

# FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS  
848 February 2026

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## GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

### GENERAL NOTES OF THE 41<sup>st</sup> GENERAL CONSULTA – 31.1.2026

#### **Lay Comboni Missionaries**

The General Council wishes to clarify for the entire Institute that the Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM) are now an autonomous association, with its own statutes, canonically recognised in one country and likely to be so elsewhere in the future. For this reason, when discussing the experiences of lay people in the Institute's various communities or circumscriptions, the term 'CLM' must be used with caution. Before calling a group 'CLM', it is necessary to verify with the national or international CLM Coordination Committee that this is correct. This verification serves to avoid using the name 'CLM' to groups of lay people who are friends of the Comboni Missionaries and are not part of the official CLM Coordination Committee.

#### **Process of reconfiguration and merger of circumscriptions**

After a lengthy process of reflection at multiple levels within the Institute, in compliance with the mandate received from the 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter and reiterated by the 2025 Intercapitular Assembly, the General Council now launches the process of reconfiguring and merging the Institute with a letter addressed to all confreres, presenting the historical path of this urgent need.

The letter traces the conceptual evolution of the process since the 1985 General Chapter, sets out the rationale for the process, and indicates the path to follow, including the organisational scenarios that seem possible at this time. It also outlines the milestones of the process leading up to the 2028 General Chapter, at which the identified options, with their operational implications for implementing the new circumscription structures, will be presented to the Chapter for its discernment and decision. The General Council invites all confreres to carefully welcome the letter and asks everyone for generous and constructive collaboration in taking up, with confidence and hope, the challenge of this reconfiguration, dictated by a passion for the mission.

## Appointment of Vice-Provincials

During the (extraordinary) Consulta in January, the General Council reviewed the election results for the circumscription vice-superiors and confirmed their appointments for each district. The full list of names will be published in the March 2026 issue of *Familia Comboniana*.

## Programme of journeys of the members of the General Council

### BROTHER ALBERTO LAMANA CONSOLA

- 7-13 February – Nairobi – Kenya Provincial Assembly
- 16-21 February – Nairobi – APDESAM Assembly

### FATHER LUIGI CODIANNI AND FATHER ELIAS SINDJALIM

- 6-16 February – Central African Republic

## Upcoming Consultas

The next General Consultas will be held as follows

- from 9 to 27 March 2026
- from 8 to 25 June 2026.

All circumscription superiors are reminded that the minutes of their respective council meetings, which must be considered by the Consulta, must be received no later than the day before the consultation begins. Matters submitted outside of this communication tool during the consultation—unless they involve critical emergencies—will not be considered.

## Perpetual professions

Sc. Gum Santino Mawan Guor	Juba/SS	11.01.2026
Sc. Wanyama Musungu Mark	Marsabit/KE	15.01.2026
Sc. Sc. Mwaba Mathews	Lima/PE	30.01.2026

## Ordinations

Eklo Honyo Kossi V. Celestin	Kohé/T	17.01.2026
Zida Koffi Magloire	Kohé/T	17.01.2026
Adaklumegah Mamertus	New Achimota/G	24.01.2026

## Holy Redeemer Guild

February      01 – 15 C                      16 – 28 EGSD  
March            01 – 07 CO                      08 – 15 E                      16 – 31 DSP

## Prayer intentions

### February

That all institutes of consecrated life may grow in communion and collaboration, recognising the strength that comes from a common vocation and diversity of charisms. *Lord, hear us.*

### March

That, as the Comboni Family, we may seek out those far from the faith and be instruments of encounter with the Lord Jesus and the Gospel of life, in every part of the world. *Lord, hear us.*

## Comboni liturgical calendar

### FEBRUARY

8	Saint Josephine Bakhita, virgin	Memoria
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### Significant anniversaries

### FEBRUARY

4	Sint John Brito, martyr	Portugal
6	The Martyrs of Japan	Asia
23	Kidane Mehret, Co-Redemptrix	Eritrea

### MARCH

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

## Publications

**Giampaolo Romanato**, *L’Africa di Daniele Comboni (1831-1881) – Missione, esplorazione, avventura*, Edizioni Studium, Roma, 2026, pp. 391.

First published in 1998, with the title *Daniele Comboni. L’Africa degli esploratori e dei missionari*, Rusconi, and again in 2003 [*L’Africa nera fra Cristianesimo e Islam. L’esperienza di Daniele Comboni (1831-1881)*], with several additions, is again presented today, with the necessary updates, given that Comboni was canonised in 2003.

The author notes: “For decades, ecclesiastical censors have examined his work, the testimonies about him, and his writings, which include numerous opinions on the Roman Curia and harsh judgments on eminent prelates of the time, without finding anything that would prevent his canonisation. This

means that his life, far removed from all the canons of ecclesiastical normality and routine—the life that had impressed and enthralled his biographer, but also many readers of the book—is today considered exemplary by the Church, worthy of universal honour.”

But the author is also re-proposing the book for another reason: “As will be seen later, the mission in which Comboni served, cantered in Khartoum on the banks of the Nile, played an active role in the discovery of the river’s source—the greatest geographical feat of the nineteenth century—and in all the complex, dramatic historical events that led to the birth of modern Sudan. Today, this country is the scene of a devastating civil war that has caused millions of victims, including deaths, refugees, fugitives, and missing persons, not without the infamous practice of child soldiers, trained to kill. [...] But today’s catastrophe comes from far away, originating in the nineteenth-century events summarised in the following pages, when the penetration, first Egyptian and then European, of which the Catholic mission was part, began to destabilise the traditional balance of power throughout the Nile region.”

Comboni and his missionaries “were witnesses, chroniclers, unwitting protagonists, and then designated victims of a historical tragedy of enormous proportions,” namely, the revolution led by Muhammad Ahmad, known as the *Madhi*, (‘the envoy of God’). The Comboni missionaries were taken prisoner by the Madhi, freed only in 1898 by British military intervention, which led to the birth of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, which constituted a fundamental stage of British colonialism in Africa.

