

# FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

842

July-August 2025

## APPOINTMENT BY THE HOLY SEE

### **Mons. Tesfaye, appointed a member of the DIVCSVA**

On 24<sup>th</sup> June 2025, we learned with joy that Pope Leo XIV appointed our confrère Msgr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, auxiliary bishop of the archeparchy of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), member of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (DIVCSVA). We congratulate Msgr. Tesfaye on this appointment, we offer him our most sincere wishes for a fruitful service to the Universal Church, and we assure him of our constant prayers.

## GENERAL COUNCIL

### **GENERAL NOTES OF THE 35<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL CONSULTA – June 2025**

#### **Appointments by the Consulta**

During the 35<sup>th</sup> Consulta, the General Council appointed:

- Fr. Domara Komlan Alagbé (Bernard) as superior of Nairobi scholasticate, as from 1.7.2025.
- Fr. Carbonero Mogollón Pedro Percy as bursar of Nairobi scholasticate as from 1.7.2025.
- Fr. Fene-Fene Santime Augustin as *socius* of the novice master of Lusaka novitiate, as from 1.7.2025.
- Mons. Filippi Giuseppe as Father Master of the Layibi Apdesam continental novitiate for a period of two years as from 1.7.2025.
- Fr. Avoga Benjamin as *socius* of the novice master of the Layibi Apdesam continental novitiate for a period of two years as from 1.7.2025.
- Fr. Natal António Manganhe as formator of the Maia formation community as from 1.7.2025.
- Fr. Hategek'Imana Sylvester as a member of the ongoing formation team as from 1.7.2025.

## **Erection of the Layibi Novitiate – Gulu – Uganda**

In order to meet the need to respond to the growing number of young people who have completed the postulancy and ask to enter the novitiate, the general council, in accordance with the *Code of Canon Law* (§647.1) and the *Rule of Life* 139.2, has erected *ad tempus* the continental novitiate for the APDESAM provinces, starting from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025 until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2027, with its seat in Layibi (Gulu – Uganda). The house, made available by the province of Uganda, will be the one used until now as the continental postulancy of the Brothers. The Layibi novitiate will maintain its dedication to Saint Daniel Comboni. The General Council invokes the protection and assistance of St. Daniel Comboni, Blessed Giuseppe Ambrosoli and all the African saints, so that their example may inspire our future confrères who will be initiated into the consecrated and missionary life in this house, and may support and encourage the two confrères who have accepted the request to take on the task of forming the novices, Msgr. Giuseppe Filippi and Father Avoga Benjamin, and bless their superiors, who have placed them at the disposal of this continental initiative.

## **Meeting of the General Councils of the Comboni Family in Rome**

On 31<sup>st</sup> May 31 and 1<sup>st</sup> June, the annual meeting of the general councils of the Comboni Family was held at the General Curia of the Comboni Missionaries, in an atmosphere of prayer, reflection and dialogue. Representatives of the Comboni missionaries, the Secular Comboni Missionaries and Lay people participated, with a welcome to Father Austine Radol Odhiambo, the new member of the general council of the MCCJ. Brother Alberto Degan led a reflection on the theme of hope (“*Spes non confundit*”). The journey undertaken in the last year and future prospects were discussed, with particular attention to the difficult situation in Sudan. The desire to return to the country emerged, but in new ways and aware of the current context. The next Forum on Integral Ecology, which will be held in Belém, in conjunction with COP30, was also discussed, and the creation of a dossier enhancing the unity and diversity of the Comboni charism was planned. Finally, the theme of interculturality was chosen for the 2026 meeting.

## **First Professions 2025**

With a feeling of gratitude, the General Council informs all the confrères that this year, 41 novices have made their first profession in the Institute. Of these, two are brothers. Sixteen come from the novitiate of Cotonou, sixteen from the novitiate of Lusaka, five from the novitiate of Xochimilco, and four from the novitiate of Nampula. The General Council is grateful

to all the vocation promoters and formators who have accompanied these newly professed, and entrusts all of them to the grace of God for their future journey.

### **Official photos of the General Council**

Many confrères have asked if it would be possible to have a photo of the General Council to display in our houses, Photos were taken during the June consultation and will be made available to the circumscription superiors who will be present in Rome for the intercapitular assembly next September.

### **Journeys of the General Council**

The following members of the General Council will be absent from Rome as indicated below:

- Fr. Luigi Codianni, from 11.7 to 29.7 in Portugal;
- Fr. Elias Sindjalim from 14.7 to 14.8 in TGB;
- Fr. David Costa Domingues from 29.7 to 14.8 in Portugal;
- Bro. Alberto Lamana from 23.6 to 12.7 in Spain;
- Fr. Radol Austine Odhiambo from 21.6 to 1.7 in the DSP.

### **The next Consulta**

The next General Council will be held from 6<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of next October.



### **Holy Redeemer Guild**

July	01 – 15 KE	16 – 31 M
August	01 – 15 MO	16 – 31 MZ
September	01 – 15 NAP	16 – 30 PCA

### **Prayer intentions**

**July** – We pray that, as missionaries, we do not rely solely on human and structural resources, but above all on the humanising power of the Gospel. *Lord hear us.*

**August** – So that missionaries may reach all peoples in every corner of the world to extend a friendly and helping hand with compassionate hearts that love, mourn, rejoice and pray together with them to God, who deeply loves every person. *Lord hear us.*

**September** – In today’s ever-changing society, we ask the Lord for the ability to listen to the needs of all humanity and all of creation, performing gestures of benevolence, respect and care for our “common home”. *Lord hear us.*

## Comboni liturgical calendar

### JULY

28	Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli	Memorial
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### SEPTEMBER

9	St. Peter Claver, priest – <i>Patron of the Institute</i>	Solemnity
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## Meaningful anniversaries

### AUGUST

2	Saint Frumentius, bishop*	Ethiopia
	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	South Africa
23	Saint Rose of Lima, virgin	Peru, Chile
28	Saint Augustine, bishop and doctor of the Church	Kenya

\* The Roman martyrology mentions him on 20 July

### SEPTEMBER

9	Saint Peter Claver, priest, <i>Patron of the Institute</i> , Solemnity	Chad, Columbia
14	Exaltation of the Holy Cross	general

## Publications

**Giulio Albanese**, *Afriche, inferno e paradiso – Viaggio in un continente dai mille contrasti*, Dicastery for Communications, Vatican City, June 2025. pp. 416.

