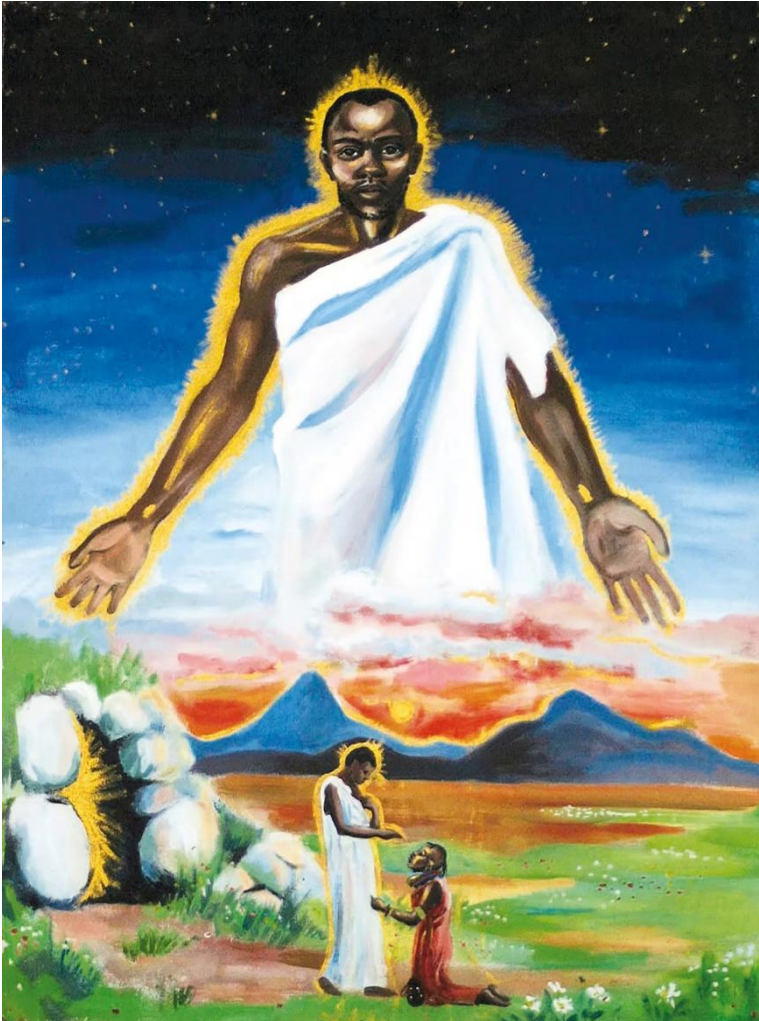


FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

839

April 2025



HAPPY EASTER 2025

GENERAL COUNCIL

GENERAL NOTES OF THE 34TH GENERAL CONSULTA (27.3.2025)

Appointment of the Assistant General

On 11th March 2025, in accordance with the provisions of the *Rule of Life* (157.4), the General Council chose Father Austine Radol Odhiambo as the new General Assistant, replacing Father Luigi Fernando Codianni. His appointment will take effect on 1st April 2025 and will last until the end of the mandate of the current administration, that is, the day of the convocation of the XX General Chapter in 2028. The Council expresses its full gratitude to Father Radol for his willingness to take on this role.

Joining the Laudato Si' Initiatives Platform (PILS)

The General Council has decided to join the 'Laudato Si' Initiatives Platform' (PILS) at the Institute level, following the Chapter Decision 30.1. It asks the Secretary General of the Mission to implement the decision and to present an annual plan of initiatives and evaluation. The Secretary General of the Mission will publish a detailed letter on the implications of this membership to encourage circumscriptions and communities to join.

Comboni Renewal Course – 50th edition

The general council and the coordinators of the ongoing formation courses in Rome confirm that the Comboni Renewal Course (CCR) – aimed in particular at confreres aged 50 to 70, especially if they are celebrating a particular anniversary of consecration and/or ordination – will be held from January to May 2026. The course intends, on the one hand, to offer the missionary help for a global renewal – physical, psychological, spiritual, community and apostolic – of his person, for growth in personal integration and a greater awareness of the existential moment he is living, in a deeper relationship with God, with himself, with Saint Daniel Comboni and with the community; on the other hand, it also aims to deepen the challenges of today's mission for a more conscious, free and responsible response to one's Comboni vocation. The course will begin on 7th January 2026 and will end in the month of May (a pilgrimage to the Holy Land will also be considered, if the situation allows). Confreres who need to study Italian are asked to communicate this to the coordinator of the Ongoing Formation Center, Father Alberto de Oliveira Silva, in order to agree on dates and methods. Confreres who will need a visa for Israel must arrive at the end of November, to begin the procedures for staying in Italy, in order to be able to request a visa from the Israeli embassy. Confreres who wish to participate in the course are invited

to speak with their circumscription superiors and send their application in writing to Father Alberto de Oliveira Silva by e-mail: ccfpmccj@comboni.org or albatrosilva55@gmail.com.

Maia Formative Community (Portugal)

The general council – taking into account the formative reality of the institute and especially the availability of places in the scholasticates – after discernment has decided to open the formative community of Maia (Portugal) starting from 1st September 2025. While we thank the province of Portugal for having welcomed this community, we ask the confreres of the Institute to accompany this new opening with prayer.

The next ordinary consultas

The next ordinary consultas will take place as follows:

- June Consulta, from 6th to 20th June 2025;
- October Consulta, from 6th to 31st October 2025.

The General Council asks all Circumscription Superiors to note these dates in their diaries so that they can organise their Circumscription Councils soon enough to send in the respective minutes before the beginning of the Consulta.

