

FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

840

May 2025

31st May

The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary



In the Gospel it is the women who first prophesy; two women whose wombs are filled with heaven and inhabited by children beyond human knowledge.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Ordinations

Ssabayinda Yuda	Mbuya/UG	26.04.2025
Jonasse Raul Seventine	Tete – Matundo/MO	26.04.2025
Dangninou Codjo Constantin	Cotonou/TBG	26.04.2025

Holy Redeemer Guild

May	01 – 15 ET	16 – 31 I	
June	01 – 07 ER	08 – 15 LP	16 – 30 P

Prayer intentions

May

Let us pray to the Lord for the prophets of our day who, scattered throughout the world, render visible his Kingdom of Justice and Peace: may their testimony question our way of living and renew our missionary commitment. *Lord, hear us.*

June

Let us pray that, following the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd of the Pierced Heart, we may be able to fashion relationships of mercy and welcoming in the reality of our daily lives. *Lord, hear us.*

Comboni liturgical calendar

MAY

31	<i>Last Saturday in May</i> – The Blessed Virgin Mary “Our Lady of the Sacred Heart”	Memorial
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JUNE

27	<i>Friday after the second Sunday after Pentecost</i> The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, titular of the Institute	Solemnity <i>Togo-Ghana-Benin</i>
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Meaningful anniversaries

MAY

2	Saint Athanasius, bishop and doctor of the Church	Egypt
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GIUGNO

1	Anniversary of the founding of the Institute	
3	Saint Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs	Uganda
5	Saint Boniface, bishop and martyr	Memorial (DSP, South Tyrol, Austria, Germany)
7	<i>Saturday before Pentecost</i> – The Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles	Memorial
28	Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Memorial

Publications

Filippo Lovison (editor), **Missionary Teachings** – Writings in honour of Fr. Fidel González Fernández, mccj, on the occasion of his 80th birthday. Editorial Mundo Negro, Rome 2025, pp. 675. Commissioned by his confreres, students, colleagues and friends, the volume collects the contributions of thirty-four authors from various university, ecclesiastical, religious and cultural institutions scattered throughout the world. The first section reports those multifaceted Missionary teachings that emerge in different realities of the five continents from the origins of the Church to the present day. The second section collects seven “Memories and testimonies” of Father Fidel by confreres and friends, while the third offers a brief biography and an extensive review of his many publications of a historical nature.

BRAZIL

25th anniversary of the educative project ‘*Mãos dadas*’

The idea was born in the head and heart of Father Armindo da Silva Dinis, a Portuguese Comboni missionary, who, feeling challenged by widespread poverty, high unemployment, too many children without education, massive drug consumption and numerous violations of human rights in the suburbs of Timon, decided to launch the ‘*Mãos Dadas*’ (‘united hands’) project, with the help of the local Christian community and the support of Portuguese and Italian sponsors.

Cherished for some time by Father Armindo, the dream of offering children from the poorest families the opportunity to study and build a better future became a reality on 15th March 2000, the day of the birth of St.

Daniel Comboni – chosen as the patron saint of the project – with the inauguration of the '*Mãos Dadas*' School.

The pedagogical aim of the project is not limited to formal education, but tends to offer a set of initiatives and activities that aim to restore citizenship to children and adolescents in situations of social dangers, developing their talents and imparting to them a professional training for adult life.

Inspired by Comboni's motto – "Save Africa with Africa" – the school has adopted as its slogan "Study and work to promote our own people". With more than 800 students enrolled full-time and from more than 500 low-income families, the school contributes significantly to reversing the region's dismal socioeconomic indicators. On 15th March, the school celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Congratulations to the '*Mãos Dadas*' Educational Project for its 25 years of mission through quality education for underprivileged children. And congratulations to the many people who have worked, 'hand in hand', to make this great dream a reality.

The Community Movement for Mental Health presents an award to Father Bonvini

Father Ottorino Bonvini, an Italian Comboni missionary, was awarded the *Medalha Iracema*, the highest honour of the city of Fortaleza, for his commitment to promoting free and complete community assistance and therapies through the Community Movement of Mental Health. His work, carried out together with several collaborating therapists, has already had a positive impact on thousands of people.

The Community Mental Health Movement was founded by Father Ottorino Bonvini and a group of local leaders in 1996, on the outskirts of Fortaleza. The Movement has grown and today contributes to improving the quality of life, self-esteem and emancipation of the most needy population through the application of integrative and complementary practices (holistic biopsychosocial-spiritual approach).

The recognition of the validity of the project reaffirms the importance of community work. The Community Mental Health Movement is in fact made up of many hands. Some of the collaborators were present at the ceremony, which took place on 11th April 2025 and was attended by local and national authorities. Father Bonvini is now coordinator of the Health and Quality of Life Commission of the Comboni Province of Brazil.

EGYPT-SUDAN

Presentation of diplomas at the Helwan Holy Family School for Boys

In an atmosphere full of pride and joy, the graduation ceremony was celebrated on 12th April for students who finished their courses at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. This was the 43rd edition of this ceremony in the rich and inspiring history of the Holy Family School for Boys in Helwan.

We were honoured by the presence of Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, Provincial Superior, His Grace Michael, Orthodox Bishop of Helwan-Maasara and the surrounding areas, Professor Dr. Abdel Aziz Fahmy, administrative director of the school, a large group of Comboni Sisters and Sisters of the Sacred Heart (Egyptians), and numerous priests of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. This rich representation gave a special touch to the celebration, reaffirming the appreciation and continued support enjoyed by our educational and moral mission.