Many are those who believe they know Africa. But the continent they think they know is not the one revealed by Father Albanese, a Comboni missionary journalist, in this engaging and witty book, in which he has collected some articles he published in *L'Osservatore Romano* between 2019 and 2024. The author, an expert in African cultures and a direct witness to the exceptional plurality, multiplicity and complexity of the centuries-old heritage of this continent – hence the use of *Africas*, instead of *Africa* in the title –, takes the reader on a journey that challenges prejudice and awakens a new awareness of one of the most fascinating continents in the world. He does not hide the vulnerabilities of this land - often the consequences of a terrible colonial past that has produced and left many, too many scars -, but he is especially interested in revealing its centuries-old traditions that, still alive, are able to shape young generations, making them capable of facing and overcoming present challenges and changing

the future, thanks also to the contribution of the Christian Churches, today more than ever eager to spread the seed of hope in an impervious field. In love with Africa, Father Albanese avoids “the usual stereotypes that portray it as a boundless land of conquest made of savannahs, deserts and rainforests, whose people, for mysterious ancestral reasons, are said to be refractory to the rational mind and scientific thought”. Instead, he intends to “debunk certain clichés, in the awareness that this is a continent that constitutes a multifaceted container of millenary knowledge, places, passions, cultural and artistic wealth.” With a specific purpose: “to generate empathy, more awareness, more consciousness of our common human belonging and common destiny, paying particular attention to the history and current conditions of the most fragile people - the elderly, the young and the women - because it is in them that the very future of Africa is reflected, in backlight.”

## CURIA

### **Meeting of the General Councils of the Comboni Family in Rome**

Moved by the desire to revive hope in the exceptional circumstance of the Jubilee, the traditional annual meeting of the General Councils of the Comboni Family (CFGC) took place on Saturday 31 May and Sunday 1 June at the General Curia of the Comboni Missionaries. The members of the General Councils of the Comboni Missionaries (MCCJ), the Comboni Missionary Sisters (CMS) and the Comboni Secular Missionaries (SCM) met; the Lay Comboni Missionaries (LCM) were represented by Alberto de la Portilla, the coordinator of the Central Committee. The new member of the General Council of the MCCJ, Father Austine Radol Odhiambo, was welcomed, who was at his first meeting of the GCCF. The participants experienced intense hours of prayer, reflection and dialogue, helped by Brother Alberto Degan, who presented a reflection entitled ‘*Spes non confundit* – The Spirit, source of our Hope’. The meeting began with a protracted sharing both on the path taken by the various realities during the past year (highlighting the main steps taken) and possible developments in the near future.

Then we discussed the situation in Sudan, which concerns the entire Comboni Family, especially the Comboni Missionaries, who in recent years have seen their presence reduced to a small group of confrères and Sisters. While the desire to return to Sudan is clear and strong in everyone, it is equally clear that we cannot limit ourselves to a simple ‘return’, to go back to doing what we always did in the past, because the Sudan of today is no longer the Sudan we knew. The dialogue is destined

to continue on the basis of more precise information, which we hope to obtain shortly.

We then talked about the Comboni Forum on Integral Ecology, which will take place in Belém (Brazil) in November, in conjunction with the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30), providing precise information and indications to facilitate participation in the event.

The dialogue then defined more clearly how to proceed in the *drafting of a common instrument* (a dossier, or insert, to be presented in Comboni magazines and websites, or made known through other dissemination tools of the Comboni Family) that can highlight the fact that the Comboni charism is lived as a common charismatic origin, but with different styles of presence and different methodological emphases, and with a fruitful collaboration in different geographical and cultural contexts.

Finally, the theme of *Interculturality* was identified as one of great relevance and common interest, which will be the underlying theme of the next meeting of the GCCF, which will take place on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026 at the headquarters of the Comboni Sisters in Rome. The meeting concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist of the solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, presided over by Father David Domingues, vicar general of the Mccj. (*Brother Daniele Giusti, mccj*)

CURIA – Student Confrères (CCS)

### **Padre Fene-Fene Santime Augustin receives a degree in Clinical and Community Psychology in Rome**

On 18<sup>th</sup> June 2025, Father Augustin Fene-Fene Santime, originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, completed a five-year specialisation course in Clinical and Community Psychology at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome, defending his master's thesis on the topic of personality psychology, with the French title *L'évaluation de la personnalité des candidats à la vie consacrée. Avantages, limites et perspectives* ("The psychological evaluation of the personality of candidates for consecrated life, advantages, limits and perspectives").

Father Augustin himself explains that "this study arises from the awareness that, in an ecclesial context profoundly marked by contemporary cultural and anthropological changes, the formation of candidates for consecrated life requires integral accompaniment, capable of embracing all dimensions of the human person. In this perspective, psychology – and, in particular, personality assessment – today proves to be a valuable support for vocational discernment, provided that it is inserted in an ethical, dialogical framework that respects personal freedom."