The author believes that “the Madhi revolt was the product of a disintegration of local society that had begun much earlier, of which the reports of Comboni and his missionaries [...] constitute the only striking testimony. [...] A native leader wished ‘everything bad’ on the foreigners who were ‘the ruin of his country.’ The current Sudanese drama, which in 2011 led to the division of the territory into two distinct states, Sudan and South Sudan, is therefore the distant consequence of an upheaval in the tribal world of the Nile that began then, under the eyes of Daniel Comboni and his missionaries.” Hence Professor Romanato’s conclusion: “I hope it is not useless, therefore, to republish this book.”

## BRAZIL

### **Father Alfonso Cigarini – 100 years of life and mission**

On 7<sup>th</sup> January 2026, Father Alfonso Cigarini, a Comboni missionary, celebrated one hundred years of life and 70 years of dedication to the mission of the Kingdom. Born on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1926, in Bagno, diocese of Reggio Emilia, in north-central Italy, he entered the Urban Episcopal

Seminary of Reggio Emilia at a young age, where he remained until the end of his third year of high school, always cultivating in his heart the desire to become a missionary.

In November 1952, he entered the Comboni novitiate in Florence, during which he attended his first theology course at the Fiesole Seminary. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1954, he took his first temporary vows and was assigned to the scholasticate of Venegono Superiore to complete his theology studies. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1956, he made his perpetual profession and was ordained a priest on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1957, in Milan Cathedral by Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI.

After ordination, Father Alfonso carried out his missionary ministry on three continents: Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

From 1957 to 1962, he worked in Mozambique. From 1963 to 1976, he was in Portugal. From 1976 to 1978, he was in Italy, and from 1978 to 1984, he was in Brazil. After two years in his homeland, he returned to Brazil in 1985, where he remained until 2000, when he returned to Italy for a year. In 2001, he was assigned to Brazil again, where he still resides. In Brazil, Father Alfonso worked in Uruçuí, in the State of Piauí, Diocese of Floriano; in Sucupira and Tasso Fragoso, in the State of Maranhão, Diocese of Balsas; in Santa Rita, in the State of Paraíba, Archdiocese of Paraíba; and Timon, in the state of Maranhão, diocese of Caxias). Today he lives in the Comboni House, which welcomes elderly and sick missionaries, in São José do Rio Preto, in the diocese of the same name, in southeastern Brazil.

Father Alfonso—or ‘*Funsein*’, as he is called in his homeland—is a testimony of life and mission. He has reached 100 years of age with great energy and missionary enthusiasm, despite his fragile health. For him, faith remains the primary driver of his longevity.

“What motivates me is the presence of Jesus, who invites us to hope for a new heaven and a new earth. What I leave to people is the invitation to lead a peaceful life, seeking to be good examples, valuing others, and maintaining hope for a better future,” Father Alfonso emphasised on his centenary.

Let us praise God for the gift of his life and his missionary vocation. (*Father Raimundo Nonato Rocha dos Santos, provincial*)

## ESPAÑA

### **38<sup>th</sup> Africa Meeting 2026 - Mundo Negro Award for Fraternity 2025**

On Saturday, 31<sup>st</sup> January, the 38<sup>th</sup> Africa Meeting was held in Madrid on the theme ‘*To Migrate or Stay: Africa’s Brain Drain*’. During the

event, the 'Mundo Negro Fraternity Award 2025' was presented to Dr. Cédric Ouanékponé, a nephrologist from the Central African Republic, for his commitment to ensuring access to proper healthcare in his country.

In the context of the talent drain from the African continent, the award presented to Dr. Ouanékponé was particularly significant. He returned to his homeland immediately after completing his specialisation in France, declining a lucrative contract to assume management of the National Haemodialysis Centre in Bangui, which had been inactive for years due to a shortage of specialists. As a result of his intervention, the centre was able to resume operations and save numerous lives.

Born in Bangui in 1986, Ouanékponé graduated with the support of the parish of Our Lady of Fatima. He played a key role during the most dramatic periods of the civil war, providing healthcare under extremely difficult conditions and refusing compensation for his service. The refugee coordinator, Ugandan Father Moses Alir Otii, who had recently been ordained a priest, relied on Cédric and other young health workers from the parish to address the health emergency until the arrival of NGOs. Cédric cared for the elderly and children, often without resources, and assisted dozens of women in childbirth.

In 2014, at the height of the crisis, the French NGO Cercle de Haute Réflexion sur la Jeunesse arrived in the country with a shipment of medicines, and Cédric treated countless people, including those from the Muslim neighbourhoods of the area known as PK5. He had to do so almost secretly to avoid being accused of 'aiding the enemy' in a conflict that was mistakenly labelled 'interreligious'. When the NGO sought to pay him in accordance with European standards, Dr Ouanékponé refused, claiming it was his humble contribution to his brothers and sisters.

In addition to his hospital work, the doctor is now the promoter of the *Mama Ti Fatima* health complex, which includes a pharmacy, an analysis laboratory, and an emergency clinic, with plans to open a maternity ward and to develop mobile clinics in the poorest areas. He is also a professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences in Bangui and is committed to training the next generation of doctors.

With this award, *Mundo Negro* intends to highlight the example of those who choose to put their skills at the service of their country, making a concrete contribution to Africa's human and health development.

## MALAWI-ZAMBIA

From 12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> January 2026, the Bauleni-Lusaka novitiate welcomed Father Opargiw John Baptist Keraryo, a Ugandan Comboni missionary, provincial superior of South Africa, and coordinator of APDESAM.