The death of Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue

With the death of Pope Francis, the voices of many politicians from around the world have been heard to express solidarity with the Catholic Church. In our province, messages of condolence and solidarity have multiplied from our Muslim friends, teachers in our schools and acquaintances. From everyone we hear words of appreciation for the life and message of Pope Francis. His attention to the least and his appeals in defence of the victims of injustice, especially in the great wars that are shaking the world, especially the Middle East, have reached the hearts of many people, belonging to every faith.

For Francis, the option for the poor can truly become the linchpin of interreligious dialogue. "Today we cannot fail to recognise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach, which must integrate justice in debates on the environment, to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*Laudato si'*, 49).

This dream of fraternity concerns all of humanity, but is entrusted in a particular way to believers of different religions, invited to be "the voice of the least fortunate... to stand on the side of the poor and to keep watch as sentinels of fraternity in the night of conflict" (Pope Francis, *Address on the occasion of the signing of the Document on 'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together'*, Abu Dhabi, 4th February 2019).

ITALIA

Pilgrims to the native home of Saint Daniel Comboni

The house where Saint Daniel Comboni was born, in Limone sul Garda, lit up by the sun, the intense green of the olive trees, the dark blue of the lake, the steep overhanging rocks that surround it, and Mount Baldo with its peak covered in snow, have aroused wonder and joy in all the pilgrims for the beauty and spirituality of the place. This is the experience lived by two groups of pilgrims on 5th and 6th April 2025. The first group came from the parish of Fontaniva, in the diocese of Vicenza but in the province of Padua, to remember the Comboni bishop, Msgr. Camillo Ballin, their beloved fellow countryman, on the fifth anniversary of his death (in Rome, on 12th April 2020, at the age of 75). The second group was made up of people from the diocese of Padua, accompanied by Comboni missionary animators, eager to experience a day of spirituality in memory of Father Ezechiele Ramin, on the 40th anniversary of his killing.

Mons. Camillo Ballin was first a missionary in the Arab-Muslim lands (Egypt and Sudan), the dream of his youth, then Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia). He was intellectually very gifted, capable of beautiful and fraternal relationships with everyone, a profound connoisseur of the Arabic language, the culture and history of the Arab-Muslim world. He organised schools of higher education. He was a bishop appreciated for his humanity and ability to welcome. His was a difficult mission, lived with great patience, respecting diversity.

Father Ezechiele Ramin, in Brazil from 1983 to 1985, made the preferential choice of the poor: that is, to live and work mainly for them in the name of Jesus. Arriving in Cacoal (Rondônia), he soon realised the abuses to which the peasants and indigenous people were subjected while being dispossessed of their lands, and began to make common cause with them. On 24th July 1985, returning from a peace-making mission among farmers and landowners, he fell into an ambush and died riddled with gunshots, forgiving his attackers. He was 32 years old.

The 'pilgrims' recognised in these two missionaries the sanctity and beauty of the vocation and mission according to the charism of Saint Daniel Comboni, often called 'the Prophet of Africa', 'the friend of Africa and Africans', the shepherd according to the pierced heart of Christ crucified. (*Father Gaetano Montresor, mccj*).

MÉXICO

Jubilee of Hope Missionary Camp 2025 at Metlatónoc

Five Comboni Lay Missionaries (LMC) – 4 Mexicans and a Costa Rican – participated in the Holy Week missionary camp, accompanied by Father Miguel Navarrete Arceo, mccj, parish priest of San Miguel Arcángel, a parish in the diocese of Tlapa, entrusted to the Comboni Missionaries on 19th October 2001, in the state of Guerrero, located in the southwestern part of Mexico. Beatriz Sánchez writes: «It was an experience of hope for us. The people of the different areas of the parish where we worked welcomed us very well, perhaps because it was the first time they met the LCM. At the beginning, everything seemed complicated to us. Soon, however, things changed and the experience was fruitful and of great learning value for everyone. We shared our faith starting from our experience, even with the difficulty and limitation of not knowing the local language and customs. The Christians opened their hearts to us, paying attention to us and participating actively. They also expressed their gratitude to each of us at different times».

«There were many obstacles encountered, among which the difficulty in communicating as we would have liked and the lack of knowledge of the customs and culture stood out. Some of us even got sick. Fortunately, there was something that united us: faith in Jesus Christ lived and celebrated during the Holy Week of this Jubilee Year 2025, including processions, moments of prayer and Eucharistic celebrations».

«We learned that we must know how to listen, know people without judging, learn from the people who welcome us, respect the values in which they believe, grasp and appreciate the great richness that is in them, be available to accept the “new”, show due respect to local leaders, live the mission according to the Comboni charism, that is, evangelising the poorest and most abandoned, accepting the crosses we encounter without being discouraged, and always remembering that we are here for Christ, whom we love, serve and to whom we want to give Glory». [*Beatriz Sánchez, with Tadeo, Felisa y Mariana (Mexican) and Carol (Costa Rican)*]

SOUTH AFRICA

Provincial Assembly 2025

All the confreres of the province took part in the provincial assembly, which took place in the Maria Trost Pastoral Centre, in Lydenburg, from 21st to 25th April, in a friendly and serene atmosphere.

The work began with the intervention of the South African Stigmatine Father Nduduzo Jali, who addressed the theme of the responsible use of social media, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects, such as dependence on these communication tools and the risk of estrangement from community life.

Each of the eight communities of the province then presented its own report, following a shared scheme with which the signs of life, the challenges and the objectives to be pursued were made explicit.