The central question that guided his research was: “*How is psychological assessment currently integrated into formative practice?*”. To answer this question, he conducted an exploratory survey aimed at formators, with the aim of understanding the degree of reception of this tool, its concrete applications and its perceived limits in the context of consecrated life. The survey involved 231 formators: 5 consecrated lay women, 108 religious women, 11 religious men, 33 diocesan priests and 74 religious priests. What did the results of the survey show? Father Augustin answers: “The results reveal a broad adherence to the use of psychological assessment (93.5%), considered useful for deepening the knowledge of candidates, promoting self-awareness and guiding discernment. The main benefits noted were improved interpersonal relationships and greater vocational clarity.” However, Father Augustin is quick to add: “There were also critical elements: cultural resistance on the part of candidates (56.3%), lack of specialised psychologists (43.7%), perceived inadequacy of the tools with respect to the religious context (41.6%) and insufficient skills of the formators in the use of psychological data. Only 39.4% of the formators said they collaborate regularly with a psychologist.” In light of these observations, Father Augustin’s research formulated several recommendations: strengthening the training of formators in reading and interpreting psychological results; promoting regular and structured collaboration with psychologists; adapting diagnostic tools to the peculiarities of consecrated life; encouraging a culture of continuous, integrated and benevolent evaluation. The study also invites us to go beyond a purely technical vision of evaluation, to rediscover its formative and humanising value. He explains: “Although the survey has privileged the point of view of the formators, it opens the way to further research that also involves the candidates and psychologists, so as to build a shared and three-dimensional understanding of formative dynamics. In this way, the psychological evaluation can become an authentic instrument of personal and spiritual maturation, fully consistent with the purposes of consecrated life”. After a period of vacation in his homeland, Father Augustin, already assigned to the province of Malawi-Zambia, will go to Lusaka where he will take up the post of *socius* of the father master in the novitiate.

## EGYPT-SUDAN

### **Asdiqa’ Comboni (“Friends of Comboni”)**

On 14<sup>th</sup> June 2025, more than 50 friends of Comboni met at the “Cordi Jesu” Missionary Animation Centre in Cairo. It was a powerful moment of

meeting, prayer and training, animated by the team of missionary animators and focused on the importance of having friends who share our spirituality and pray for the mission. The vision and contents of the *Plan for the Regeneration of Africa* by St. Daniel Comboni were placed at the centre of the reflection and discussion.

Father Giovanni Antonello opened the meeting with a moment of prayer and then helped the assembly understand that we all need the help of others at a certain moment in our lives.

After welcoming those present, Father Christophe Bamana recalled that our founder, St. Daniel Comboni, had many friends in Europe, but also in mission places. One of his friends was the ruler of Egypt of his time, Ismail Pasha. He donated to the great missionary a piece of land where the first stone of the “Cordi Jesu” was laid, the first church dedicated to the Sacred Heart in Africa and the centre of Comboni’s missionary activities.

Father Mina Albeer then presented the purpose of the meeting: “We would like to share with our friends our spirituality and some mission experiences and pray for the mission.”

Then the presentation of the Comboni *Plan* began. Comboni Sister Amani Boulis emphasised that the main objective of our founder was to reach the people who lived in the centre of Africa, because other congregations were already present on the coasts of the continent. This meeting was a great opportunity to bring friends together to witness the beauty of the Comboni mission today.

### **Inauguration of the new headquarters of the Comboni College of Science and Technology in Port Sudan**

On 28<sup>th</sup> June, the Comboni College of Science and Technology (CCST) inaugurated its new headquarters in Port Sudan. The new facilities will improve the quality of the work that the College is already doing with university students enrolled before the outbreak of the war in Khartoum, but will also open its doors to new students. Luca Renda, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sudan, praised the way in which a private institution like the CCST integrates into national development through collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Higher Education and with the community, in this case through the activities of the Nursing Clinic, the Hospice for palliative care and its volunteers. He also highlighted the characteristics of the building, which is completely sustainable in terms of energy (through the installation of solar panels) and water, thanks to the system for collecting water condensed by air conditioners. The ‘Daniel Comboni’ secondary school



also benefits from the building, since the ground floor includes three classrooms for the female section.

On Sunday the 29<sup>th</sup>, the national high school leaving exams began across the country. This was the second session after the war began, so they are valid as secondary school exams for 2024. The Minister of General Education, Dr. Ahmed Khalifa, visited the Comboni secondary school and the new headquarters of the College, where he was able to appreciate the quality and characteristics of our educational proposal. He stressed the need to incorporate online education in Sudan to increase its level and broaden its horizons.

## ITALY

### **Acse celebration at the Comboni community in Rome**

On Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> June, the annual celebration of the Comboni Association for the Service of Emigrants (ACSE) took place at the Comboni community in Via Luigi Lilio, Rome, with excellent participation from members, volunteers and friends, despite the heat.

The meeting began with a reflection by Father Venanzio Milani, a Comboni missionary and president of ACSE, on the outcome of one of the five referendums held on 8 and 9 June – the one closest to his heart – concerning *Italian citizenship for foreigners*, which proposed halving the period of legal residence in Italy required of non-EU foreigners of legal age to apply for Italian citizenship from 10 to 5 years. None of the five referendums obtained the required quorum (50% +1). Father Venanzio commented: “It was a tremendous disappointment.... But we will not stop in terms of services provided to migrants and initiatives aimed at providing correct information on the phenomenon.”

Three university students who benefit from scholarships promoted by Acse, presented their experience and current situation. This was followed by a reflection on *Human Trafficking* by Sister Mariarosa Venturelli, a Comboni missionary. According to the United Nations, it is estimated that 50 million people are victims of trafficking globally. Those who suffer the consequences most are women, children, migrants and refugees. Sister Mariarosa said: “The ministry of combatting human trafficking is closely linked to the phenomenon of migration. Human trafficking is like a perverse mechanism that captures and crushes people, but many grains of sand can cause its gears to jam up.” The meeting continued with a Eucharistic celebration, presided over by the Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, Father Luigi Codianni, enlivened by Congolese songs. The day ended with a shared meal.

## **Rethinking the development model – Combonian initiative in Padua**

From 2024 to 2025, a training course inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* was developed in Padua. The project, entitled *In the wake of Laudato si'*, saw the organisation of 13 events – conferences, walks, shows and meetings – with the aim of promoting awareness of environmental and social crises and stimulating a change in our lifestyles.

Promoted by a group of volunteers, together with the Comboni missionaries and lay missionaries, and supported by local institutions and associations, the project was also born as part of a degree thesis in Integral Ecology at the Pontifical University–The Antonianum. The starting point was the appeal of the encyclical: there are not two separate crises – environmental and social – but a single complex crisis, which requires a new cultural perspective.

