultures». For him, it was a school that prepared him for the great leap towards Africa, which took place six years later.

In 1967 he went to the Apostolic Vicariate of Hawassa in Ethiopia. He began studying the language and pastoral and missionary insertion. Those were beautiful and intense years, characterised by his great desire to share the most precious thing he carried with him: the gift of Jesus. He would say of this first period: "Walking with the people, I learned a lot. We

enriched each other, despite the many difficulties.” From 1976 to 1981 he was the provincial superior of Ethiopia.

In 1981, the superiors called Father Lorenzo to the important service of the formation of future African Combonians. For 10 years he was the father master of novices from Uganda, Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia, first in Tartar (Kenya), then in Kampala and Namugongo (Uganda). Many African Combonians around the world today, remember him as a great “Father Master”.

Father Lorenzo returned to Italy in July 1990 for a renewal course in Rome. In July of the following year, he was superior of the community of Casa Madre, in Verona. In 1993, he was vice provincial superior of the Italian province. On 20<sup>th</sup> December 1993, Father Lorenzo was appointed Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate of Hawassa, where he had worked in his first years of missionary life. He would tell his brothers: “Three times I begged Rome to be exempted from this appointment. But everything had already been decided! And then, I prayed: ‘Lord, you know, you are well aware of how little good I am... Help me on my journey. I am merely an instrument in your hands’”. He was consecrated bishop on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1994. He would lead the local Church of Hawassa until 21<sup>st</sup> March 2009, when he renounced the pastoral government of the Vicariate having reached the age limit. What characterised his episcopal ministry was his being with the people, with the ones he felt were his own, with whom he identified himself in a long and patient journey, taking small steps of communion and brotherhood. He loved his people and his priests, acting with coherence and patience. It was not always easy; there were times and moments of suffering, but he always placed his trust in the One who had chosen him.

After his episcopal mandate, Msgr. Ceresoli continued to be a simple missionary, ‘bishop emeritus’, for another ten years in some missions of the Vicariate of Hawassa and in the capital Addis Ababa. He would have liked to remain in ‘his’ Ethiopia, but his age and state of health forced him to return to his homeland.

In 2020, he returned to Italy and was assigned to the Comboni community of Brescia. Intense years followed, full of activity. He says: “A missionary never retires!” He actively participated in the life of the community. His reflections and interventions told of his wisdom and the experience of a long life. He was always up to date on the Italian situation and the life of the Italian Church and the world. He continued to cultivate contacts with the Church in Ethiopia and with the Comboni communities of that province. He said: “Every evening, I pray for the Pope, for Ethiopia, for my Church of Hawassa, for its priests, and for its people.” Numerous

messages arrive from Ethiopia. Many of these end like this: “Dear Monsignor, even if you are in Italy, you will always be our father.”

When a bishop was needed for ministry in the city of Brescia, Msgr. Ceresoli was always available. And there he was, conferring the sacrament of Confirmation to the confirmands of the parishes of the Good Shepherd and San Francesco di Paola. His is the beautiful testimony of a ninety-year-old bishop who ends up being seen and felt as a “grandfather” by many boys and girls and their families.

In August 2024, Msgr. Ceresoli agreed to be transferred to Castel d’Azano, where he could be cared for more closely. He died on 6<sup>th</sup> September. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, a funeral mass was celebrated in the chapel of the Centre. On the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> the funeral was held at the parish church of Nave. (*Father Girolamo Miante, mccj*).

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

**THE FATHER:** Jean-Chrysostome, of the scholastic Fiston Muhindo (EGSD).

**THE MOTHERS:** Celeste, of Father Fidelino Jardim (U); Ermelinda, of Father Paulo Emanuel Loureiro da Silva (P).

**THE BROTHERS:** Carlo, of Bro. Guerrino and Bro. Gino Baldo (I); Lino of Bro. Giuseppe Zamboni (†).

**THE SISTER:** Anita, of Father Benno Singer (†).

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS:** Sr. Pia Ausilia Di Pietro, Sr. M. Sarina Nici.