The assembly officially approved the new Directory of the Province 2025, completing a process of reviewing and updating the previous document dated 2014.

The beginning of the discussion on the election of the new provincial superior was preceded by an analysis prepared by a select committee, which wanted to present various types of leadership and made explicit the most important needs of the province that the new superior and his council are called to address. After an exchange of views and opinions, the brothers voted with an opinion poll their preference for the next provincial superior.

During the Eucharist of thanksgiving on the last evening, the “jubilee” of some brothers was celebrated: Father Aldo Sierra, for 25 years of priestly ordination; Father Rafael Armada, 25 years of perpetual vows; Father Edgardo Alfonso Vizcarra and Father Raul Tabaranza, 25 years of first religious profession. For Father Raul it was also a farewell and sending to the new mission in the Province of Malawi/Zambia to which he was assigned. (*Father Efreem Tresoldi, mccj*)

Renewal of Vows at Pietermaritzburg

On Saturday 26th April, 14 scholastics renewed their vows in Pietermaritzburg, before the Provincial Superior, Father John Baptist Opargiw. They are: Tomety Yawo Emile and Kpekpe Kossi Pascal (Togo), Musiime Joseph Mukasa, Bakalu Frank and Rutaremwa Cleophas (Uganda), Duku Lumago Thomas Eugenio and Oliha Emmanuel Felix (South Sudan), Mwachande Jacob Msanjama and Gerald Paul Hieronimo (Malawi), Phiri Steven (Zambia), Ts’oana Karabo April (Lesotho), Ramos Alberto (Mozambique) and Tasson Rodríguez Luis Omar (Peru).

Father John Baptist presided over the Eucharist, concelebrated by the two formators, Father Joseph Maku and Father Aldo Sierra, the pastor of the host parish of Saint Joan of Arc, Father Endrias Shamena, and two Dominican friars, Father Neil and Father Michael. Also present at the ceremony were about 20 friends and other seminarians.

In his homily, Father John Baptist emphasised the importance of putting into practice what each voter has declared in the renewal formula, formulated as a prayer. The liturgical celebration, animated by joyful African songs, was followed by a fraternal agape in the hall.

May the Lord continue to guide these young confreres in their passion for the mission, as true disciples of Christ, with a special love for the poorest and most abandoned. May Saint Daniel Comboni intercede for all of us. *(Father Aldo Serra, mcccj.)*

IN PACE CHRISTI

Father Padre Victor Manuel Tavares Dias (18.04.1960 – 21.03.2025)

Victor Manuel Tavares Dias was born on 18th April 1960 in Arcozelo das Maias, diocese of Viseu, Portugal, the second of three brothers, sons of Abel Jorge Dias and de Ester Tavares de Jesus. His parents ran a grocery store, which also housed a post office and a public telephone. The Comboni missionaries, who arrived in Portugal in 1947, with the opening of the minor seminary in Viseu, also used the store. They also opened a house in Arcozelo, on the banks of the Vouga River, used for the seminarians' summer holidays. Victor was often with them and was fascinated by them. So much so that, in 1970, he asked to enter the minor seminary in Viseu, where he attended middle school and the two-year high school period, then going to Maia for the three-year high school period, crowned by the classical high school exam, and finally in the postulate of Coimbra for philosophy. In September 1979, Victor began the two-year novitiate in Santarém. At the end of the two-year period, the evaluation of the formators was completely positive: "His identification with the Comboni missionary vocation has grown and today Victor lives it with joy and serenity. His ability to weave personal relationships of friendship with others is good, and this facilitates his insertion into community life". On 6th June 1981 he made his first religious profession.

For his theological studies, Victor was assigned to the scholasticate of Elstree in England. For a few months he studied English, also earning the Certificate in English from the University of Cambridge in June

1982. For the theology courses he attended the Mission Institute of London, where in June 1985 he obtained the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology and a Masters in Humanistic Sciences, awarded by the University of Louvain.

According to the formators and his scholasticate companions, “the qualities of his personality have grown; Victor is communicative, open to dialogue, attentive to people, calm and serene, faithful to his convictions, endowed with a strong sense of creativity and humour.” They recognise in him “a marked tendency to be emotional, very sensitive in relation to people and events,” and therefore recommend him “not to let himself be carried away by emotions.” Victor made his perpetual profession on 8th December 1984. On 13th February 1985, he was ordained deacon in the church of St. Paul the Apostle in Wood Green, a neighbourhood located in the north of London, by Mgr. Patrick Augustine Kalilombe (M. Afr.), Bishop of Lilongwe (Malawi). His priestly ordination took place on 14th July 1985 in the parish church of Arcozelo das Maias, by the Bishop of Viseu, Mgr. José Pedro da Silva. Destined for Portugal, the provincial superior assigned him to the community of Santarém as the person in charge of missionary animation. From the very beginning, Father Victor managed to gain the friendship of the bishop and the clergy. The initiatives he was able to propose and the valid ministerial help he offered to the parish priests led to the birth of a relationship of friendship and mutual appreciation. In the missionary animation activities, he involved the novices and a team of lay men and women, who supported him in his visits to the parishes, bringing a clear evangelical message and a splendid evangelising testimony, both on Sundays and in the missionary triduums and weeks.

At a certain point, Father Victor was appointed superior of the local community. This new responsibility also led him to take an interest in the formation of Comboni candidates, with close contact with the formators, with whom he discussed, reflected, evaluated, examined and questioned, always respecting those who had received the task of forming the novices. This helped him to gain a valuable wealth of experience that would prove decisive later in his missionary life.