Ordinations

Kangite Wolima François d'Assise	Kinshasa (CN)	22.02.2025
Lokengi Mputu Jean Marie Vianney	Kinshasa (CN)	22.02.2025
Mumbere Kahongya Mapenzi (Volonté)	Butembo (CN)	27.02.2025
Muyisa Kapitula Mumbere	Butembo (CN)	27.02.2025
Mwangi Samuel Ngugi	Gilgil (KE)	01.03.2025

Holy Redeemer Guild

April	01 – 15 CN	16 – 30 EC
May	01 – 15 ET	16 – 31 I

Prayer intentions

April – For all the countries of the world, especially those where we are present as a Comboni family, so that we may always seek the common good and motivate Christians to social and political commitment. *Lord hear us.*

May – Let us pray to the Lord for the *prophets of the Gospel* of our time who, scattered throughout the world, make visible his Kingdom of justice

and peace: may their testimony challenge our lives and renew our missionary commitment. *Lord hear us.*

Comboni liturgical calendar

MAY

31	<i>Last Saturday of the month</i> – The Blessed Virgin Mary, “Our Lady of the Sacred Heart”	memorial
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Meaningful anniversaries

APRIL

25	Saint Pedro de San José de Betancur, religious	PCA (Central América, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador)
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MAGGIO

2	Saint Athanasius, bishop and doctor of the Church	Egypt
31	<i>Last Saturday of the month</i> – The Blessed Virgin Mary, “Our Lady of the Sacred Heart”	memorial

Publications

GIUSEPPE CARAMAZZA, *The Gospel of Social Transformation – Faith, Justice, and the Path to a Renewed Society*, edited by the Triveneto Faculty of Theology – Padova, 2025, pp. 170.

Father Giuseppe has a Masters in Missiology (from the Chicago CTU) and a doctorate in Religious Studies (from the Nairobi CUEA). He is a Comboni Missionary and has worked in Kenya especially in the world of the media, the world of politics and in teaching at Tangaza University, Nairobi. He is now in the Padua community and collaborates with the Triveneto Faculty of Theology (Padua).

The book presents Jesus of Nazareth as one of the most complex and often misunderstood people in history. To recover the historical Jesus, we must examine history by combining the results of many independent investigations. This forms a new image of Galilee at the beginning of the first century of our era and leads to a reassessment of our understanding of Jesus’ message. There is no doubt that one of Jesus’ goals was to

propose an alternative society. He referred to this society as the 'Lordship of God' in the world. His action was, therefore, oriented towards a transformation of society that was based on the profound change of the human being.

The book focuses on the fact that Jesus proclaimed a gospel of social transformation and wanted his disciples to be social transformers. The social dimension of the gospel is emphasised in recent papal documents. Today, in an age of global consciousness, Jesus' disciples are called to translate the gospel of social transformation into political and financial choices that go beyond their local scope. Real social transformation will have to be addressed at the local level, but above all at the international level. The North-South divide, the ongoing experience of financial, cultural and political colonisation, and other forms of isolation of large groups of people, require a concerted effort by all people of good will. Only in this way will the gospel of social transformation come to life for the people of our time.

Downloadable from the Internet: *TTP-Theology-08-The-gospel-of-social-transformation_Giuseppe-Caramazza.pdf*

FATHER METIN SÈDOTÉ ALEX CANISIUS, mccj, originally from Benin and now in Kinshasa-Kingabwa (DR Congo) at the *Centre Afriquespoir*, was ordained in December 2012. After having ministered in the province of TBG (2013-2022), he went to Rome, to the generalate for a Master in Social Sciences, specialising in Communications, at the Gregorian University. In 2024, he presented his thesis, *Communication and Culture of the Encounter of Le Akomimlan, ferment de cohésion sociale chez les fons d'Abomey (Bénin)*. On the instructions of his thesis director, Father Dr Alejo Albert, SJ, Father Metin wrote his thesis in the form of a research article which he submitted to the *Revue Internationale du Chercheur*, based in Morocco and linked to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. To his great satisfaction, the new text appeared in the February 2025 issue of the magazine (Volume 6: No. 1 – 2025, pp: 670-700). Here is an extract:

In today's social context, characterised by indifference, polarisation and extremism, research on communicative practices known for their ability to create social cohesion could contribute to promoting a communicative style that facilitates the "culture of encounter". To this end, this research is committed to studying the communicative characteristics of *Akomimlan* (a panegyric of the *Fon* clan of the Republic of Benin), known for its ability to establish social cohesion. The results of the research reveal that the specific verbal and non-verbal content of the practice and its

particular style, based on recognition and valorisation, favour the identification and socialisation of members and integration into the social group. From the analysis, some communicative characteristics can be deduced that are suitable for promoting effective encounters.

Here is the link to download the article published in French: *“Communication and Encounter’s Culture” in the cultural practice of Akomimlan (Fon clan’s panegyric) of the Republic of Benin | Revue Internationale du Chercheur (revuechercheur.com)*

TONINO FALAGUASTA NYABENDA, Christians and Muslims – Dialogue in the truth, 2025, 80 pages. This booklet has reached its fifth edition, which addresses the issue of Islamic-Christian dialogue in a simple and brief manner. Three short chapters added to the 4th edition: “Working for human brotherhood”, “The earth, our common home”, “Dialogue looking from the other”.

To download the 2023 edition: [https://comboni2000.org/2023/05/08/falaguasta-cristiani-e-musulmani-dialogo-nella-verita-1/\[and -2/\]](https://comboni2000.org/2023/05/08/falaguasta-cristiani-e-musulmani-dialogo-nella-verita-1/[and -2/).

CONGO

Priestly ordinations in Butembo

This year, the annual priestly ordinations in the diocese of Butembo-Beni had a truly solemn tone. Not only was the group of ordinands extremely large (23 diocesan deacons and 2 Combonians, Muyisa Kapitula and Mapenzi Kahongya), but the diocesan Church decided to celebrate them in the context of the memory of the first two bishops of the diocese, Mgr. Henri Joseph Piérard (1893-1975) and Mgr. Emmanuel Kataliko (1958-2000).