The novitiate community is composed of 17 novices of eight different nationalities, accompanied by two formators: Father Kiwanuka Achilles Kasozi, novice master, and Father Fene-Fene Santime Augustin, formator and socius.

Father Opargiw's visit is part of the province's ongoing comprehensive formation process, aimed at deepening understanding of the Comboni charism and strengthening awareness of the *Code of Conduct* as a fundamental tool for missionary life today.

The visit was structured around three main formative moments—a spiritual retreat, a reflection on the Comboni charism, and a workshop on the *Code of Conduct*—integrated with opportunities for meeting and dialogue with the formation community.

**Retreat Focused on Awareness and Inner Truth** – On the morning of Tuesday, January 13, at the Bauleni-Lusaka novitiate, Father Opargiw led a spiritual retreat, inviting the novices to a process of self-awareness and inner truth, emphasising that authentic spiritual growth begins with honesty before God and oneself. Attention was paid to personal feelings, inner movements, motivations, relationships, and apostolic attitudes. Through guided reflection, the novices were encouraged to examine their inner state, the quality of their prayer, emotional maturity, use of time, interpersonal behaviour, and their ability to live responsibly in community.

Two biblical texts served as the framework for the retreat: Jesus' invitation to the disciples: "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while" (*Mark* 6:31-32), and God's question to Adam: "Where are you?" (*Gen* 3:9b). These texts became invitations to silence, interiority, and openness to God's transforming presence.

Father Opargiw emphasised that spiritual life is not shaped by extraordinary experiences but by daily fidelity, attentiveness to God's presence, and a growing passion for Christ and others. The retreat was welcomed with openness and gratitude, as a space for grounding, discernment, and renewed vocational awareness.

**Deepening and assimilation of the Comboni charism** – The afternoon of the same day was dedicated to a sharing on the Comboni charism. Presented as a living gift of the Spirit, the charism was described as an

experience first lived by Saint Daniel Comboni and continually embodied throughout history. The novitiate was defined as a privileged theological and spiritual space during which this charism must be deeply rooted and internalised.

Father Opargiw recalled the essential elements of the Comboni charism: total dedication to God; missionary orientation *ad gentes, ad pauperes*, and *ad vitam*; and the experience of the *Cenacle of the Apostles*, understood as a school of fraternity, prayer, shared responsibility, and availability for mission. At the heart of all this is the Christological dimension of the charism, rooted in contemplative openness to God and expressed in active missionary commitment. The Heart of Jesus was presented as a source of compassion, availability, and selfless love.

Particular emphasis was placed on the relational dimension of missionary identity. Referring to the experience of the “*Cenacle of Apostles*,” Father Opargiw emphasised the shift from the Cartesian *Cogito, ergo sum* (‘I think, therefore I am’) to the African wisdom *Cognatus, ergo sum* (‘I am related, therefore I am’). He emphasised that missionary identity is fundamentally relational, lived in communion with God, the community, and the people to whom one is sent, particularly those living on the frontiers and existential peripheries.

The novices welcomed this reflection with interest, recognising the challenge and richness of living the Comboni charism as a community, intercultural, and missionary vocation.

**The Code of Conduct as a journey of conversion and missionary credibility** – Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> January, was dedicated to a workshop on the *Code of Conduct*, with participation by both novices and confreres from the Lusaka area. Father Opargiw presented the historical development of the Code, emphasising that its evolution from 1997 to the 2025 revision reflects the Institute’s growing awareness of ethical, pastoral, and institutional responsibilities.

He emphasised that the drafting of the document was never a simple collection of rules, but rather a journey of conversion, fidelity to the Gospel, and integrity in ministry. Its objectives are to promote a responsible missionary culture, foster mutual care, and ensure just and transparent responses to situations of abuse, misconduct, or scandal.

The workshop highlighted the theological, spiritual, and canonical foundations of the *Code*, rooted in the Gospel, *Canon Law*, and our *Rule of Life*. Attention was paid to relationships as a mission, safeguarding policies, disciplinary measures, and the values of integrity, responsibility, honesty, and transparency.

Both novices and confreres expressed appreciation for the clarity and realism of the presentation, recognising the *Code of Conduct* as an essential tool for personal responsibility, healthy community life, and credible missionary witness today.

At the conclusion of the seminar, the four Comboni missionaries present (Fathers Achilles Kiwanuka, Augustin Fene-Fene, Simon Agedede, and the scholastic Phiri Charles) formally signed the acceptance form for the *Code of Conduct*. The signed documents were handed over to Father Simon Agedede, Provincial Councillor responsible for the Lusaka area, who will forward them, where appropriate, to the Provincial Superior for inclusion in the respective personnel files of each confrere, in accordance with the Institute's procedures. (*Father Fene-Fene Santime Augustin, mcccj*)

## PROVINCIA DE CENTRO AMÉRICA

### **Provincial Assembly**

Reuniting for the Provincial Assembly was a source of great joy: we met again after some time—for some, after months, if not years—we spoke and listened to each other, and we “valued” who we are and what we have.

First, there was the meeting of the treasurers of our communities (on 4<sup>th</sup> January), who shared their year's work and discussed issues related to their service.

From 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> January, the Provincial Assembly was held at the *Casa Sacerdotal* in Mixco, near Guatemala City, with the participation of members of our province from Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

We examined our missionary life and rekindled the fire of our vocation. We discussed the role of authority within our community and the importance of our formation, and we addressed economic issues, supported by the various sector secretariats.

We critically assessed the progress we've made in 2025 and confronted the challenges that await us across the various contexts in which we operate. We discussed religious life and the journey undertaken by our Institute.

On the first day, Father Sergio Osorio, of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, encouraged us to courageously look at the reality around us, doing so as 'religious', that is, always walking in the light of the Word of God and the dictates of our Chapter documents, with eyes capable of recognising challenges, with hearts ready to fight with all the perseverance we are capable of, without ever losing our 'passion' for the mission.