In July 1992, Father Victor was assigned to the Philippines. Shortly afterwards he joined the first group of Comboni Missionaries who arrived in Quezon City, Metro Manila, in January 1988, beginning the missionary activity of the Institute in Asia. He was assigned to missionary animation. This stage marked his entire missionary life, in the sense that, from now on, periods spent in the Philippines would alternate with periods spent in Portugal, as a missionary animation officer or engaged

in formation in a novitiate or postulancy. He maintained a lifelong and deep nostalgia for Africa and the ministry of direct evangelisation. This, after all, was his first choice made on the eve of his perpetual vows, in which he asked to be able to work in Sudan or Ethiopia. This longing for Africa, however, did not divide his soul, nor affect his will to do what he could and must do. He threw himself with all his energy and enthusiasm into missionary animation in the Philippines, immediately nurturing feelings of great sympathy and sincere appreciation towards the people – children, young people, adults – and forming numerous bonds of friendship with many people. The experience he had in Santarém was useful to him. He sought and found opportunities to meet priests, parish priests, curates, religious and lay people, and to make friends with them. He visited the parishes, always bringing with him the seminarians of the Saint Daniel Comboni Seminary. He maintained and took care of correspondence with friends and benefactors, old and new. For them he created a newsletter, *Friends of the Mission*, which he distributed – always together with the *World Mission* magazine published in the delegation – as a simple but effective tool for missionary animation. To revive their missionary spirit and commitment, he organised periodical gatherings for them, called *Feasts of Friends of the Mission*.

In 1997, Father Victor asked for a break to take care of his personal formation. He participated in the Comboni Year of Ongoing Formation (ACFP), which was held in Mexico City from October 1996 to June 1997. The experience enriched him because of his appreciation of the Latin American cultural world, and Mexican in particular. Renewed by this experience, Father Victor returned to Manila, where he remained until the end of 2000, again involved in missionary animation.

In January 2001, the major superiors in Rome were looking for possible formators for the formation houses around the world. Sifting through the folders containing documents regarding young Comboni missionaries who had already had missionary experience, they came across that of Father Victor. Inside was the report made by the formators of the Elstree scholasticate and they read: “We warmly recommend him for further studies and future commitments in the sector of basic formation.” The letter of appointment was sent out and Father Victor had to hurry to Rome, assigned to the community of student confreres at the Curia. He immediately enrolled at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Formators in Seminaries and the Congregation for Catholic Education, at the Pontifical Gregorian University. At the end of August 2002, he finished the first series of courses and went to the novitiate in Santarém, where he was appointed superior, in charge of missionary animation. At the end of June 2003, he

returned to Rome to continue his courses at the Interdisciplinary Centre. At the end of June 2004, he had attended four semesters (2 years) as an ordinary student at the Institute of Spirituality and a third year outside the course for the Licentiate, and obtained both the Diploma for Formators in Seminaries (2003) and the Licentiate in Formation and Spirituality (2004), both with the grade '*summa cum laude*'. After three months holidays spent with his family, at the beginning of September he went to the postulancy-novitiate of Quezon City, first as a formator of postulants, then as father master of novices. On 1st June 2005, he was elected vice-superior of the Asian delegation. He was immediately appointed secretary of the delegation for vocation promotion and formation. He remained in the postulancy-novitiate of Quezon City until October 2009 a year he spent in the shadow of the cross: he suffered a serious nervous breakdown that forced him to return to Portugal for medical treatment. In a new assignment letter dated 16th December 2009, the superior general, Father Enrique Sánchez González, assigned him to the province of Portugal. After the moment of crisis, in January 2011 Father Victor was assigned to the community of Santarém as local superior. In August 2012, he was appointed socius father master of the novitiate. In January 2014 he was elected provincial councillor and chosen by the councillors as vice provincial superior. In July he was appointed provincial coordinator of ongoing formation. In short, he returned to being what he had always been and to doing what he knew how to do so well: animating formation and missionary animation, and enlivening the life of the community and the entire province.

But it also appears clear that the passing years marked by exhaustion left their mark. However, he was still eager to return to the Philippines. And in June 2019, he was again in Quezon City as a father master of novices. In March 2022, however, he again fell into a state of depression and was forced to return to Portugal to recover.

Father Victor will never return to his beloved Manila. In fact, a particularly difficult and painful period then commenced which he spent in the Comboni community of Viseu, surrounded by the love of his brothers and cared for by a doctor. He never lost his usual smile or good humour, even if though his face betrayed a sense of suffering for the limitations he experienced that limited his relationships with others and forced him to wonder about the dreams he still carried in his heart.

Sister Death approached in a surprising way. On Saturday, 15th March 2025, Father Victor went to the hospital in Viseu to visit his mother Ester, 93 years old, who was hospitalised due to her failing health. On his way home, he confided to the confrere who accompanied him that he felt

extremely tired and had a bad headache. However, he managed to spend the night peacefully. In the morning, during the recitation of Lauds, he feels a bit unwell but seemed to recover immediately. At lunch, he was the same Victor as always, and the confreres chatted with him as usual. He then retired to his room to rest. He went to the bathroom to wash his hands and brush his teeth and there he suffered a heart attack. In falling, he struck his head on the floor. The fall caused a massive cerebral hematoma. The emergency services were called immediately. After the necessary efforts at resuscitation, Father Victor recovered his breathing and his heart started beating again. Immediately afterward, he entered a deep coma. He was rushed to the hospital, where he was cared for for 72 hours. The tests left no sign of hope: he no longer responded. On the 20th, brain death occurred, and Father Victor was taken to the Central Hospital of Coimbra for organ transplantation. The body was handed over on Saturday the 22nd. Father Victor's brothers, Giorgio and Abele, asked that the funeral be celebrated on Sunday the 23rd. The Eucharist was celebrated in the chapel of the house in Viseu, presided over by Father Fernando Domingues, provincial superior. At 3:30 p.m., the funeral was celebrated in the parish church of Arcozelo das Maias, packed with people, including many friends who had come from various parts, particularly from Santarém, and confreres and diocesan priests. The ceremony was a tribute of faith, tinged with sadness and heartache, given to a priest and Comboni missionary who, with his smile and friendship, brought the joy of the Gospel and Christian life into the lives of so many people.