Mgr. Piérard, a Belgian Assumptionist, was the first bishop of this local Church from 1938 to 1966, and is today considered the founding father of the diocese. He also founded two religious congregations: the Brothers of the Assumption in 1952 and the Little Sisters of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple in 1948. After resigning on 27th April 1973, he died on 5th March 1975. The current bishop of Butembo-Beni, Mgr. Sikuli Paluku Melchisédech, chose to celebrate this year’s priestly ordinations close to the 50th anniversary of his heavenly birth.

Mgr. Kataliko was the second bishop of the diocese, but the first native of the place. Born in 1932, he led the diocese of Butembo-Beni from 1966 to 1997 when he was transferred to Bukavu to succeed Mgr. Christophe Munzihirwa who was assassinated in 1996, and remained Archbishop of Bukavu until his death in 2000. Known for his commitment to

peace and justice in the DR Congo and a defender of human rights, Msgr. Kataliko courageously denounced the violence, massacres and injustices perpetrated against the civilian population, in particular by armed groups and foreign occupation forces supported by Rwanda. Forced into exile in 1990, he was able to return to his diocese only in January 2000, but died a few months later, in October of the same year, in circumstances that remain unclear. His commitment marked the history of the Church of Butembo-Beni and his memory remains alive in the collective memory. The climate of war in which this year's ordinations took place brought to mind by all those present the conditions in which he died. Significant was the choice of Archbishop Sikuli to ordain the 25 deacons in two different ceremonies in two different places: 17 (including the two Combonians) in Butembo on 27th February, and 6th on March 2 in Beni, where Archbishop Piérard had started the diocese of Beni which later became Butembo-Beni with the appointment of Archbishop Kataliko.

The two celebrations took place in a spirit of hope, but also in a climate of insecurity due to the threat of the rebel group M23, which at the end of January had taken over the city of Goma, capital of North Kivu (which includes the diocese of Butembo-Beni), and the city of Bukavu, capital of South Kivu, on 14th February. Everyone expected the rebels to move north, towards Butembo, a city with a strategic position and commercial centre of the region. However, as Bishop Sikuli said, "God has visited us and granted us peace," thanks to the many prayers raised throughout the world for this diocese.

From 17th to 23rd February, the ordinands had a spiritual retreat, on the theme *'Being a priest according to the heart of God'*, in Musimba, on the outskirts of Butembo, in the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where the 17 priests of the first group were ordained.

Who knows if those present were able to grasp the dual missionary dimension of the event: to be priests according to the Heart of God in the peripheries, and prophets of peace and reconciliation, as was the Virgin who appeared in Guadalupe. But this is precisely the wish that the Comboni Province of Congo makes for these two of its new members. (*Father Kakule Muvawa Emery-Justin, mccj*)

DEUTSCHSPRACHIGE PROVINZ

DSP Annual retreat

From 10th to 14th March 2025, the annual retreat of the German-speaking Province (DSP) took place in Ellwangen on the theme *'Spiritually Shaping*

Old Age', led by the monk Martin Birk, OSB, of the Benedictine Abbey of Münsterschwarzach, 25 km from Würzburg. The retreat began on Monday afternoon and concluded on Friday with the celebration of the Eucharist and lunch.

The central theme of the meditations – each lasting about 30 minutes – was love for God and for one's neighbor. The commandment of Jesus is fundamental: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love!" (Jn 15:9). Love is not made up of words, nor of feelings, but of actions. Love is a verb, a choice, a decision. It is an act of the will, and it is a gift.

To understand this, it is essential to contemplate Jesus crucified and risen, who gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Prayer – especially the celebration of the Eucharist as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice of love and suffering and as a sign of the wedding of the Lamb for eternal life – must characterise our daily life. Assistance to the sick, refugees, the hungry, orphans, the elderly without family members... are concrete expressions of our love for our neighbor.

In addition to the 14 members of the Ellwangen community, six confreres from other communities in the province took part in the retreat.

EGYPT-SUDAN

Sudan – The regular army “frees” Khartoum

On 26th March, after weeks of siege and having liberated almost the entire city of Omdurman in the last months of 2024 and Khartoum North in January of this year, the regular army scored another major victory against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and entered the centre of Khartoum, where the cathedral and many of our oldest Comboni missions, including Comboni College, are located. As the army entered Khartoum, reports began to spread that the RSF were moving westward, into Darfur.

Videos and photos began to circulate on social media, showing the destruction and chaos left by almost two years of war. For us missionaries, it is a consolation to see that the buildings we had abandoned are still standing – which is no small thing, to be honest. The images we have received tell us that Khartoum awaits us. The bricks will be put back together... It will be hard work. But much harder will be the task of healing the souls (and bodies) of the survivors. Comboni used to say: "Sudan or death!"

ESPAÑA

Annual meeting of the Comboni Family in Madrid

On 15th and 16th March, in Madrid, we had the opportunity to experience a wonderful meeting of the Comboni Family of Spain. It was a weekend lived as a space of fraternity, reflection and spiritual growth.

We explored the theme of the Jubilee of Hope, understood as a special time that invites us to renew our faith and our commitment to those most in need. In this Jubilee Year we feel called to be instruments of hope in a world that needs it so much.

We reflected on the spirituality and the Comboni charism, which encourage us to live the Gospel with courage, generosity and boundless love. As sons and daughters of Saint Daniel Comboni, our mission is to bring the light of the Gospel to every corner of the world, especially to those who suffer most.

It was a meeting full of moments of prayer, reflection and testimonies that strengthened our bonds as a family and encouraged us to an ever-greater commitment to the mission of Jesus.

While we thank all those who made this meeting possible, we invite everyone to continue walking together 'as *pilgrims of hope*', guided, of course, by our Comboni charism. (*The meeting participants*).

MOZAMBIQUE

Jude: yet another cyclone

On Monday, 10th March, Mozambique was tragically hit by Cyclone Jude. The destructive event hit the province of Nampula, in the district of Mos-suril, with winds reaching more than 140 km/h causing heavy rains and freak waves and increasing the risk of floods and landslides. In some villages, Cyclone Jude caused 70% of the houses to collapse!