In the following days, there was a thorough discussion of the various

points that our Institute presents as key themes for reflection in 2026. These included the issue of merging the districts, the updated *Code of Conduct* and the *Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults*, the commitment to ‘*specific pastoral care*’, the theme of Mission (see the General Council’s *Letter on the Mission – “Going Beyond”*), and ministeriality.

On the final day, Father David Domingues, a member of the General Council responsible for the America-Asia macro-region, joined us via *Zoom*, infusing new energy into our activities and the various commitments we undertake in the province.

The Assembly placed us in the role of becoming increasingly ‘community builders’, both at the provincial and institute levels, each carefully overseeing our home, our Family, and our mission.

Ready for new steps on our common journey, we celebrated the “transition” of the new Provincial Father, Father Enrique Sánchez, and the new Provincial Councillors. It was like a true “rite of passage,” experienced in an atmosphere of prayer, fraternity, and communion, celebrating the Eucharist as a “thanksgiving” and a supplication to the Lord to accompany them.

At the end of the Assembly, in the joy that comes from being together, we organised a pilgrimage to San Juan Obispo, home of Bishop Francisco Marroquín, the first bishop of Guatemala, dating back to the colonial era. In the former episcopal chapel, we celebrated the Eucharist, presided over by Fathers Baltazar Zárata, who will celebrate 60 years of priesthood in March, and Luis Filiberto López, who will celebrate his 20th anniversary in October. (*Father Juan Diego Calderón Vargas, mcccj*)

## SOUTH SUDAN

### **Perpetual vows by Santino Mawan**

On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2026, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the provincial house in Juba was filled with joy when scholastic Gum Santino Mawan Guor professed his perpetual vows during the annual Provincial Assembly. Numerous Comboni confreres attended the celebration, including Bishop Tesfaye Tadesse, former Superior General and now Auxiliary Bishop of Addis Ababa, who presided over the Mass.

Also present were Brother Alberto Lamana, several religious sisters, and Santino’s family. Father Gregor, Provincial Superior of South Sudan, received the vows and praised Santino for his courage in saying ‘yes’ to God and in giving himself to the Comboni Family.

Born and raised in a Catholic family, Santino began his Comboni formation in the pre-postulancy in Lomin, South Sudan. He studied philosophy in Nairobi, Kenya, for three years, then completed the two-year novitiate in Bauleni-Lusaka, Zambia, where he made his first religious profession on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2021. He continued his theological studies in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, and then returned to South Sudan for a year of missionary service in the parish of Mapourdit, in the Diocese of Rumbek. His ordination to the diaconate is scheduled for 8<sup>th</sup> February 2026, the feast of Saint Josephine Bakhita. Let us accompany Santino with our prayers as he continues his vocational journey.

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **FATHER BENITO DE MARCHI (29.05.1942 – 10.12.2025)**

Benito was born in Urbania, in the province of Pesaro-Urbino, on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1942. From the beginning, life was not kind to him. When he was just six years old, he lost his mother, who died shortly after the birth of his younger brother, Luigi. Thus, very early on, he experienced both loss and resilience. Perhaps this was where his profound sense of humanity lay. His vocational journey also began early. In October 1953, he entered the diocesan seminary of Urbania, where he attended three classes of middle school and two years of high school. Soon, however, he felt the call to a missionary vocation and, in October 1958, was accepted into the Comboni Missionary High School in Carraia (Lucca) for three years of high school.

In September 1961, he began his novitiate in Gozzano (Novara) and also completed a year of preparatory theology. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1963, he took his first temporary vows and was sent to Rome for theological studies at the Pontifical Urbaniana University (Propaganda Fide). This period marked the beginning of a lifelong dedication to research and intellectual study.

He spent his first year of theological studies in the house on Via San Pancrazio and, in September 1964, moved with the other scholastics to the new general house on Via Luigi Lilio (EUR). In 1965, he earned a bachelor's degree in theology, and in 1967, a licentiate in theology and a diploma in contemporary atheism from the Gregorian University.

He was ordained a priest on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1967, in the chapel of the diocesan seminary of Urbania by Msgr. Anacleto Cazzaniga, Archbishop of Urbino.

The superior general at the time, Father Gaetano Briani, regularly asked newly ordained priests where they wished to be assigned. Father Benito asked to begin his studies for a doctorate in Sacred Theology. So, while others left for the missions, he remained in Rome... for the next ten years!

He read tirelessly, conducted in-depth research, and reflected intensely. What he found most difficult—he openly admitted—was reaching conclusions! His doctorate progressed slowly – very slowly! – until his superiors gently but firmly encouraged him to complete his thesis and leave for the missions. Eventually, he managed to finish it. It was entitled *Towards a New Image of the Church: The Episcopal and Eucharistic Community in the Diaspora of the Contemporary World*. He defended it brilliantly on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1976, and two days later, he received the parchment certificate bearing the final grade: *magna cum laude*.

This trait – always thinking, continually seeking, rarely concluding – accompanied him throughout his life. He stayed up late at night reading, studying, and writing... never finishing, never concluding.

In 1977, Father Benito was assigned to the Comboni Province of Malawi-Zambia (then still the Malawi Delegation). He served first as parish priest at Gambula in the diocese of Blantyre (July 1977–June 1980), then in Lirangwe (1980–83), and subsequently at the newly founded mission of Mthawira on the outskirts of Blantyre (1983–86).

During his first years in Malawi, he was diagnosed with a tumour in his chest, located between his lung and his aorta. He returned to Italy for treatment. He underwent surgery and, once his health was restored, returned to Malawi as soon as possible to continue his missionary life.