(Father Manuel Augusto Lopes Ferreira, mccj)

Father Andreas Thorwarth (01.11.1936 –24.03.2025)

Andreas Thorwarth was born on 1st November 1936 in Unterschneidheim, near Ellwangen, into a farming family, and grew up with six brothers and sisters. Three more children from the closest relatives soon joined them after their parents died. This locality gave the Comboni Congregation eight missionaries. Andreas was the last. Even as a boy, Andreas wanted to become a missionary, and his parents directed him to the then small Comboni seminary in Bad Mergentheim. [The Josefinum seminary in Ellwangen did not yet exist – it was built after the war]. In 1954, Andreas moved to the seminary in Ellwangen and in 1957 he obtained his high school diploma. Immediately afterward he entered the novitiate in Bamberg and took his first vows on 1st May 1959. He began his theological studies, again in Bamberg, where he made his perpetual religious profession on 29th June 1962. On 28th July 1963, he was ordained a priest in

the cathedral of Bamberg by Archbishop Josef Schneider. A few weeks later, he left for Peru.

In Peru – Since 1958, the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MFSC) had been assigned a new field of work, namely the diocese of Tarma, in a mountainous area, with altitudes ranging from 2,500 to 4,700 meters above sea level. There, Father Andreas would spend the first ten years of his missionary activity. His good health helped him resist the harsh climate and intense cold. The temperature was usually between plus 12° during the day and minus 12° at night. He enjoyed the experience, also because it was clear to him that the people had been waiting for him for a long time and now sincerely appreciated his presence.

His first pastoral assignment was to the vast parish that included the region of Junín-Ulcumayo (1964-1969) at 3,600 metres above sea level. Thanks to his frequent pastoral visits to the approximately 40 villages and the cooperation of the population, the area soon experienced a religious revival. The renovation of the old and precious parish church and the completion of the rectory of Ulcumayo also contributed to this. The numerous churches present in the vast territory were witnesses to the deep Christian faith and a glorious religious past. In an interview with the magazine *Nigrizia*, he said: «It was a wonderful experience to see that the people felt united again, after so much social individualism, and were willing to work together for their church. Everyone was very disappointed when, in 1969, I was transferred to another mission, in Cerro de Pasco. The Ulcumayans did everything they could to keep me, but in vain».

In Cerro de Pasco, Father Andreas took over the management of the parish of San Miguel, succeeding the then parish priest, Father Lorenz Unfried, who had recently been appointed auxiliary bishop of Arequipa. In the interview, he recalls: «In Cerro de Pasco the environment was very different. Our apostolic community consisted of four priests. The town was already a mining centre of great importance, at 4,350 metres above sea level. There, too, I acclimatised physically and spiritually, as I gradually learned about the problems of the parish: abandoned families, women without husbands but with many children to support, the sick and prisoners, catechism programs in schools and communities».

In 1972, Father Andreas managed to establish a sort of 'refectory for the poor', assisted by the 'Ladies of Bellavista', organised by the wives of engineers, as well as a recovery centre for children. For the training of

mothers and the organisation of the various clubs, Father Andreas could count on the nuns, who came to give him a hand in pastoral work. The training of lay catechists in charge of teaching religion in government schools, and of the leaders of Sunday worship in the peripheral chapels, was more difficult, due to the lack of a deep and selfless faith.

In 1974, Father Andreas had to leave the parish because his brothers elected him regional superior, and he was forced to settle in Lima, the capital. For nine years, he carried out this important service with wisdom. It was certainly the most important and interesting decade of his missionary life, since it was the period of preparation for the reunification of the two congregations, which had divided after the First World War, of the reunification itself (1979) and of the introduction of the new *Rule of Life*.

Towards reunification – Reunification required a long period of preparation, and Father Andreas played his part in it. During the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the two bishops Anton Kühner and Anton Reiterer, both MFSC, met in Rome with the then Superior General of the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (FSCJ), Father Gaetano Briani, and asked him for confreres for their dioceses of Tarma (Peru) and Witbank (South Africa). Father Briani accepted.

In October 1966, the first three FSCJ confreres arrived in Peru. There were the first important contacts on the path to reunification, which were followed by other increasingly concrete ones. But already in May 1963, in a survey among MFSC members on a possible “reunification”, 65% voted in favour of starting talks. Further steps were taken towards rapprochement, collaboration and mutual understanding. An important step was the establishment, on 28th October 1969, in Limone sul Garda, of the “Reunion Study Commission”, with the task of studying and taking the first steps towards a reunion.

During the Special General Chapter of 1975, in Rome and Ellwangen, on 2nd September 1975, the reunification was officially decided, which would then be definitively realised in the joint General Chapter, on 22nd June 1979, in Rome, the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

As Provincial of Peru, Father Thorwarth had the important task of accompanying his brothers on their journey towards reunification. It was not an easy task, since the confreres struggled to agree on the concrete modalities of reunification.