Jude is the third cyclone to hit Mozambique in the last four months. Cyclone Chido passed in December, killing at least 120 people and destroying nearly 120,000 homes. In mid-January, it was the turn of Cyclone Dikeledi, which killed at least 5 people and destroyed around 3,500 homes.

The area of the Comboni community of Carapira, which hosts both the Diocesan Pastoral Center and the Carapira Industrial Technical Institute (ITIC), has also suffered extensive damage. The brothers have communicated that they are fine, although they are completely isolated from the rest of the world. Father De Guidi Davide, superior, sent a voice message on 14th March, describing the situation.

"The cyclone passed over our area with tremendous force. It lasted about 12 hours, with very strong winds and heavy rain. Carapira was the centre of the terrible phenomenon. The cyclone then headed towards Nampula, but with less force. The damage is extensive. In the parish, many houses collapsed. Some chapels were also razed to the ground. The centre of the parish itself suffered severe but not enormous damage, thank God. Many trees fell. The buildings are all flooded. Water entered everywhere, even from the damaged ceilings. There is no doubt that a year of hunger awaits us."

It was a real shock. "And to think that things were going really well. In the previous months, there had been abundant rains. The crops were growing wonderfully. We were waiting for the last month to pass, before taking up the sickle and starting the harvest. Now, however, a year of difficulty and hope awaits us... We look around and our minds are bombarded by terrible questions: What can we do? What can the people do? Where will the aid come from? The local population has lost a large part of their crops. What will tomorrow be like?"

A reflection by Father Davide followed: "The cyclones that have occurred in recent months have been extremely frequent and devastating. It is impossible not to think of a reckless manipulation of the environment. As always, even today those who pay the price are the poor, the last, who are almost certainly the least guilty of the exploitation of ecosystems. Obviously, the first buildings to collapse were the mud huts of the poorest. Thank God, it seems that there have been no deaths in our parish. We hope this will be confirmed soon."

How did the population react? "Our people are amazing: they immediately rolled up their sleeves and started to put things back in order. Many immediately began to erect small structures with poles and branches. Obviously: they are looking for a place to live... But, sooner or later, they will have to start building stronger and more stable homes. The problem is where to find the money to do this. Straw houses and 'matope' (mud) do not last: the next cyclone would have no regard for them."

He continued: "The children and young people are all at home. The schools have all been hit. Even the school in Carapira was partly destroyed. Our Pastoral Center – already in need of repairs – was seriously damaged. Only the church resisted: it was flooded, yes, but it is in good condition. Outside, in the villages, however, many chapels have been reduced to piles of mud and straw; others have been seriously damaged and will need to be repaired."

In conclusion: "Many poor people have flocked to the mission courtyard. We immediately took action to welcome and help them. We offer them

shelter and food to feed themselves. We will have to think of some project to be able to deal with the difficult situation. We will launch appeals to local authorities, to the diocese and to friends abroad, in the hope that we will soon receive concrete signs of hope for these vulnerable poor people. We are not discouraged. We are simply eager to help. But we will also have to think about the future, starting with educating the local population to invest the few resources they have in improving their homes. It is a hopeless task to counter a cyclone with the huts built with straw and mud.”

TCHAD

Bursars’ formation meeting in Chad

Following a proposal expressed in the six-year plan of the Comboni delegation of Chad, a training session on economics was held from 25th February to 1st March 2025, led by Father Pietro Ciuciulla, in which some confreres and the treasurers of the communities participated. After this, the treasurers met to analyse the reports and budgets of their respective communities. Finally, the secretariat of the economy held a session to evaluate the economic situation of the delegation.

The training session with Father Pietro allowed us to understand and appreciate both the strictly technical aspects (management, accounting; the Banana program) and those in reference to the *Code of Canon Law*, the *Rule of Life*, the *Code of Conduct*. The presentation of the various topics was interesting and full of suggestions to help an understanding of the economy understood and lived according to the indications of the Church and the Institute.

A more practical and interesting moment was when Father Pietro introduced us to two practical and technical topics (‘What is accounting in its technical aspects’ and ‘the Banana Accounting program’) that need to be better known and practised at the level of individual communities.

A second session was dedicated to the economy of the communities. Despite some technical difficulties, such as the rotation of the treasurers and an uncertain technical management of the data, the economy of the communities responds to the needs of the mission. Father Amegnaglo Yaotsé-Mensah (Jean Nestor), treasurer of the delegation, accompanied this analysis, recalling the points on which it is essential to commit to such management of the economy that is increasingly in accordance with the indications of the Institute and the local Church.

A final moment of this “economic marathon” was when the secretariat of the economy analysed some economic issues (projects, revision of

community budgets, etc.) that will allow the delegation council to have a clearer vision of what happens in the economic field in our communities. These were intense days, but I think they were fruitful thanks to the help of Father Pietro, who never tired of emphasising the importance of community dialogue and proper management of the goods entrusted to us. The economy is everyone's business – the individual, the local community and the entire delegation – where we find ourselves carrying out our mission.

Trust, dialogue, correctness seem to me to be some of the key words that emerged during these days of work.

A sincere thank you goes to the community of Ndjaména, who welcomed us so fraternally. (*Brother Enrico Gonzales, mccj*)

UGANDA

115 years of Comboni presence

The first Comboni missionaries arrived in Omach, in northwestern Uganda, 115 years ago. To remember and celebrate that historic moment – it was 6th March 1910 – in which the Cross of Christ was raised for the first time in that region, last 6th March bishops, priests and hundreds of Christians went on a pilgrimage to that precise place – today in the parish of Pakwach, in the diocese of Nebbi – to celebrate the Eucharist together. «It was a truly spectacular celebration, a feast celebrated with all the liturgical and 'stylistic' splendour of Africa», writes Father Carmelo Del Río Sanz, a Spanish Comboni missionary, aged 71 years of which he spent more than thirty in Uganda. He was also parish priest of Pakwach in the 1980s.