The series of meetings was characterised by an interdisciplinary approach, aimed at involving different perspectives – scientific, ethical, philosophical – to address the ecological crisis in its complexity. The first event, in April 2024, opened the discussion on '*The necessary change*', underlining the need for a pedagogy of care and responsibility.

In the second event, in May 2024, the theme '*Science, ethics and ecological transition*' questioned the apparent neutrality of science and technology, highlighting the risk of a technocratic drift.

At the end of May, the theme of the '*Value of natural capital*' was addressed, with a focus on the environmental costs of our well-being: industrial fishing, deforestation and land exploitation, often at the service of the consumption of a few, produce damage and costs that will fall on future generations.

In October, the *Appeal of the Centre for Studies on Energy Economics and Technology* of the University of Padua relaunched the alarm of scientists on the climate crisis, while the '*Climate Walk*' made the challenges of climate adaptation visible, even in urban areas.

The meeting '*Men and Trees*', in November, reiterated the importance of correct information to address complexity. On 1<sup>st</sup> December, the show '*Climate and crime*' closed 2024 with an effective example of scientific communication.

In 2025, the associations involved promoted events on specific topics: ANACI talked about sustainable construction; the biologists of Veneto presented urgent actions to combat climate change; the SUMAI of Padua discussed pollution from PFAS and drugs, underlining the risks to human health.

The final event on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025, '*The actions necessary for a different well-being*' saw the participation of institutional representatives, univer-

sities and the promoting bodies. During the meeting, two concrete tools were presented: the handbook *lo impatto meno* and the film *coLibriamoci*. The final reflections, entrusted to an economist, a scientist and a philosopher, reiterated the need to profoundly rethink our development model. As organisers – religious, lay Combonian missionaries and volunteers – we have learned a lot from this journey. *Laudato si'* has proven to be a transversal and prophetic text, addressed to all people of good will. We have understood the importance of networking, of building community and of collaboration between knowledge, as demonstrated by the generous participation of professors from the Universities of Padua, Milan Bicocca, Verona, the Mario Negri of Milan and theological institutes. The project has addressed crucial issues – from technocracy to social justice, from spiritual values to ecological urgency – demonstrating that every person can contribute to change. Awareness is needed, and this awareness has been the heart of the entire journey: understanding in order to act, rediscovering the link between our lifestyle and the health of the Earth. (*Father Gaetano Montresor with Lay Combonian Missionaries, Margherita Sedino and Colibanda*)

### **New parish at Pescopagano di Mondragone**

At Pescopagano, a small town in the commune of Mondragone (Caserta), a new pastoral phase has begun with the arrival of the Comboni missionaries in the parish of San Gaetano da Thiene. The official start of the mandate took place on Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> June, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, with a celebration presided over by Msgr. Giacomo Cirulli, bishop of Teano-Calvi, Alife-Caiazzo and Sessa Aurunca.

The bishop, inspired by the testimony of the Apostles Peter and Paul, entrusted the religious with the delicate task of promoting unity, harmony and brotherhood in a complex social context, marked by the strong presence of immigrants and by ethnic, religious and cultural tensions. He underlined the importance of recognising ourselves “all one in Jesus Christ, beyond differences”.

The Comboni missionaries have been present in the Campania region for decades, especially in the diocese of Capua, committed to helping the least fortunate: immigrants, women and children. Their work ranges from material and educational assistance to the promotion of social and environmental justice, human rights and peace.

At the inauguration celebration, several priests of the diocese were present alongside the bishop. The parish will be led by Fathers Daniele Moschetti, Filippo Ivardi and Daniel Gbedenygna

## MOZAMBIQUE

### **Provincial Assembly in Nampula**

The Comboni missionaries present in Mozambique met in assembly from 16<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2025 at the Paul VI Socio-Pastoral Centre in Anchilo, Nampula, in northern Mozambique. All the confrères participated in the provincial assembly, except Father Juan Sánchez Arenas and Father José Júlio Marques for justified reasons. Also present on the first day were Sister Guadalupe Alejandra Mancilla, provincial superior of the Comboni Sisters in Mozambique and Zambia, and two representatives of the collaborators and friends of Nampula, called 'The Godparents of the Mccj', whose current coordinator is Mrs. Zainabo Aníbal.

The assembly began with the celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by Father José Joaquim Luís Pedro, provincial superior, who made an appeal to those present to be generous and to live fraternal love in the communities. Then, at the opening of the assembly, he invited the participants to "refine their gaze, perfect their discernment and have the courage to make new choices."

An invitation in line with both the theme chosen for the assembly – "Pilgrims of hope on the path to requalifying the mission, training and economic sustainability" – and with the objectives of the assembly itself: "Taking up the challenges of the XIX General Chapter and embracing the commitments of the Six-Year Plan 2022-2028."

During the assembly there were moments of personal and community prayer, the presentation of ongoing formation content, the presentation of reports from the provincial council, the communities and the various secretariats, as well as group work and plenary sessions. The topics discussed were mainly related to the mission, training and the economic situation of the circumscription.

The topics that received the most attention were: the excessive number of candidates (overcrowding) in the formation houses, the strengthening of the formation teams (more formators), the need to increase the number of confrères in the individual communities, the urgency of promoting local collaborators and benefactors through the Work of the Redeemer, and the possibility of renting some of our houses.

It was also hoped that the celebration of the 80 years of Comboni presence in Mozambique (1946-2026) would be an excellent opportunity to revitalise our vocation and mission in Mozambique, facing prophetically the current challenges facing the Church and Mozambican society.

The sessions, held in a climate of serenity and fraternity, were very productive. The participants expressed their gratitude for the preparation and

realisation of this important moment of discernment for our circumscription.

The assembly concluded on 22<sup>nd</sup> Saturday with the mass presided over by Father José Joaquim, who, in his homily, invited everyone to collaborate to implement the proposals put forward during the assembly and to trust in Providence. He concluded by saying that all this will be possible, provided that we all cultivate a solid spirituality, an essential condition for the fruitfulness of our Comboni missionary pastoral work (*Father Sergio Mario Vilanculo, mccj*).