After reunification, the structure of the province had to be adapted to the guidelines of the new *Rule of Life*: the creation of provincial secretariats, the beginning of missionary animation and vocation ministry, the opening of a postulancy and, later, a novitiate and a scholasticate,

and, for Peru, also a clear new missionary orientation of the missionary magazine *Misión sin Fronteras*.

The group of Comboni missionaries in Peru immediately became more and more international. The Province completely changed its appearance in the space of a few years, and the provincial superior, Father Thorwarth, at the end of his second mandate, could certainly look back with great satisfaction and deep gratitude, and also with a certain pride for what had been achieved with the help of the confreres.

Opening in Chile – Once again provincial superior, Father Andreas prepared the opening of the Institute in Chile, with a community in the capital Santiago. At the end of his mandate, on 4th September 1984, he and a Spanish confrere, Brother Diaz Pérez José, were the first to go to Chile. The aim of the new foundation was missionary animation and vocational pastoral care. The national director of the Pontifical Works for the Propagation of the Faith, Msgr. Raul Silva – later Archbishop and Cardinal of Santiago – and the Apostolic Nuncio, Msgr. Angelo Sodano – later Cardinal and Secretary of State in the Vatican – still supported the new opening of the Institute. Msgr. Sodano even accepted the invitation to preside over the inauguration ceremony of the new house. Father Andreas and Brother José worked closely with the Pontifical Societies for the Propagation of the Faith and the Missionary Work for Children: they visited schools and colleges, organised missionary days in parishes and meetings for young people, and distributed our two missionary magazines and the *Work of the Redeemer*. The beginning of the opening in Chile promised well, but the hoped-for successes, especially in terms of local Comboni vocations, were slow in coming.

A particular challenge during Father Andreas's double term as provincial was the presence of Sendero Luminoso, one of the most brutal guerrilla groups ever. The years 1970-1980 were years of real terrorism, which caused the deaths of thousands of people. The declared objective of Sendero Luminoso was that of a more just society and a government of the people, not of a corrupt and rich ruling class. But to achieve this objective, the group has seen no other option than resorting to violence – often reciprocated by more violence from the regular army. Some confreres were therefore in grave danger of being killed. Father Andreas suffered terribly, but he committed himself with all his strength to contribute, with his great patience and deep trust in God, to making possible coexistence in justice and peace.

Returning home – In 1988, Father Andreas Thorwarth was asked to take up a post in his home province. He then returned to Germany. Thanks to the rich experience he had gained during his work in South America, he tirelessly sought to obtain aid and find new benefactors for the mission in the Bamberg area. As elsewhere, there were many groups of associates of the Redeemer's Work in the area around this city, and he visited them and encouraged them to increase their missionary zeal, convinced that they represent an important spiritual and financial basis for the work of the confreres abroad.

His extraordinary organisational talent and his excellent memory for people's faces and names made his work easier. He knew many people and kept in contact with them. He was never still. It is fair to say that, most likely, in his entire life, he had never even considered the possibility of taking a vacation in the sense of total relaxation.

Another focal point during his activity in Germany was the spiritual exercises he led, the retreats, the Cursillos and the pilgrimages. More than 30 times he went to the Holy Land through the Bavarian Pilgrimage Office. Here, as on other pilgrimages, he would meet and get to know many people, always letting them know the concerns and aims of the mission.

Even though physically a long way from Peru, he was far from losing direct contact with that beloved nation. Those who come to visit him – and there were many – could not help but notice that his room was a veritable warehouse of Peruvian handicrafts: tapestries, fabrics, carpets, tablecloths, blankets, sculptures, dolls, nativity scenes... They are not just to be admired: they are to be bought. And he, with the proceeds, continued to help many people and groups in Peru. He also has a good 'cultural' justification: "Through these 'exchanges' I bring together people from different cultures, and this is enriching." To tell the truth, some of his confreres did not fully share this type of activity, but he never lost courage.

Father Andreas has always been a great admirer of the Peruvian saints: Rose of Lima and Martin de Porres. On the day of their liturgical commemoration, their small statue was always on the altar. And he relied on their protection and intercession, especially during the many hours spent behind the wheel. To those who smile in pity he responded with the utmost calm: "You may smile, but I base myself on two facts: driving a car has never been my strong point; and for some years, I have also recognised that it could also involve a certain risk. And yet, I have always returned home safe and sound." He hastens to add: "But the same cannot be said of my cars!"

When the house in Bamberg was closed in 2013, he rented a small apartment in the basement of a community of nuns. From there, together with his long-time collaborator, Ingeborg Fichtner, he animated and visited the benefactors of the “Work of the Redeemer”, until in 2024, at the age of 87, he fell ill and was forced to move to Ellwangen.

Father Andreas was a priest and missionary deeply dedicated to the apostolate and full of zeal. He persevered in working in the Lord’s vineyard while he had the strength. He then accepted and endured his illness with patience.

In his last days, his firm faith and his profound spirituality re-emerged with force. In full consciousness, he asked for and received the sacraments of Reconciliation, the Eucharist and farewell to this world, at the hospice of St. Anna in Ellwangen. And it was there that he died peacefully on the afternoon of 24th March 2025.