Father Carmelo continues: "Today we had the joy of celebrating the fruits of that first arrival: the birth and development of four flourishing dioceses in the northwest of the country, today led by six prelates: the archdiocese of Gulu, with Msgr. Wokorach Raphael P'Mony and Msgr. John Baptist Odama, emeritus; the diocese of Lira, with Msgr. Sanctus Lino Wanok and Msgr. Giuseppe Franzelli, emeritus; the diocese of Arua, with Msgr. Sabino Ocan Odoki; the diocese of Nebbi, with Msgr. Constantine Rupiny."

The missionary concludes: "Every year, on March 6, we go on a pilgrimage to Omach, to remember the arrival of faith in this region. It is an important day in the history of the Comboni Missionaries in Uganda, because it is from here that our presence and the history of evangelisation in the north of the country began."

IN PACE CHRISTI

Father Mario Porto (5.11.1940 – 2.01.2025)

Mario was born on 5th November 1940 in Orgiano, in the province of Vicenza. From an early age he showed a strong religious sense and a passion for music. At the age of 12, despite his family's economic difficulties, he entered the minor seminary of the Comboni missionaries in Padua. Four months later, his mother died of breast cancer. After completing middle school, he began the two-year high school. In July 1957, he passed the state entrance exam for high school. On 1st October, he entered the novitiate in Gozzano (Novara). In April 1958, he was sent for the second year of novitiate in Sunningdale, 40 km from London, where he took his first temporary vows on 9th September 1959. He returned to Italy to begin the scholasticate in Carraia (Lucca). In July 1961, he went to the Mother House in Verona to continue his theology courses. On 9th September 1965, he made his perpetual profession and on 26th June 1966, he was ordained a priest in the chapel of the Mother House in Verona.

Immediately afterwards, he was assigned to the Apostolic House of Thiene (Vicenza) as prefect and teacher. During the months of vacation, he attended courses at the music conservatories of Padua, Bologna, and Pesaro. In February 1968, he was obliged to go to Arco, on Lake Garda, for health reasons. In September, he returned to the seminary in Thiene.

Appointed to Africa – In April 1972 he received a letter of assignment to the missions of Uganda, but the process to obtain an entry visa was extremely long. He was therefore allowed to extend his stay in Italy. In June, he graduated in choral music and choir direction, and in March 1973 also in musical composition (harmony, counterpoint, and fugue) at the music conservatory in Venice.

The news was received that President Idi Amin had denied entry to Father Mario and five other confreres. On 4th April 1973, he was informed that he was appointed to Kenya, where the first Comboni missions were going. In October 1973, Father Mario went to London, for an English course. In August 1974, he went to Nairobi, appointed to the mission of Gaicanjiru, in the Central Province of the country, inhabited by the Kikuyu ethnic group. Before going there, he attended a Kiswahili course in Kapalapala, Tanzania. Ten months later he went to Gaicanjiru, where he discovered that the people knew little Kiswahili and decided to commit himself to learning the local language, Kikuyu.

In September 1977 he returned to Italy to follow a renewal course in Rome, at the Curia. In May 1978 he again went to Kenya and was assigned to the parish of Kariobangi, in the outskirts of the capital. On 1st

July, he was elected vice-provincial. In November, he was assigned to the mission of Saba Saba, recently opened in the central province.

At the end of the General Chapter of 1979, Father Antonio Colombo, provincial superior of Kenya, resigned, and Father Mario was elected to succeed him until 1st July 1981, when the new provincial council was elected, led by Father Giovanni Ferracin. Father Mario returned to Italy for holidays and in September he went to Curia in Rome for a specialisation course.

In July 1982 he returned to Kenya to the community of Ongata Rongai, as a formator of postulants where he remained for five years also doing pastoral work in the local parish; he was also a member of the provincial secretariat for missionary animation and formation. In July 1987, he was transferred to the mission of Gilgil, as parish priest and superior of the Comboni community. He remained there until the end of June 1989, when he returned to Italy.

In the London Province and back to Kenya – In December he received a letter of assignment to the London Province, starting from 1st January 1990. He went to Glasgow, Scotland, assigned to missionary animation and stayed there for two years. In January 1992, he moved to Dublin, Ireland, charged with vocations promotion.

In January 1993, he was able to return to Kenya, assigned to the community by Kariobangi. In September he was appointed superior and parish priest of the large parish. Father Alex Zanotelli was also a member of that community and was involved in the shanty town of Korogoco. Kariobangi is a place marked by violence, unemployment and lack of essential services. Here Father Mario flourished. He was in a place he had always dreamed of. The following testimony by Brother Alberto Parise offers a glimpse of what Father Mario was and did in this mission.

Brother Alberto Parise recalls

«When I arrived in Kariobangi, in the slums of Nairobi, on my first missionary assignment, Father Mario was the parish priest and superior of the community. It was a real initiation for me in a challenging context in which the Comboni community worked with a collaborative ministerial approach, according to the guidelines of the Association of Members of the Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA), which focused on small Christian communities and ministries. The mission then had 76 small Christian communities, who met every week at the crossroads of the alleys between the shacks to pray, share the Word of God, and promote an incarnate and service-oriented faith. In each small Christian community, each adult took on a service towards the community or the

neighborhood. These communities interacted and collaborated, with their zonal councils and coordination, and then met again at the parish level. It was a structure of great participation and vitality, accompanied by a pastoral team that included the various coordinators of the ministries present in the mission.

Father Mario was able to guide this large missionary parish with wisdom, with a flourishing catechumenate and an integral vision of mission in which the social ministry was an integral part of the parish's journey of faith. Every commitment in the social sphere had a clear pastoral slant. Father Mario was the uniting factor in this complex and articulated urban mission: he was always there as a point of reference, and you could count on him.