Alongside his parish ministry, Father Benito taught Liturgy at Saint Peter's Major Seminary in Zomba for six years. His teaching was known for being rich, profound, and complex. This led, in 1986, to his transfer to the London Province as Professor of Liturgy and later Missiology at the Missionary Institute of London (MIL). Before taking up his post at MIL and his role as formator at the Elstree scholasticate, he spent a year as a lecturer at the Malta Theological Faculty.

He lived in the Elstree community from 1987 to 1991, then moved in 2001 to the Dawson Place community, where he spent the last 25 years of his life.

In Malawi, Father Benito discovered a great love for nature. He became an avid gardener and planted flowers and shrubs wherever he could. Creation held a profound value for him—as did his passion for grapes and winemaking.

Beyond his titles and roles, Father Benito was above all a theologian and an academic. He never stopped reading, studying, and reflecting on the meaning of Mission. His homilies and lectures were always passionate, inspired, and deeply attentive to the life of the Church, society, and the world order. His vision of Church, Society, and Mission was profoundly human, concrete, and close to the lives of ordinary people forced to work hard for a living. A vision that, as he loved to recall, stemmed from growing up in extreme poverty.

He was actively involved in ecumenical dialogue and in building strong relationships with the Christian churches of Elstree and Borehamwood. For many years, he also carried out a highly regarded pastoral ministry in the parish of St. Edward the Confessor in Golders Green, north London.

He also actively contributed to the theological reflection of the Comboni Institute through the European Group for Theological Reflection (GERT), publishing articles in various journals and periodicals, participating in various commissions, and taking responsibility for the ongoing formation of the London Province for many years.

Wherever he was – in Italy, Germany, Malawi, Malta, or England – he forged deep and lasting friendships. People were important to him. He was affable, sociable, and genuinely enjoyed the company of others. Some friendships lasted a lifetime. Friends of the Pandolfini family in Prato—benefactors during his early years of formation—remained in touch with him until the end: a friendship that lasted over sixty years, caring for him and regularly sending him treats from their ‘Antonio Mattei’ biscuit factory. Relationships were the true treasure of his life, even more so than the beloved theology volumes he continued to purchase with the help of family and friends.

Father Benito was always very attentive to his health and the various ailments and illnesses that afflicted him over the years. However, when engaged in conversation – especially about the Mission, Liturgy, or the Church –, any complaints quickly disappeared, becoming lively, interesting, and engaging, with a subtle sense of humour. And, as many know, a glass of red wine has extraordinary therapeutic and regenerative powers, capable of curing almost anything!

Autopsy results certified that Father Benito’s death (on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025) was almost instantaneous and completely unexpected, caused by an aortic aneurysm while he was descending the main staircase of the Dawson Place residence. When paramedics and a doctor arrived on the scene, just minutes after being called by members of the community, he was already unconscious.

We deeply thank God for the life and gifts of Father Benito: for his prodigious intellect, his inquiring mind, his generous openness to his students, his great heart and loyal friendship, his subtle sense of humour – even his difficulty reaching conclusions – knowing that, finally, he has found the answers he had always sought.

As a formator at Elstree, Father Benito visited Mexico and often spoke of his visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a memory he cherished deeply. We therefore entrust our beloved brother to the hands of the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking her to intercede for him before the Almighty. May he rest in eternal peace and rise with the Lord in glory. (*Father Javier Alvarado Ayala, mccj*)

### **FATHER VELLUTO PONZIANINO VINCENZO (10-12-1931 – 15-12-2025)**

Ponzianino—known to all as Ponziano—was born in Troia, in the diocese of Foggia, on 10th December 1931, the seventh child in a deeply Christian family. His parents, Pietro Velluto and Maria Cornacchia, raised their children in the faith and service in the parish of Maria Santissima Mediatrice, entrusted to the Comboni missionaries. From childhood, Ponziano was a diligent altar boy, and in that environment his vocation slowly developed.

After elementary school, he received his First Communion on 10th May 1940, and Confirmation on the same day at the Troia Episcopal Seminary. He expressed a desire to become a missionary. He was accepted into the Comboni Apostolic School. The formative years were not easy: a long illness forced him to interrupt his studies in Sulmona and repeat a year. With patience and tenacity, he resumed his journey, dividing his time between the Troia Episcopal Seminary and the Comboni Seminary.

In 1950, he passed his classical high school exams and, after a brief stop in Rome during the Holy Year, reached Gozzano for his novitiate. Here, welcomed with simplicity and warmth, he lived the decisive years of his consecration. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1952, he took his first vows. He then studied in Verona, then in Venegono Superiore for a four-year theology course. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1958, he made his final profession, and on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1959, he was ordained a priest in Milan Cathedral by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI.

His missionary dream was now ready to become a reality. His first destination was Sudan, but delays in obtaining permits forced him to wait a long and patient time. He was sent to London to learn English and, finally, to Uganda, to the diocese of Gulu. On 21<sup>st</sup> March 1961, he landed in

Kampala and was immediately sent to the mission of Opit, a newly established community.

Here began the long and fruitful African chapter of his life, which would last over fifty years. He passionately dedicated himself to learning the *Acholi* language, humbly addressing the challenges of a complex idiom, especially its tonal system. After only four months, he gave his first sermon in the local language—an experience he himself described as “a providential dive.” From that moment, language became the privileged instrument for reaching people’s hearts.

First on a Vespa and then on an old, retrofitted Guzzi, he travelled kilometres of trails to visit distant villages, to celebrate, teach, and accompany. Pastoral safaris lasted weeks. In Odek, he trained a group of catechumens, carefully preparing them for their first communions and confirmations. In 1963, while on a long visit to the Parak area, he was chosen as parish priest and local superior of Anaka. Here, together with a young brother, he strengthened the ecclesial presence in a large and diverse parish, also supported by the community of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate. In 1967, he returned to Italy temporarily for a refresher course amid the post-conciliar climate. These were months of intense ecclesial reflection, also marked by suffering from his mother’s illness. She herself encouraged him to return to Africa with words that would remain engraved in his heart: if they never meet again on this earth, they will meet in Heaven.