## PORTUGAL

### **Cinfães honours Father José da Silva Vieira**

On 10<sup>th</sup> June of each year, the Portuguese celebrate the 'Day of Portugal, Camões and Portuguese Communities'. This day commemorates the death of the national poet Luís de Camões, the official recognition of the Portuguese language as a national language, and the Portuguese Communities abroad. It is an occasion to organise cultural events throughout the country: shows, concerts, exhibitions and parades to honour Portuguese history and identity. It is also a celebration of each municipality, and the mayors take the opportunity to honour some citizens worthy of appreciation.

Father José da Silva Vieira, on vacation from his mission in Ethiopia, was one of the citizens chosen by the mayor of his municipality, Cinfães, located in the district of Viseu, to be honoured during the official ceremony held in the local cultural centre.

On this occasion, Mayor Serafim Rodrigues explained the reason for this tribute to Father José Vieira, emphasising "the exceptional path taken by the missionary, always at the service of others, especially in the missions he went to, spreading the evangelical message in the most varied ways and making his own life, totally spent for others, a clear message of peace and communion." He then added, addressing Father Vieira directly: "But there is also another reason: your deep love for the land of Cinfães. For this, dear Father José, the Municipality is grateful that one of its sons carries around the world not only the message of faith, but also the name of the land of his birth."

At first, Father José Vieira was inclined to refuse the invitation, but eventually accepted it. And he also had to address the many people present. Here follows his brief address.

**Thanks** – «I confess that I am against receiving honours of this type. When it was proposed to me, I thought twice or three times! Then I

accepted for one simple reason: I am here on behalf of the faith of the people of Cinfães, where I was born and raised, learning what life is and learning the Christian faith, which I then tried to share with the Guji ethnic group, from southern Ethiopia, for twelve years, with the South Sudanese for another seven years, and with the Mexicans for just over nine months. In all honesty, I feel like a humble witness of the Gospel of God's grace. I carry out the ministry of evangelical proclamation on your behalf and with the strength of your friendship. Missionary service is a unique privilege and a source of joy and vitality. It is a unique human experience to be able to share life with people I didn't even know existed and who welcomed me as one of them.

José Tolentino de Mendonça, a great beacon of contemporary literature and spirituality, wrote: "When I give my life, it multiplies. When I abandon myself to others, I find myself again. When I say to someone 'my life is yours,' it truly belongs to me. Life will be a fruitful adventure, if we can count on this kind of love." The mission I am carrying out makes me live this reality every day!

I am a native of Cinfães and immensely proud of my roots. Even of my accent! When I lived in Lisbon, many people who heard me speak would say to me: "You, Father, are from the North, right?". I am from Cinfães, and that makes me proud. Even more: I feel responsible for this, because I am your ambassador to all corners of the world!

Many of my generation live in a diaspora for work or family reasons, or to follow a vocation, like myself.

We left Cinfães, but Cinfães did not let us go. The call of the cradle that welcomed us at birth and of this magical land nestled between the river and the mountains, has forged our character. We are resistant and strong like the granite of Montemuro. We are calm – I would dare to say "contemplative poets" – like the quiet waters of the Douro River that flow at our feet.

Cinfães is more than a place lost on a map and difficult to reach: it is an identity that shapes us, an indelible mark that always accompanies us, a sign of belonging, of personal and community identification.

I am deeply grateful for this recognition: grateful above all to God in whom we move, breathe and exist.

I would also like to thank Dr. Serafim Rodrigues, the mayor in office, above all for the friendship that has bound us for many years. And I say thank you to each one of you for your closeness.

May the Lord of Life and Mission bless us all."

## Meeting of the over-seventies in Viseu

From the evening of 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> June, the usual meeting of the confrères of the province who are over seventy years of age took place in Viseu. This initiative of the Secretariat of Ongoing Formation has the objective of helping the confrères of this age group to keep alive the dimension of ongoing formation in their lives.

While last year's meeting focused on the treatments (medical and otherwise) to be taken into account in the process of psychophysical aging (led by Brother Jorge, of the Brothers of Saint John of God), this year's event, focused on the theme 'Relationships between people in advanced age', was led by Sister Paula Carneiro, of the Hospitaller Sisters of Idanha. The day of reflection was accompanied by two Zoom sessions.

Sister Paula approached the theme starting from the encyclical *Dilexit nos*, presenting the love of Christ as a model of relationships in apostolic fraternity, and underlining the importance of the heart as a place of encounter and communion between people, and as a space for building fraternal relationships. The heart has to do with communication with others in a twofold way: first, as the place of our self-awareness, that is, of awareness of ourselves and our identity; second, as the place of awareness of otherness, of others and of our identity, of the Other and his presence.

A moment of shared reflection followed between the participants, which developed around three questions proposed by Sister Paula:

- what gifts are there in me that favour fraternal communication?
- what resistances, present in me but not visible, hinder life in fraternity?
- in this stage of my life, what is the Lord asking of me?

The sharing proved fruitful in terms of rediscovering personal gifts in view of authentic communication in the community and overcoming personal resistance. This return to the heart in fraternal life becomes particularly important in a missionary and apostolic community, such as the Comboni community, even if composed of elderly people. We may lose our physical senses in old age, but we cannot lose the spiritual senses of the heart, to recognise the signs of God and to live in communion with Christ and with others.

The second day of the meeting was dedicated to a pleasant excursion to the heights of the Serra da Estrela, precisely in São Romão, in Seia, where we visited the Natural Museum of Electricity, celebrated the Eucharist and then went up to Lagoa Comprida after enjoying a good lunch. In the late afternoon we returned to Viseu.