He organised the meetings of the pastoral team (they met every Tuesday morning) and of the parish council, the retreats for the various groups and the spaces for community prayer. He was the one who maintained contact with the local vicariate and the institutions of the local Church. He promoted the skills and initiatives of the confreres and the various pastoral agents, whom he encouraged and stimulated to put their ability and creativity into play. It was not easy to manage the richness of the presence of various pastoral agents and brothers, with strong personalities, sometimes different sensibilities and visions, so that tensions could sometimes arise, but he managed to keep the parish community of Kariobangi-Korogocho together. In those years, the insertion of Father Alex Zanotelli in Korogocho, with various other confreres who joined him for more or less long periods, brought a frontier experience that, even within the Institute, generated debate and contrasting positions, the result of different visions of mission. Although Father Mario came from a more traditional practice of mission, he was able to make room for the novelty of the experience of Korogocho. He continually promoted training workshops for the leaders of the various ministries and small Christian communities, for young people and for women, following the Comboni charism of the regeneration of Africa with Africa.

I remember him as always open and ready to learn from the experiences and innovations of others, like when the mission restructured the youth ministry on the model of the nearby parish of Kariobangi South, or when, from behind the scenes, he supported the work of the interreligious commission that worked on the path of healing and reconciliation after the Kariobangi massacre of 3rd March 2002.

During his years of ministry in Kariobangi, Father Mario promoted or supported countless initiatives that led to the growth of the mission: the development of essential structures in the different areas of the parish (such

as Huruma and Ngei); the support of the Huruma Self-help Group, which would become one of the most successful experiences of savings and credit cooperatives in Kenya, reaching a national scale of excellence (today it has 22,000 members and is among the most functional in all of Kenya). Not to mention the Watoto Wetu project, a primary school with psychosocial support for the parish orphans, and the dispensary and vocational centre for girls at risk, run by the Comboni Sisters. He wanted the clinic for malnourished mothers and children, the food program for schools, the physiotherapy program for disabled children. He supported the parish social services program, the rehabilitation program for a youth gang, on the initiative of the Ministry of Justice and Peace of the Ngei area, accompanied by Father Vicente Reig and Brother Hans Eigner, who transformed a situation of violence into one of care for the environment».

Ongata Rongai, Kapenguria and Embakasi – In December 2010, Father Mario returned to Italy for a renewal course in Rome. In June 2011, he returned to Kenya, assigned to the postulancy at the parish of Ongata Rongai, as bursar. He remained there until June 2012, when he was sent to the mission-parish of Kapenguria, in the northwest of the country, among the Pokotethnic group.

In December 2013 he returned to Nairobi, assigned to the parish of Embakasi, on the outskirts of Nairobi, where a vocational and missionary animation centre had been opened. In January 2015, he was back in Ongata Rongai. In May he had to return to Italy for urgent health reasons.

A long illness... but carrying on working – He went to the hospital in Negrar for tests. The response was terrible: pancreatic cancer. He had an operation on 12th June. When he was discharged, he went to the community that runs the rectory of San Tomio, in the centre of Verona. In May 2016 he accepted the appointment as superior of the community. He remained there for seven long years, during which his heart always remained tied to Africa and its people.

In November 2023, he recognised that it was best for him to go to the 'Brother Alfredo Fiorini' Sick Center in Castel d'Azzano, to be adequately cared for by doctors and medical staff. His health deteriorated, but he remained calm and serene. On the evening of 2nd January 2025, he had a sudden collapse. He was immediately taken to the Borgo Roma hospital in Verona. He spent the night and the next day in the emergency room, and passed away on the evening of the 3rd.

On 7th January, his funeral was celebrated in the chapel of the Castel d'Azzano Center. His remains were taken to the Alma Luce Funeral Home in Alonte, 4 km from Orgiano, so that the parishioners could visit.

On the 8th, a funeral mass was celebrated in the “S. Maria Assunta” church in Orgiano. The burial then took place in the local cemetery. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

Father Héctor Villalba Arroyo (12.07.1935 – 05.02.2025)

Héctor was born in Santa Rosalía de Cuevas, in the municipality of Doctor Belisario Domínguez (Estado de Chihuahua), on 12th July 1935, to Juan Villalba and Ramona Arroyo. He attended elementary and secondary schools there. In 1954 he entered the Conciliar Seminary of Chihuahua where he attended the four-year course of Humanities. In 1958 he began the three-year course of Philosophy.

In his heart he already had a clear desire to become a missionary. He had already met some Comboni missionaries present in Mexico. During the first theology course, he spoke openly about it even with the bishop of the diocese of Chihuahua, who said he was ready to ‘let him go’, and in August 1962 gave him his dimissorial letters.

On September 28, Héctor went to the Comboni house in Tepepam (Mexico City) to begin the two-year novitiate. He spent his first year there. In September 1963 he sent to the novitiate in Florence (Italy) for the second year, during which he attended the second course of theology at the Episcopal Seminary of Fiesole. On 9th September 1964 he took his first religious vows in the presence of Father Maestro Stefano Patroni. Immediately afterwards, he went to Venegono Superiore to continue his theological studies. On 3rd July 1966 he was ordained a priest by Saint Paul VI, in Rome.

Returning to Mexico, he was immediately assigned to the minor seminary of San Francisco del Rincón as a formator and teacher. In July 1968 he was in Mexico City, at the provincial headquarters, as diocesan director of the Pontifical Missionary Works and national assistant of the Student Missionary League. On 1st January 1971 he went to the Comboni seminary of Guadalajara, as a propagandist and in charge of missionary animation. There he received the letter of assignment to the missions of Uganda. In September he went to Cincinnati (USA) for a short English course. In December 1971 he arrived in Masindi, Uganda, in the diocese of Hoima. He remained there for six years as assistant pastor. At the beginning of 1976, he moved to Nyantonzi, in the same diocese. In March 1977, the superior general, Father Tarcisio Agostini, sent him a letter of assignment: “I inform you that it is the desire of the general council that you return to Mexico to help the province in its various activities. I know

the sacrifice we are asking of you: temporarily leaving Uganda and the work you have begun will not be easy for you. [...] In Mexico the Lord is blessing our institute in a special way with numerous vocations. The sacrifice we ask of you will turn into joy when you see that you are preparing numerous new missionaries for the mission in the future. Therefore, I assign you to the province of Mexico from 1st July 1977.”