In 1968, he returned to Uganda and was assigned to Palabek, a difficult mission marked by the recent expulsion of other missionaries. At first, he was completely alone. He found a fragile community, a nearly empty church, and a faith in need of rebuilding. Patiently, he visited the catechists, convened them, organised pastoral work, and slowly, Christian life flourished again.

On 4<sup>th</sup> April 1969, his mother died. The news reached him on the mission a few days later. In his diary, he entrusted to the Lord his grief and gratitude for that mother who had supported his vocation to the end. Even in the midst of suffering, he did not cease his service.

In the following years, he faced serious health problems: renal colic forced him to be hospitalised and transferred, but he never abandoned his mission. From 1974 to 1979, he served as superior and parish priest in Padibe. Then, almost reluctantly, he accepted the post of formator in the scholasticate in Kampala. Here, he discovered a new apostolic dimension among the students, in the schools and colleges of the capital, which he considered an unexpected gift from the Lord. In the 1980s, he worked in Kalongo and then in Gulu, during a dramatic period for

northern Uganda, marked by millenarian movements and widespread violence. He even sought dialogue with Alice Lakwena, leader of the Holy Spirit Movement, but was flatly rejected. However, he continued to offer a discreet and reassuring presence among a population devastated by the war.

From 1992, he served as superior of the Meeting Centre in Layibi, then, from 1994 to 2008, he returned to Opit as superior. These were the most difficult years: the conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army, led by the infamous Joseph Kony, devastated the region. He was kidnapped twice by the rebels. Many confreres lost their lives. Ponziano endured this time without ever doubting his choice. He remained close to the people as a sign of fidelity and hope.

His mission was not limited to preaching. He built schools and clinics, promoted long-distance adoptions, supported young people in their studies, and accompanied families in difficulty. This is how he interpreted his missionary spirit: a comprehensive service, both human and spiritual.

In 2009, he returned to Italy, experiencing these years as a painful separation from Africa. In 2012, he managed to return to Uganda once again, first to Bala, then to the Comboni House in Ngeta. He wanted to end his life there, but in 2016, health forced him to return permanently. In Lecce, he collected his memoirs, which in 2017 became a book entitled *It Was Worth It – Fifty Years in Uganda*, a simple and intense summary of an entire life dedicated to self-giving.

In July 2020, he retired to the 'Brother Alfredo Fiorini' Centre in Castel d'Azzano. Here, he lived his final years in silence and self-denial, slowly preparing for his final encounter. He died on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

During his funeral on the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Centre's superior, Father Giovanni Munari, recalled how Pontian, at the end of his life, let go of everything he had built, leaving only himself before God. From the messages received from all sides, a unanimous portrait emerges: a humble, good, faithful missionary, totally dedicated to Africa.

Particularly touching is the testimony from Gulu: as a child, the future vicar general of the archdiocese had been welcomed by him in Palabek along with his orphaned brothers. Even today, many remember him with affection and gratitude. Many children even bear the mark of his name.

After the funeral, his body was taken to Troia for burial in the local cemetery. Thus ends the long journey of a man who lived the Gospel in everyday simplicity, amidst remote villages, wars, illnesses, and hopes. His life, as he himself wrote, "was worth it." (*Father Franco Moretti*)

## **FATHER ALBIN GRUNSER (03.01.1933 – 01.01.2026)**

Albin was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1933, in Terento, in the autonomous province of Bolzano, Trentino-Alto Adige. After completing elementary school, he was admitted to the Missionary House of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Milland. From there, he attended middle school, and high school at the Vinzentinum Episcopal Seminary.

**Years of preparation** – Five times a week, he and the other Milland students had to make the rather lengthy round trip between the mission house and the Vinzentinum. Albin was a good and diligent student and successfully passed his high school exams in Merano in 1955.

That same year, he applied for admission to the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MFSC), now the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus (MCCJ). On 13<sup>th</sup> November, he began his spiritual and missionary formation with the novitiate in Bamberg. On 29<sup>th</sup> September 1957, he took his first temporary vows.

At that time, every year, several newly professed members were sent to Rome for theological studies. Albin was among them. After completing his philosophy studies in Bamberg in 1958, he moved to Rome, where he attended the University of Propaganda Fide from 1958 to 1962, concluding his studies with a licentiate thesis. On 6<sup>th</sup> January 1962, he took his perpetual vows in Rome. On 29<sup>th</sup> June 1962, he was ordained a priest in Brixen by Bishop Josef Gargitter.

Albin attracted everyone's attention with his imposing stature. During his first Mass, the parish priest, in his welcoming address, compared him to Saul, the elected king of Israel, of whom the *First Book of Samuel* states: "He towered head and shoulders above all the people" (1 Sam 9:2c).

**Assignment to Spain** – Father Albin began his missionary ministry in Spain. Shortly after his arrival, he was appointed formator of a group of seminarians at the San Francisco Javier missionary seminary in Saldaña, which the Congregation had opened two years earlier. At the same time, he taught, as the seminarians did not attend public schools but were educated within the seminary.

He learned Spanish quickly and fluently. His homilies and lectures were highly appreciated by the students. The solid theological formation he received in Rome provided an important foundation for his commitment to education.

**Pastoral work and teaching in Tarma, Peru** – After two years, in 1965, the time came again for Father Albin to pack his bags, embark, and set out for Peru, which would become his permanent missionary homeland. He would spend a total of 56 years of his life there.

After a brief period of pastoral work in the parish of Sant'Anna in Tarma, he was appointed a teacher at the 'San Ramon' school in the same city. For over two decades, he accompanied generations of young people, who always held him in high esteem; an esteem shared by his colleagues and the families of his students.