The participants expressed their appreciation to the community of Viseu (especially to Father Xavier) and to the commission of ongoing formation,

with the hope that more of us will attend the next meeting and... have our youth restored. (*Father Manuel Augusto L. Ferreira, mccj*)

## UGANDA

### **Moroto: Consecration of the Cathedral of the Merciful Love of Jesus**

On a day that will remain etched in the hearts and minds of our community, the Cathedral of the Merciful Love of Jesus in the Diocese of Moroto in northeastern Uganda was solemnly consecrated on Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2025, marking a significant milestone in our journey of faith. The ceremony, attended by parishioners from across the diocese and neighbouring dioceses, men and women religious, community leaders, and guests of honour—including, in particular, Her Excellency the Hon. Jessica Alupo, Vice President of the Republic of Uganda, and the Ambassador of Italy to Uganda—was a splendid testimony to our commitment to spiritual growth, unity, and service.

The event opened with a joyous procession and the opening of the doors of the cathedral, led by the Apostolic Nuncio to Uganda, Msgr. Luigi Bianco, accompanied by seven bishops: Msgr. Damiano Guzzetti (diocese of Moroto), Msgr. Emmanuel Obbo (Archdiocese of Tororo), Msgr. Dominic Eibu (Diocese of Kotido), Msgr. Eciru Joseph Oliach (Diocese of Soroti), Msgr. Sabino Ochan Odoki (Diocese of Arua), Msgr. Giuseppe Filippi (Bishop Emeritus of Kotido), Msgr. John Baptist Odama (Archbishop Emeritus of Gulu), along with numerous local priests and lay faithful. The atmosphere was filled with a palpable sense of reverence and joy as thousands of people gathered to witness this sacred occasion. The church, adorned with flowers and decorated with bright banners, was transformed into a vivid tapestry of faith, hope and community. During the ceremony, the nuncio gave a moving homily on the importance of this cathedral church as a sanctuary of worship, fraternity and mission. He emphasised that this new cathedral, which replaces the Regina Mundi Cathedral, is much more than a physical structure: it is a place and a sign of God's presence among his people, a place where friendships are born, lives are transformed and the love of God is shared. He also said that the cathedral is the bishop's church, the mother of all the churches in the diocese, and in it the Church of Christ – one, holy, catholic and apostolic – is present and alive.

The assembly listened attentively, reflecting on the many blessings that our Church has brought into their lives.

After the homily, the rite of consecration took place, during which sacred blessings were imparted to the church and the altar was dedicated as a



focal point of worship through the anointing with chrism oil; the walls of the church were also anointed. The rite included the sprinkling of holy water to symbolise new life and purification, the lighting of candles and the blessing of the tabernacle.

The musical accompaniment throughout the Eucharistic celebration, provided by our talented choir and musicians, filled the church with joyful hymns and sacred melodies, adding to the spiritual atmosphere of the day. The congregation participated in harmony, creating an inspired chorus of voices that reflected the joy of the occasion. Many expressed gratitude for the tireless efforts of all who contributed to the realisation of the church, from the financiers to the workers and designers and to the volunteers who dedicated countless hours, months and years to make this dream a reality. (*Damiano Guzzetti – Bishop of Moroto*)

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Father Pierantonio Ferrari (1.12. 1946 – 27.4.2025)**

Pierantonio was born in Sluderno (Bolzano) on 1st December 1946, to Mario Ferrari and Giuseppina Sartori, originally from Sant'Ambrogio Valpolicella (Verona). Carla was born before him, in 1942. Shortly after, the family moved to Cologna Veneta (Verona), in the diocese of Vicenza.

In October 1957, Pierantonio entered the diocesan seminary of Vicenza to begin middle school, but in 1959 he spontaneously left the seminary, to return in 1961, after obtaining his middle school diploma. He was admitted to the two-year high school. In 1966 he took the classical high school exam and passed it brilliantly. He told the rector of the seminary that he intended to enter the Comboni institute. In response, he received a smile: "I am not at all surprised. I would have been surprised if you had proposed a different solution from this one. Go in peace."

The next day, the rector gave him the accompanying letter. It reads: "The boy had considerable difficulties in his studies, but he succeeded thanks to his always praiseworthy, sometimes even excessive, commitment. His behaviour was satisfactory, even if, in terms of discipline, he always seemed rather careless. He is a little stubborn in some of his ideas and in not taking into account remarks and recommendations. [...] He has cultivated the life of piety sufficiently, but he still has much to do [...] He has a fundamentally good, serene, generous and enterprising soul. In my opinion, he can succeed, as long as he makes a serious effort."

On 14<sup>th</sup> September 1966, Pierantonio began the two-year novitiate in Florence. During the second year, he attended philosophy courses at the episcopal seminary of Fiesole. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1968, he pronounced

his first religious vows and was assigned to the Apostolic School of Pesaro as prefect of young seminarians while he attended theology courses at the city's major diocesan seminary. After only one year, he was transferred to the scholasticate of Verona, at the Mother House, where he continued his theological studies and, at the same time, attended a nursing school, obtaining the certificate of "qualification for the exercise of the auxiliary health profession" in June 1970.

In July 1970, he went to the General Curia in Rome to begin the course for a licentiate in theology at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas – The Angelicum. On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1971, he made his perpetual profession and on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1972, he was ordained a priest in the parish church of Sant'Andrea in Cologna Veneta, by the laying on of hands of the bishop of Vicenza, Monsignor Arnaldo Onisto. On 17<sup>th</sup> June, he defended with honours his thesis for a licentiate in theology.

In the autumn of 1972, he arrived in Zahle, Lebanon, to attend an Arabic course. Here he also worked on the arrangement of the house he had recently purchased, demonstrating his industrious and determined nature. On 30<sup>th</sup> March 1974, in the presence of the superior general Father Tarcisio Agostoni, he had the joy of inaugurating the new headquarters. In June 1975 he returned to Cologna Veneta, where, on Sundays, he was invited to speak in the nearby parishes, managing to involve numerous faithful and collect substantial donations. In October he was sent to Egypt, assigned to the community of Zamalek as chaplain of the nearby church. He remained there until Christmas 1976.