In September 1977, after taking holidays with his family, Father Héctor was appointed superior of the seminary in Guadalajara. In July 1980 he was assigned to the Comboni Vocation Center in Mexico City, with the task of vocations promoter.

After seven years in Mexico, Father Héctor was able to return to Uganda. In July 1984 he was in the mission-parish of Kigumba, diocese of Hoima. He did not stay there long, because Father Fernando Colombo, head of the international scholasticate in Kampala, insistently asked for an assistant and a possible substitute, and he mentioned Father Héctor's name. In June 1985, Father Héctor received a letter from the superior general, Father Salvatore Calvia assigning him to the scholasticate in Kampala, as assistant to Father Colombo: “There are strong reasons that led us to this assignment. I know that it is not a great consolation for you, but here are my reasons: it is an act of esteem towards you; we are sure that your presence in the scholasticate will be very positive, full of balance and stability; we wanted to appoint a ‘non-Italian’ formator to emphasise internationality in all the structures of the Institute; finally, we think that you will not have to sacrifice pastoral work entirely, because in Kampala you will find many ways to engage in in pastoral work, especially in the nearby parish of Mbuya.”

In June 1988, the scholasticate was moved to Nairobi, Kenya, and Father Francesco Pierli, the new superior general, soon assigned Father Héctor to the Province of Kenya: “I hope that you will find yourself well in the new situation and that the scholasticate can begin this new chapter with the same seriousness and the same commitment that you gave to it during the years of its presence in Uganda.”

Three months later, there was another letter from Father Pierli with a new destination: “You know better than I do the evolution of events in recent times: first the transfer of the scholasticate from Kampala to Nairobi, then the deterioration of the situation in terms of formation personnel at the Nairobi International Brothers Center (CIF) due to the sudden departure of Father Piergiorgio Prandina. You know well that formators cannot be improvised. Therefore, after various reflections, the general council has decided to ask you to be available to be a formator and superior of the community of the CIF.” In October he went to the new formation house,

where he remained for three years. He learned Kiswahili, so as to be able to carry out pastoral ministry in the local parish run by the Mexican missionaries of Guadalupe. In 1990 he returned to Mexico to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the priesthood of the first group of Mexican Combonians. The provincial superior of Mexico insisted he remain in his homeland. But he does not agree. He was waiting for a replacement for the CIF, and would like to have some pastoral experience in one of the slums of Nairobi.

In December 1990, Father Pierli asks him by letter to return to Kenya and wait at least until mid-1991. He knew he was not fulfilling his confrere's and explained: "The criteria that I follow in asking for 'special sacrifices' are the following: I ask for very few, because, being special, it is not easy to find someone who can bear them; I ask them of someone who I believe has the moral and spiritual stature to bear them; and I hope that the suffering that they cause can have great fruitfulness, if accepted in faith."

In June 1991, Father Pierli sent him a letter of assignment to the province of Uganda starting on 1st July. The superior general felt the need to add: "I thank you with all my heart for what you have done and for how much you have suffered."

Father Héctor returned to Mexico for the holidays. In October 1991 he went to Rome to begin some course in spirituality; in January 1992 he began the refresher course that lasted until June. In July he returned to Uganda as superior of the Kigumba community. He remained there until June 1998, when he returned to Mexico for a sabbatical year, at the end of which he received a letter from Father Manuel Augusto Ferreira, superior general, assigning him to the province of Mexico starting January 1st, 1999.

He then moved to the pre-postulancy-propaedeutic seminary at Cuernavaca until December 2000, in charge of missionary animation. In January 2001 he went to Monterrey centre for aspirants and postulancy brothers, again assigned to missionary animation.

In June 2003, he was assigned to Uganda. In November he went to the parish of Mbuya, Kampala. Two months later, he was assigned to the mission of Rushere, in the diocese of Mbarara, with Father Paolo Tomaino. From June 2005 to March 2006, he worked in the mission of Kyamuhunga (Bushenyi), in the diocese of Mbarara, returning to Rushere until the end of 2011. He was now 76 years old and beginning to feel weak, with difficulty remembering things. He himself expressed the desire to return to Mexico.

The superior general wrote him a letter in which he assigned him to the province of Mexico. Among other things he wrote: "You have worked for

a good number of years in Uganda and Kenya. For this I thank you with all my heart, on behalf of the general council and the entire institute. I wish you happy and fruitful years of apostolate in your homeland. I commend you to the Virgin of Guadalupe and to Saint Daniel Comboni.”

In January 2012 he was in Guadalajara, at the centre for elderly confreres, called OASIS, where he spent the rest of his life. There he passed away on 5th February 2025, surrounded by the affection and prayers of his confreres. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*).

Father Sebastian Hopfgartner (29.01.1940 – 11.03.2025)

Sebastian was born on 29th January 1940 in Lutago (Luttach), a hamlet of the municipality of Valle Aurina (Ahrntal) in the province of Bolzano. The town lies at the foot of enchanting mountains of 3,000 meters and more. Not far away there are very famous and popular ski resorts. Sebastian is the second of eight children of a very religious and musically gifted Catholic family as he himself was.

After attending elementary school in the town, at the age of 12 he entered the minor seminary ‘Vinzentinum’ of the diocese of Bressanone. In 1960 he obtained his high school diploma and entered the major seminary for theological studies. On 29th June 1964 he was ordained a priest in the cathedral of Bressanone by Bishop Joseph Gargitter.

Sebastian has long wanted to become a missionary. Among his family there are already missionaries: his cousin Joseph, who entered the Mill Hill Missionaries Institute, was involved in evangelisation in Pakistan; an aunt of his was a Dominican missionary in South Africa. In a letter dated February 20, 1988, addressed to the superior general, Father Francesco Pierli, he revealed: “Already at the time of my priestly ordination I was very tempted to enter the institute of the Missionary Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the German branch of the Comboni missionaries. I also spoke about it to the bishop, who asked me to wait at least a year for a deeper discernment and to complete, in the meantime, my theological studies, which I finished at the end of 1965.”