He was an upright, honest, and profoundly humane priest, particularly attentive to the more timid, poor, or academically less gifted students. He did not hesitate to visit their families, converse with their parents, and even provide financial assistance so they could continue their studies. Many former students still remember him as a true educator and mentor, a concrete testament to how the mission can also be lived out in the classroom.

A former student of the San Ramon School, present at Father Albin's funeral in Terento, said: "I never saw Father Albin alone. Whether in the schoolyard, on the stairs, or in the corridors, he was always surrounded by students or colleagues. He was always smiling. He taught us to seek and understand the meaning of life. When I think of him today, I wonder why so many students and people turned to him. I'm sure it was because they found food for their souls in him. He strengthened families and blessed lives. We can already imagine how deeply his second hometown, Tarma, will remember him."

He was soon entrusted with coordinating religious education in the diocese of Tarma. With his frank, sincere style, he earned the respect of the teaching staff and was appreciated by the students for his professional competence and thorough preparation.

However, he did not neglect his important pastoral commitment in the parishes: he willingly celebrated the Eucharist on weekends and, for many years, served as advisor to the bishop of Tarma.

During the years of terrorism in Peru, Father Albin experienced firsthand situations of great danger. One particularly dramatic attack occurred in Tarma, when a vehicle loaded with explosives exploded next to the parish church, right under his bedroom window. Fortunately, he was not at home that day. Many saw this episode as a clear sign of God's protection and that of the guardian angel who accompanied him throughout his life.

**Pastoral work in Lima – Provincial administrator** – In 1994, he moved to Lima and joined the community of the Provincial House of Monterrico.

There, too, he willingly offered pastoral service in the parishes. He celebrated Mass daily at the school of the Mothers of the Immaculate Conception and on Sundays for the residents of the neighbourhood. He also demonstrated his compassionate heart by sending aid to the Missionaries of Charity working in areas plagued by poverty and violence.

From 1996 to 2003, he was treasurer of the provincial house and the province. Whatever task was entrusted to him, Father Albin carried it out with conscientiousness, competence, and precision. He deeply loved his missionary vocation and remained faithful to it until the end. Like everyone else, he had unique personality traits that sometimes made working and living with him difficult.

Assignment to the German-speaking Province (DSP) – In August 2021, due to his advanced age and health problems, he was transferred to the German-speaking Comboni Province, to the centre for elderly and sick confreres in Ellwangen. It was not easy for him to say a final farewell to his mission after 56 years. However, he quickly settled in, thanks in part to the many services offered by the assistants. Furthermore, Father Albin had a fine sense of humour, a quality much appreciated by the staff.

After numerous hospitalisations, doctors finally concluded that further treatment would bring no improvement. On December 30, 2025, he was transferred to the nearby “Sant’Anna” Hospice, where he died on January 1, shortly after midnight. At his express request, his body was taken to Terento, his hometown, and buried in the local cemetery.

**Announcement of the death of Father Albin in Tarma** – On the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> January, a small local radio station in the Tarma region, in the heart of the Peruvian Andes, announced the death of Father Albin Grunser. The radio statement expressed deep sorrow for his passing, was immediately followed by words of faith in the resurrection, and offered sincere condolences and sympathy to his missionary community and family.

The spread of the news immediately sparked a veritable flood of messages on social media, honouring Father Albin as a priest, teacher, missionary, and spiritual guide. One message read: “He was a great missionary, who left his homeland to dedicate himself to Tarma; an excellent teacher, who educated the students of Colegio San Ramon; an edifying example of perseverance, faith in God, and profound respect for people. In Tarma, we will always cherish his memory. We are united in prayer with his family and the community of Comboni missionaries.”

His punctuality and discipline have left indelible memories. When Albin took his afternoon stroll around Tarma's Plaza de Armas, you could almost set your watch by him; the route was always the same. Some children, watching him, enjoyed counting his steps.

The Comboni missionaries thank Bishop Timoteo Solórzano of Tarma for his support and for the condolences expressed for the loss of this brother, who dedicated his life to education, pastoral work, and faithful service to the Church.

**Father Eduard Falk and Father Albin Grunser** – On the same day, two years ago, Father Eduard Falk, also originally from Terento, passed away. He, too, had worked as a missionary in Peru for 48 years. Now both rest in the same cemetery. Together, these two 'Terento missionaries' served in the Peruvian mission for over 100 years! Both were deeply attached to their parish, so much so that they expressed a great desire to be buried in the parish cemetery.

With profound gratitude, we pray to the Lord for Father Albin Grunser, certain that the one he served with such dedication has welcomed him into his Kingdom: *"Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Enter into the joy of your master"* (Mt 25:21). (Father Nelson Mitchell, Provincial Superior of Peru, and Father Alois Eder)

### **FATHER INÁCIO BABO DE MACEDO (03.01.1950 – 22.01.2026)**

Inácio was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1950, in Vila Cova da Lixa, in the former province of Douro Litoral, a territory in northern Portugal, in the diocese of Porto. He was baptised on the 6<sup>th</sup>. He was confirmed in July 1959. He attended local schools but dropped out early. So much so that, in early 1969, when he decided to enter the Apostolic School of Maia, run by the Comboni missionaries, he was forced to make a tour de force to catch up on several years of schooling. But he had a keen mind and threw himself headlong into his studies. On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1970, he was ready to enter the novitiate in Moncada. (F.M.)

I met Inácio when he was 19, and I was 17. He had entered the seminary in Maia that very year, a little behind in his school studies, but he was eager to catch up with the others as quickly as possible. And he succeeded brilliantly. Even though we were almost the same age, I always saw him as a role model for his commitment and seriousness in his studies and daily life.

Two years later, we left together for the novitiate in Moncada, Spain. There, too, Inácio always stood out for his commitment. He aimed very

high: he said—and he was very serious! —that he wanted to become a saint! Sometimes, in my naiveté, I thought he was being excessively “serious.”