At the end of the year, he was assigned to the region of Khartoum, in Sudan. In January 1977, he went to El Obeid, where he was entrusted with the role of factotum by the apostolic administrator, Father Paulino Lukudu Loro (who would be ordained bishop in May 1979, and installed as archbishop of Juba, South Sudan, in July 1983, ed.), a position he accepted with humility and commitment. In July of the same year he was moved to Dilling, about 140 kilometres south, as parish priest of the mission. Here he found the ideal environment to give the best of himself, visiting villages, organising meetings with catechumens and Christian communities, supporting the poor, pastorally assisting prisoners and soldiers, and leading retreats for teachers. In 1981 he began an ambitious project to expand the Dilling mission, with the construction of new classrooms for adult literacy, offices, rooms for catechists, housing for Sisters and the renovation of the church and existing structures.

In 1987 he was transferred to Nyala, in Darfur. In 1989 he was appointed superior of the community and parish priest, a role he held until 1993,

courageously facing the difficulties of a region torn apart by internal conflicts that soon degenerated into massacres of non-Arab human groups. Some misunderstandings within the Comboni community of Nyala led him, against his will, to leave the mission.

After a short period of rest and medical treatment in Italy, he returned to Khartoum at the beginning of 1994, where he took over the Passport and Permit Office for missionaries and volunteers of the diocese. In this role he distinguished himself for his diplomatic skills and his ability to mediate with the Sudanese authorities, obtaining countless residence and entry permits that had been blocked for months due to political tensions and the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.

His superiors in Rome insisted that he return to Italy for a refresher course. But a letter from the vicar general of the archdiocese of Khartoum, Father Roland Laneuville, of the Foreign Missions of Quebec, reached the desk of Father General with an 18-page report from the Passport Office with all the names of missionaries, religious, doctors, lay volunteers who needed an exit permit, a visa, a re-entry permit, and various renewals in the period from 1<sup>st</sup> March to 20<sup>th</sup> October 1994. The number of renewals obtained is impressive: over 300. The first case resolved was that of Father Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot (who became a cardinal, and passed away in Rome on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2024).

The letter from the vicar general described in detail both the difficult situation of the Sudanese church and underlined Father Pierantonio's surprising ability to navigate the labyrinth of Sudanese security: "There is no doubt that he has done a fantastic job, not only managing to renew permits that had been blocked for months, but also obtaining new ones for new personnel. He seems to have a particular *savoir-faire* that allows him to establish real contacts with those responsible for immigration. [...] In short, we absolutely need him in this particularly delicate situation. Therefore, on behalf of the archbishop, I officially request Father Pierantonio Ferrari for this service in our archdiocese." In June 1995, he was the victim of an attempted murder by the extremist Muslim Brotherhood: he suffered a serious car accident in Khartoum that left him with serious injuries, including multiple fractures to one leg. Returning to Italy for treatment, he underwent numerous surgeries and a long rehabilitation. In January 1998, reluctantly obeying the repeated appeals of his major superiors for a refresher course, he agreed to attend the course offered at the General Curia in Rome, which concluded with a visit to the Holy Land and Sinai. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, he alternated his work in Italy – at the Mother House in Verona and at the provincial headquarters in Bologna – with frequent trips to Sudan and other parts of Africa, always with the aim

of supporting missions, humanitarian projects and local communities. In 2005, he went to Darfur, in the midst of one of the most serious contemporary humanitarian crises, denouncing the ongoing genocide and bringing aid to refugees. In the following years, he continued to travel regularly to Africa, visiting missions in Sudan, DR Congo and Kenya, always committed to financing and supporting projects of assistance, education and health.

In 2022 he celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of priesthood, receiving the greetings of the superior general and recognition for his dedication to the mission and service of the Sudanese and Italian Church.

In recent years, his health weakened: he had to deal with respiratory problems and frequent medical checks, but he never let himself be discouraged and kept his missionary spirit alive. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025, while he was staying with his sister in Cologna Veneta, he suffered a serious cerebral haemorrhage that led to a coma. He passed away on the night of April 26 and the doctors proceeded to remove some of his organs, according to his clearly expressed wishes.

The funeral was held on May 2 in the cathedral of Cologna Veneta.

At the end of the Eucharist, Paola Vismara, a graduate of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (Pisai) in Rome, a volunteer missionary in Chad and Sudan (Darfur) for 12 years, then director of the Missionary Centre of the diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, always linked to Father Pierantonio, addressed the congregation. Her words went straight to the hearts of those present: «Dear Pierantonio, you were never able to bear the unjust situations of poverty, hunger, thirst, disease, violence and devastation that grip the world, especially in the many countries of your beloved Africa that you were able to visit personally, while visiting your confrères. I met you in the mission of Nyala in 1989, when you returned from a visit to Italy, after the death of your dear mother Pina. In Nyala we shared 5 years of a 'tough' mission, of fighting to defend the rights of the weakest from the Islamic fundamentalists who had recently taken power together with Omar El-Bashir and his military. While you had many concerns, I was shedding secret tears at night».

Paola continues: «From 2000 onwards, we worked together in Italy. You, in charge of missionary animation in the Verona area, went as far as Ventimiglia in Liguria. I often joined you to give you a hand. We travelled thousands of kilometres, animating the communities and meeting so many people, who then remained in contact with you and of whom you became an advisor, confidant, confessor... [...] A few days ago, during the Easter Vigil, these ancient words resounded in the liturgy: "*Where, O death, is your victory?*". Now we repeat them while looking at your coffin,

certain that death does not conquer infinite Love. No, death, you have lost, because the Lord has won the duel with you, rising again». In the afternoon, the body was taken to the cemetery of Verona, where, after a brief ceremony, it was placed next to that of many of his confreres. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