With his death, a life totally dedicated to the missionary vocation was extinguished. (*Father Reinhold Baumann, mccj*)

Father Fernando Correia Guimarães (28.9.1942 – 7.4.2025)

Fernando José Correia Guimarães was born on 28th September 1942 in the municipality of São Pedro do Sul, in the ancient parish of Carvalhais, in the district of Viseu (Portugal), to Carlos Alberto de Oliveira Guimarães and Maria Duarte Guimarães. He was baptised on 25th October of the following year. The local Christian community was mostly made up of farmers, active people who are proud of their faith and customs. Fernando’s family was considered “rich in authentic religiosity and economically well-off”. The parish was very lively, made up of committed faithful ready to make their abilities available to everyone. Thanks to the special charisma of the parish priest, many young people have already been directed both to the diocesan seminary and to that of the Comboni missionaries in Viseu. The presence of the young Comboni seminarians in Carvalhais, at the foot of the Serra da Gralheira, had become habitual during the summer. In the nearby town of Faleiro, the Combonians had a residence in an estate on the banks of the Vouga River, where the seminarians spent their holidays. They would take frequent walks in the Serra da Gralheira, sometimes going as far as Carvalhais, where they were welcomed at the parish premises for lunch, followed by the inevitable game of football with the local boys and young people. And there was no shortage of adolescents

who decided to share with them something more than a football match and chose to join them in their missionary vocation. One of these was Fernando. On 12th August 1953, he put pen to paper and wrote a letter to the superior of the Seminary of the Missions with the request to enter “to become an apostle of Jesus.” The quick response was positive. Therefore, in September, the boy entered the minor seminary of Viseu, where he remained for five years. At the end of this first phase of formation, the superiors’ report was good: «The boy enjoys good physical and mental health. His physical development is normal, but he sometimes appears a little nervous. In his relationships with others he is balanced and open. However, he “lacks initiative”, in the sense that he has difficulty being proactive and acting independently. On the other hand, his application to study is good; the results are also good, helped by his reserved character and his methodical way of doing things. He shows a good inclination towards piety and sincere love for the priesthood and missionary life». There is a final note: «In Viseu, in the last year, 1958, Fernando appeared “quite exhausted”... but he may turn out well if his health allows him to continue without consequences for his nervous system».

This is the evaluation that, at the beginning of October 1958, he gave to the novice master of Vila Nova de Famalicão, Father Tarcisio Zoia. At the end of the first year, his performance was judged “slow”. At the end of the second year, however, the master father wrote: «In the last few months, the boy has recovered and now lives with evident commitment and satisfactory results». On 9th September 1960, Fernando took his first vows.

In October he was in the postulancy of Maia for the years of high school and philosophy courses. The educator was Father Raffaele Giulio Signoretti. Three years later, Father Signoretti wrote: «Fernando is a bright, intelligent and very committed student. [...] Sometimes he is stubborn, with a tendency to criticise, even if he always shows a sincere desire to correct himself». In July 1963, he was assigned to the scholasticate of Verona for theology studies, which he attended at the Studio Teologico San Zeno.

During the scholasticate, his progress was judged good: «His commitment to study is discreet; in this Fernando is very committed and attentive». Regarding his relationships with others, he was considered «fairly sociable, balanced, although a little closed». Work and charity «are his virtues to be highlighted». As time went by, however, “the difficulty of doing more, especially in studying, due to a persistent headache” emerged. His character “remains calm and serene”.

At the end of the scholasticate, in the evaluation given in view of perpetual vows, the diaconate and the priesthood, the judgment on Fernando was positive: "He is a little attached to his point of view, which leads him to some verbal criticism; however, he obeys". And again: "His adherence to missionary and religious life is good". His state of health was also considered "good". Thus, on 6th November 1966, he was ordained a deacon in the chapel of the Mother House in Verona by Msgr. Edoardo Mason.

At the end of the scholastic year, he returned to Portugal and was ordained priest on 16th July 1967 in the parish church of Carvalhais, by the bishop of the diocese of Viseu, Msgr. José Pedro da Silva.

His first assignment was to the Comboni community of Viseu as a professor and trainer in the minor seminary. He remained there until 1974. These were years of 'improvisation', between dreams of developing the institute in Portugal and the conditions related to the limited staff available for the various missionary animation and training activities. These were the years of the 'United Iberian Province', with Father Enrico Farè as provincial superior, who, as a good strategist, planned the longed-for development, reorganising the formation in the minor seminaries, relaunching missionary animation and, above all, trying to insert young Portuguese Combonians into the life of the province.

As a trainer, Father Fernando was assiduous in his work: from 1967 to 1968 he is a teacher and prefect of studies, when the seminary follows the teleschool government method; then he becomes its rector. He was always very attentive to the young seminarians: his way of "getting close" to each of them, ready to welcome, correct and encourage, was admired by all.

In a letter of assignment dated 21st March 1974, the superior general, Father Tarcisio Agostoni, assigned him to Mozambique. Among other things, it reads: "Following the expulsion of six Comboni missionaries, decided by the colonial authorities on 20th March, I do not know what the situation will be like in the month of May. I hope, however, that you will be able to leave around that date. If not, we will provide otherwise."

The six Comboni missionaries [Fathers Severino Peano, Giovanni Zani, Vincenzo Capra, Rogério de Sousa, Cornelio Prandina and Ernesto Calderola – *ed.*] were expelled by the colonial authorities following the decision that the entire Comboni group took, together with the Portuguese bishop of Nampula, Msgr. Manuel Vieira Pinto, to draft, sign and make public the document '*Imperative of Conscience*', with the request addressed to the bishops to "be more prophetic" and to ask the government of Lisbon to end the colonial war of Portugal

against the liberation movement, the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo)*.