The years spent in the diocese become five. First, he was curate of Velturmo (about 2,000 inhabitants), where he remained for a year, and then he was assigned, as curate, to the parish of San Giacomo near Bolzano (about 6,000 inhabitants).

In 1970, he obtained permission from the bishop to go to Malawi as a *fidei donum* priest in the diocese of Lilongwe, to replace another priest from the diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, who had returned to his homeland. In 1975, his permission to remain in the mission until 1989 was renewed. But he was now convinced that, if he wanted to continue his missionary life, he needed to live in a community. At the end of 1982, after 12 years spent in Malawi, during which he had many opportunities to get to know the Comboni missionaries present there, he returned to his homeland with the clear decision to enter the Comboni Institute. He spoke to the bishop, who told him: "It is up to you to decide whether to return to the diocese or join a missionary institute." Father Sebastian chose the second alternative. The bishop gave him his dimissorial letters and, in 1983, Father Sebastian spent a year as a postulant in various communities of the Comboni province.

In January 1984 he began his novitiate in Bamberg, where on 1st January 1985 he made his first religious profession. He was immediately assigned to the community of Bressanone, in charge of missionary animation and vocational pastoral care. In July 1986 he was in Messendorf, near Graz/Austria, with the same two roles. There he took his perpetual vows on 17th April 1988.

From January to May 1990 he was in Rome, at the general house, for a renewal course. During the course, the superior general, Father Francesco Pierli, gave him the letter of assignment. Among other things he wrote: "Visiting Malawi during the last month of November, many confreres asked me when you would return to the mission. The memory of your commitment, of your apostolate, of the style of contact you had with the people during the years spent there, is very great. Your return – to be able to live closer than in the past – is awaited with great hopes. [...] I thank you for the work you do in your home province. I pray that the good seed of missionary animation, the interest in evangelisation and the human promotion of the peoples that you have tried to spread may grow more and more and bear fruit."

In July he was already in Limbe, in the parish of Mthawira, on the outskirts of Blantyre, the capital. His confreres in community were Father Giuseppe Buffoni and Brother Romano Maran. In June 1991, he was assigned to the parish of Gambula as superior. The Gambula community comprised 4 other Comboni Fathers – Tarcisio Candian, Emilio Franzolin, Martinho Lopes Moura and Lorenzo Turrini –

belonging to the Comboni province of Mozambique who were engaged in pastoral ministry among the many refugees from Mozambique.

In October 1994, Father Sebastian was assigned as superior to the community of Chipata, in Zambia. In January 1997, he returned to Malawi, assigned to the mission of Lirangwe, where he remained until March 2000, when he was able to go to Rome, for a refresher course, and then to Bressanone for a period of rest and medical care.

In November of the same year, he received a letter of assignment from the Superior General, Father Manuel August Ferreira, who assigned him to the German-speaking Province from 1st January 2001. Father Manuel wrote: «I would like to thank you for your willingness to accept this change in your missionary life, despite the obvious difficulties that your health situation entails. [...] I would also like to thank you for the years of missionary service that you have given to the province of Malawi-Zambia, which you are now leaving. [...] In this Jubilee Year, I wish you “a new beginning” in your missionary life with the courage and fidelity of our Founder, Blessed Daniel Comboni».

In January 2001, he went to the scholasticate of Innsbruck for a few months as a formator. In July, he was assigned to the Halle community for about a year, and then to the Neumarkt community, in charge of missionary animation.

From 2004 to 2009 he worked in Limone sul Garda, the birthplace of Daniel Comboni, to welcome and accompany the many German tourists who visited the house. Speaking fluent German and Italian, he was able to welcome them and tell them about the life of Saint Daniel Comboni and the work of his missionaries. Every Sunday, he celebrated mass in the parish in German for the many tourists and vacationers from Germany present in Limone.

In 2009 he returned to Milland where, at the request of the diocese, he took on the pastoral care of the two parishes of Sarnes and Albes in the municipality of Bressanone. Wherever he went, he was always highly appreciated by the people, also for his musical talent.

In 2017, for health reasons he had to give up his office as parish priest. The Covid-19 pandemic put him to the test and greatly compromised his health. In 2021, he accepted with obedience and serenity to be assigned to the Center for elderly and sick confreres in Ellwangen, where he regained some strength. He became a passionate listener to *Radio Maria* and *Radio Horeb*. He would stay in his

room listening to the radio for hours on end so as not to miss any programs.

Father Sebastian died in Ellwangen on 13th March 2025. Many messages of condolence and sincere gratitude arrived from Malawi from a bishop, numerous diocesan priests and confreres.

Today his body rests in the nearby local cemetery near St. Wolfgang in Ellwangen, together with 82 confreres who preceded him in the house of the Father.

Certainly, the Lord Jesus welcomed him lovingly into his arms, whispering in his ear: "Come, Sebastian, blessed of my Father, receive as your inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (cf. Mt 28:34b). (*Father Alois Eder mccj*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHERS: Alfredo, of Father Cerda Contreras Mario (M); Dewa Marcel, of Father Horbé Richard (TCH); Nayir Berkay, of Father Teweldebrhan Nayir Berkay (ER); Atia, of Father Mina Anwar Habib Atia (EG); Victor, of Father Milungo Mangulani Pascal (RDC).

THE MOTHERS: Gina, of Father Bombieri Claudio (I); Ma. de la Luz, of Father Rogelio Bustos Juárez (†).

THE BROTHERS: Franz, of Father Baumann Reinhold (DSP); Gianbattista, of Father Aldo Pedercini (I).

THE SISTERS: Ngsti Haile, of Father Tesfagiorgis Haile; Sr. Virginia Mary, of Father Baltz David Paul (NAP); Mari Carmen, of Father Fraile Gómez Juan Antonio (E).

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS: Sr. Maria Rita Saccol; Sr. Angelica M. Habtemariam. (ER).

MISSIONARI COMBONIANI – VIA LUIGI LILIO 80 – ROMA