### **Father Cosmo Vittorio Spadavecchia (28.5.1941 – 10.5.2025)**

- Cosmo Vittorio was born in Molfetta, in the province of Bari, on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1941, to Michele Spadavecchia and Susanna Tatulli; he had a brother named Nicola. He was baptised with the name of “Cosmo Vittorio” (given the era, the name guaranteed modest state aid – Vittorio was the name of the king of Italy).
- He entered the novitiate in Gozzano in November 1960. On 9<sup>th</sup> November 1962 he took his first religious vows.
- He moved to the scholasticate of Venegono, where on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1965 he made his perpetual religious profession and on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1966 he was ordained a priest.
- From 1966 to 1968 he was in Zahle, Lebanon, to study Arabic. After completing the course, he was sent to El Obeid for pastoral activity.
- In 1982 he was called to Rome, to the General Curia to begin a course for a license in Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Gregorian University. In June 1984, he defended his thesis, obtaining the qualification “magna cum laude”.
- From 1984 to 1985 he was in El Obeid, at the bishop’s seat, in charge of pastoral ministry. In June 1986 he was assigned to Egypt, appointed to the parish of Sakakini; his ministry was that of teaching. In 1994 he was appointed superior of the community, until July 2001. In 1999 he started the first scout group in Sakakini.
- In August 2001 he began a sabbatical year, first in the Philippines, then in Kenya.
- In March 2003 he returned to Italy to await his assignment. In September he was assigned to the community of Messina, as local superior, in charge of missionary animation.
- In July 2006 he returned to Cairo as a teacher at Dar Comboni. From July 2007 to April 2009, he was a teacher at Sakakini. From 2008 to 2010 he was superior of the Egyptian delegation. On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2010 he had a car accident, which caused him to break an ankle. After recovering, he resumed his pastoral activity and teaching in the seminary, until December 2017.
- In January 2018, he was assigned to the ‘Brother Alfredo Fiorini’ Centre in Castel d’Azzano, where he ended his life.

Father Cosmo was, above all else, a missionary who deeply loved Sudan. We who knew him in Egypt will never forget the fact that, when he spoke of the years spent in Sudan, his face always lit up with a very special light. Even decades later, he remembered with a smile the time in El Obeid when he had become familiar with the street kids, to the point of hanging out with them and learning some tricks with which – due to lack of food – they managed to steal an apple or a mango at the market. He remembered as “the best days I spent in Sudan” a three-week trip with some nomads in the desert on the border between Kassala and Eritrea. And he explained: “The starry sky of the desert has remained in my heart as a dear memory.” Using the words of Pope Francis, I could say that Father Cosmo was “a shepherd with the smell of sheep.”

Father Cosmo was a man in love with the Word of God. His sabbatical year in the Philippines and the workshops of the Catechetical Centre of Lumko attended in Kenya left a deep mark on his pastoral work and spirituality. In him the words “*your word is a lamp for my feet*” (Ps 119:105) were a lived reality.

In the many years of teaching at the seminary of Maadi and at the Institute of Religious Sciences of Sakakini, many of his students were touched by his passion for the Word of God: a passion that was born from a living relationship with that Word, much deeper than the simple learning of biblical notions.

Father Cosimo believed deeply in dialogue between religions. This passion led him to experience moments of tension with the local ordinary of El Obeid in the early years of the mission, in the 1980s.

He was also a man of dialogue between the Churches and between the many Christian rites present in Egypt. His excellent knowledge of Arabic allowed him to relate easily to people of all backgrounds and faiths. He is remembered as one of the protagonists of the opening and affirmation of Dar Comboni.

He was a valid missionary animator. In Upper Egypt, Father Cosmo preached on various occasions. His words addressed to the young people in Girga on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the priesthood of the late Father Thomas Riad are unforgettable.

Finally, Father Cosmo was a man who knew how to listen and welcome, always attentive to taking care of guests and friends.

He will be remembered for his simplicity – a simplicity that, at times, created some difficulties for him with some Sudanese bishops who insisted on the importance of priests dressing formally.

The confrères who knew him as superior of the delegation were struck by the humility with which he related to everyone: his approach was truly

fraternal. When some stranger asked him: “Are you Father Cosmo?”, he replied with a smile: “I would prefer to say that I am more of a ‘son’ than a ‘father’.”

Father Cosmo died on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2025, in Castel d’Azzano, at the ‘Brother Alfredo Fiorini’ Centre, after suffering from Alzheimer’s disease for several years. For some weeks previously, a respiratory infection had made him increasingly weak.

The day after his death, a funeral mass was celebrated in his suffrage in Sakakini, where he had lived for most of his missionary life. Presiding over the Eucharist was Msgr. Claudio Lurati, Apostolic Vicar of Alexandria, Egypt. In his homily, among other things, the bishop emphasised how Father Cosmo was the first to open the doors of a Catholic parish in Egypt to the Sudanese, when their “exodus” began in the 1980s due to the second civil war.

In the hearts of the confrères and parishioners present was the clear and living memory of a long list of ‘firsts’ of which the deceased could boast:

- the African Christian Student Association (ACSA);
- the “mahabba” group, for visiting the sick;
- the Bakhita group;
- the “Christian Training Centre” (CTC, which people called “Cosimo Training Centre”), to teach tailoring;
- the first parish council;
- the first computer lab in the parish;
- the primary school of San Carlo Lwanga and the secondary school dedicated to Father Filippo Sina;
- the opening of the Santa Bakhita Centre in Arba w Nus, which this year celebrates its 25th anniversary and has more parishioners than the main church in Sakakini;
- he sponsored many Sudanese students who studied abroad;
- he encouraged vocations of Sudanese religious, including among the Franciscans.

Father Cosmo left us on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2025, the eve of Good Shepherd Sunday. There was no more significant moment to return to the Father’s house for someone like him who gave his life for the flock of Christ... always with a smile on his lips. (*Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, mccj*)

## LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

**THE MOTHER:** Elisabeth, of Brother Bernhard Hengl (DSP).

**THE BROTHERS:** Julio, of Father Rubio Aguerri José (E); Hubert, of Father Josef Gerner (DSP).

**THE SISTERS:** Beatriz, of Father Huamán Inga Máximo (PE); Rocío (“La Nena”), of Father Aguiñaga Pantoja Guillermo (MEX).

**THE COMBONI SISTERS:** Sister Giancostanza Ramus (I); Sister Milena Agata Zanet 8I); Sister Bianchi Laura (I).