We walked together for a few years. In fact, we attended philosophy courses together at Moncada and became friends.

He took his first temporary vows on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1973, in Coimbra (a year before me) and continued his philosophical studies at Moncada, while I returned to Portugal as a scholastic and prefect of the apostolic school in Viseu.

In September 1974, we met again at the scholasticate of Issy-Les-Moulineaux, Paris, for theology courses. Inácio was the best student in the class. On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1977, he made his perpetual religious profession, and on 31<sup>st</sup> July of the same year, he was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of Viseu by the diocesan bishop, Most Rev. José Pedro da Silva.

After theology and priestly ordination, our paths separated: he immediately left for Zaire (recently incorporated into the Democratic Republic of the Congo – DR Congo), initially assigned to the parish of Kakwa in the diocese of Isiro, then to Limete-Kinshasa. I remained in Portugal and only left for Mozambique at the end of 1984.

In July 1983, Father Inácio was assigned to Issy-Les-Moulineaux, Paris, as a formator of scholastics. He enrolled in a course in Biblical Theology and obtained his licentiate in October 1987. Soon after, he returned to the DR Congo, was assigned to the Comboni postulancy in Kisangani, and then moved to the parish of Saint Camille in the same city as an assistant pastor. In 1993, he returned to Portugal, assigned to the community of Famalicão, where he was in charge of missionary animation.

Upon my return from Mozambique in early 1999, I immediately went to meet Father Inácio, who was about to leave the community of Famalicão, and convinced him to leave for Mozambique, explaining that he could offer his valuable service as a philosophy professor at the Interdiocesan Philosophical Seminary in Maputo. At first, he hesitated but then accepted. He was immediately assigned to his new post from Rome, and by July of that year, he was already in Maputo, beginning a new missionary adventure. He immediately proved himself an excellent philosophy teacher, so much so that he was chosen as prefect of studies. At the time, the seminary was directed by a formation team composed of Comboni missionaries. Here, even today, Father Inácio is remembered by former diocesan seminarians, now priests, as a competent professor, dedicated to his students, and demanding. He would tell them: “Being a priest is a serious matter: we cannot joke with God and the people.”

In 2005, after the direction of the seminary was handed over to the diocesan priests, the Comboni team left the seminary, and Father Inácio was assigned to Tete, where the Institute was present in three missions. Despite his age, he spared no effort in studying the local language, Chinyungwe, and learned it quite well.

Father Inácio was passionate: he did everything with great dedication, always giving his best. He lived everything intensely, even the smallest things. His missionary and religious vocation was a treasure he guarded with affection and generously placed at the service of his brothers, especially those most in need.

He remained in Tete until 2008, when he returned to Portugal and was assigned to the community of Famalicão, where he was in charge of missionary animation.

In July 2011, he moved to the Generalate, where he was responsible for the student brothers. He had a remarkable ability to accompany others. I met him again here in 2015, serving his brother Father Manuel João Pereira Correia, who was suffering from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a serious, progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects motor neurons, causing muscle paralysis and difficulty breathing and swallowing. He lived those years with great dedication, offering his life for Father Manuel João's well-being.

During this brief time spent with him—about a year—I discovered his love for two great saints (in addition to Saint Daniel Comboni, of course): Saint Augustine and Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Of little Thérèse, he told me: “This young Carmelite nun’s love for God and the missions has always fascinated me. Her ‘little way’ inspires and excites me, pushing me to dedicate my entire life to the mission. I know I have in her a great *‘intercessor’* with God.” And he showed me the famous portrait of Thérèse, prominently displayed on his desk. He shared with me many of his studies on the books of St. Augustine and on the *Story of a Soul* by St. Teresa, which he knew very well.

In 2016, Father Inácio returned to Portugal, assigned to the Calvão community to promote vocations and missionary outreach. Meanwhile, his health was slowly deteriorating. A stroke left him severely debilitated, but with great willpower, he regained his mobility and a certain independence.

However, his mental health remained severely impaired, and he had to be transferred to the Viseu community, where he spent his days doing small tasks, raking leaves from the trees in the garden, and walking around the grounds of our retirement home. As he walked, he slowly counted the beads of his rosary. Every time I visited him, he would ask

me where I was and what I was doing, still showing interest in the mission. When I answered, he would shrug his shoulders in resignation and whisper, “I can’t do anything anymore,” and he would show me the rosary, as if to say, “This is my mission today!” And how great his mission truly was! Still, as he had always done, he continued to offer his life—now fragile and worn out—generously for the mission, praying for all the missionaries who joyfully proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom on the frontiers.

He passed away in the Lord on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026, at the age of 76. The funeral ceremonies were held on the morning of 23<sup>rd</sup> January, with a funeral Mass presided over by the Bishop of Viseu, Most Rev. António Luciano dos Santos Costa, in the church of the ancient and glorious Seminary of the Missions of Viseu, followed in the afternoon by the funeral in Vila Cova da Lixa, his hometown. He was then buried in the local cemetery.

Rest in peace, Father Inácio, my companion and my friend. I am sure you heard the Lord calling you gently: *“Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your master”* (Mt 25:21). (Father Jeremias dos Santos Martins, mccj).

## LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

**THE FATHER:** Guillermo Sipión, of Mons. Barrera Pacheco L. Alberto (PE)

**THE BROTHER:** Arnulfo, of Brother Enriquez Sanchez (M)

**THE SISTERS:** Sister Maria Gerarda, of Father Giuseppe Ambrosi ( † ), Elina Bianca, of Father Luciano Perina (I); Dolores, of Card. Miguel Ángel Ayuso ( † )

**THE COMBONI SISTERS:** Sr. Fumagalli Alessandra (I); Sr. M. Lucia Cavalli (I); Sr. Adeliana M. Locatelli (I)