The situation evolves in a surprising and favourable way for the Combonians: on 25th April 1974, in fact, a military coup took place in Lisbon with the immediate change of regime, with the so-called 'Carnation Revolution' (*Revolução dos cravos*). The expelled missionaries are immediately granted permission to return to Mozambique; new missionaries could go there without problems; those already resident were free to stay. At the beginning of July 1977, Father Fernando flew to Mozambique, where he was immediately assigned to the mission-parish of Alto da Manga, in the diocese of Beira, with the role of assistant parish priest.

In Beira, as in the rest of the country, there was a transition phase. The social situation was tense and uncertain, prone to arousing apprehension. Frelimo, now a political party, was busy leading the country to independence and putting an end to the colonial regime as soon as possible, with the consequent return of the Portuguese to their homeland. In the parish of Alto da Manga, a mixed-race population prevailed and the vision of the immediate political future was not unanimous, because, despite the enthusiasm that independence aroused, many had the clear feeling that there were no political figures ready to manage the difficult transition, which was clearly fraught with dangerous risks.

Even among the missionaries there were differences in both views and pastoral approach. Father Fernando lived this situation not without tension and suffering, which however he did not externalise. He had very clear ideas in his mind. He was not a person with much pastoral initiative, and therefore limited his service mostly to the parish. He always remained proactive and lucid, and did not hide his strong concern for the future of the country.

His stay in Mozambique, always in Alto da Manga, lasted nine years. At the end of June 1983, he returned home, asking to first attend a course in spirituality at the Pontifical Theological Faculty 'Teresianum' in Rome. Returning to Portugal, he was assigned to the missionary animation centre of Aveiro, as superior. In July 1986, he was assigned to the Unified Postulancy of Maia, as formator of the candidate brothers. He remained there until June 1990. The first signs of psychological distress that conditioned his actions and reactions date back to this period (initially, it was thought to be a nervous breakdown).

In July, he was transferred to the novitiate community of Santarém, as the person in charge of missionary animation, even though the

documents do not report any official assignment, but describe his situation as “under treatment”. And it is there that the signs of an illness that will prove incurable are confirmed: a strong obsessive-compulsive-depressive disorder that will mark the rest of his life. Father Fernando alternates moments and days in which he was the same person as always – a friend, available, sensitive, participatory, attentive to the life of the Comboni province and the Church in Portugal – with moments and days in which he was another person, with unusual and unexpected reactions.

Yet, this state of health did not rob him of his serenity, privacy and basic good humour. His presence among the novices and lay friends who frequent the community aroused friendships, interest and communion: it is a familiar presence that, in its own way, contributed to the missionary testimony and the growth of the formative community of the novitiate.

Novices and friends of the community remember him with friendship and affection, even when, in 2016, Father Fernando had to move to the community of Viseu for more adequate medical care. In Santarém he was cared for with affection by friendly doctors from the local hospital and the psychiatric hospital of the Brothers of Saint John of God in Telhal, near Lisbon. As his illness worsened, they were the ones who suggested his transfer to Viseu, to the Reception Centre for the Elderly and Sick of the province.

As time went by, the situation worsened. Father Fernando stopped participating in community prayer and eating meals in the common refectory. He stayed mostly in his room, where he had to be assisted in practically everything. The confreres and the health workers created a relationship of warm closeness around him and, in turn, paid him continuous visits, maintaining communication with him. The nurses followed him with particular affection. The same was true of his family and friends from Carvalhais, who visited him regularly.

In the last weeks of his life, his health situation becomes complicated by serious respiratory problems that required continuous night-time nursing care and also frequent hospitalisations. In the end, he had to be taken to a continuous care unit, but his confreres and family guaranteed him a daily presence. Repeatedly, the doctors predicted his death, but, thanks to his strong and resistant heart, he overcomes all the crises until Sister Death brought him the embrace of the Father and accompanied him to the Kingdom of Heaven. It was 7th April 2025, Monday of the fifth week of Lent, less than two weeks from the celebration of Easter Sunday.

Father Manuel António Machado, superior of the community of Viseu, commented on the 'Easter passage' of Father Fernando Guimarães: «His return to God was deeply felt by his confreres, family members and health workers, many of whom attended the funeral. Thinking back to these last years in which I have accompanied the life of Father Fernando more closely, the following words of Saint Paul have often come to mind: "We have this treasure [the power of God and the strength of the Gospel, *ed.*] in earthen vessels, to show that this extraordinary power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:7). Our beloved brother, Father Manuel João Pereira Correia, who has been living with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis for 15 years, paraphrased this text on the occasion of Easter 2014: "Our treasure – life and faith (and missionary vocation, I would add) – is contained in the clay vessel of our corporeity. This fragility is also a 'gift', because it arouses and manifests our love and our fraternal solidarity". In reality, Father Fernando's fragility has become an opportunity for all of us to take care of him with greater attention and affection, experiencing an ever-renewed solidarity between confreres, family members and healthcare personnel». (*Father Manuel Augusto Lopes Ferreira, mccj*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE BROTHERS: Jose Luis, of Father Franco Lorenzo Conrado (Pe); Ermanno, of Brother Giancarlo Bianchi (I); Giorgio, of Father Fernando Madaschi (I); Edoardo, of Father González Galarza Fernando (C).

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS: Sister Baldassarre Carmelina(I); Sister Tironi Piertarcisia (I); Sister Benetello Gemma (I); Sister Pessima Carla Giuseppina (I); Sister Indrias Ghide Elisabetta M. (ER); Sister M. Lorian Rossato (I); Sister Garascia M. Bianca (I).

THE SECULAR COMBONI MISSIONARY: Ana Gomes de Amorim (Porto/P).