

# FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

849

March 2026

## GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

### Perpetual profession

Sc. Mercado Sandoval Diego Martín	Manila/A	02/02/2026
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### Ordinations

Mwilu Nicholas Mbithi	Kandisi/KE	10/02/2026
Romero Chajón David Eduardo	Guatemala City	07/02/2026
Muhindo Kapanza Lwanzo	Butembo/CN	15/02/2026

### Holy Redeemer Guild

March	01 – 07 CO	08 – 15 E	16 – 31 DSP
April	01 – 15 CN	16 – 30 EC	

### Prayer intentions

#### 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.*

#### April

We pray for close collaboration within the Comboni Family, so that we may bear witness to a synodal Church that is close to the poorest and most abandoned, as Saint Daniel Comboni desired. *Lord, hear us.*

### Meaningful anniversaries

#### MARCH

15	The birth of St Daniel Comboni	
17	St Patrick, bishop	LP (London Province)
19	St Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Central Africa

## APRIL

25	San Pedro de San José de Betancourt, religious	<b>Province of Central America</b> [Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador]
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### ASIA

#### **Perpetual profession of the scholastic Diego Mercado, in Manila**

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, on the occasion of the World Day of Consecrated Life, the Comboni Missionaries, along with their confrères, friends, and benefactors, gathered in Manila to celebrate the perpetual profession of scholastic Mercado Sandoval Diego Martín, who served in our delegation for nearly a year.

We thank God that our young confrère has forever consecrated his life to the service of the missions.

During his homily, the delegate superior, Father Aguilar Sánchez Víctor Manuel, emphasised that total dedication to the mission is the essence of our calling. He added that our primary commitment is to proclaim the Gospel among the poorest and most abandoned human groups in the world's different continents, drawing inspiration and strength from a profound and tender devotion to the pierced Heart of Jesus. Sustained by the love of this Heart, we are determined to share the "good news" of the Kingdom with these most abandoned brothers and sisters living on the peripheries of society, with a view to authentic human advancement.

Father Manuel reminded Diego, his confrères, and all those present at the celebration that our consecration is 'for life' (*ad vitam*), spent beyond the borders of our countries of origin (*ad extra*), dedicated to the service of the poor (*ad pauperes*), and directed to all peoples, especially non-Christians (*ad gentes*). He concluded: "These are the fundamental elements that define our missionary vocation and identity. Today, Diego Martín is a living testimony to our Comboni charism." (*Father Aguilar Sánchez Víctor Manuel, mccj*).

### CONGO

#### **Priestly ordination of Lwanzo Kapanza in Butembo**

On 15<sup>th</sup> February, the Diocese of Butembo-Beni experienced a very meaningful event: the priestly ordination of Muhindo Kapanza Lwanzo, a Comboni missionary, celebrated by Bishop Sikuli Paluku Melchisédech of the Diocese of Butembo-Beni, in the parish of the Immaculate Heart in Kitumba. Along with fourteen other new priests – thirteen diocesan

and one religious – Father Lwanzo generously responded to the Lord’s call. The celebration was much more than a liturgical rite: it was a true sign of light in a context marked by trials. While the province of North Kivu continues to face the painful realities of war and insecurity, the local Church showed its most beautiful aspect: a fervent, united, and supportive community.

The joy was palpable. The songs, prayers, and fervent participation of the faithful testified to a living faith that is undaunted by difficulties. In the midst of adversity, God continues to call, and young people continue to answer ‘yes’. These ordinations sent a powerful message: hope is stronger than fear.

Father Lwanzo is part of the great tradition of the charism of St. Daniel Comboni, oriented toward evangelisation and service to the most vulnerable. His commitment reminds us that mission is not merely a geographical destination, but a total gift of self for the proclamation of the Gospel and the building of a more fraternal society.

The day after his ordination, Father Lwanzo celebrated his first Mass in his home parish, surrounded by his family and the local Comboni community, which works with dedication in the diocese. It was a moment of profound communion and thanksgiving. The Christian community welcomed this son of theirs with pride and gratitude as he became a priest for the universal Church.

This celebration of the ‘first fruits’ was also an important moment of missionary and vocational promotion. Through his testimony, Father Lwanzo encouraged young people not to be afraid to give their lives to Christ and his Church. His life’s journey has become a living sign that, even in the most fragile contexts, God continues to sow vocations and inspire artisans of peace.

Let us pray to the Lord that this ordination may be for the diocese of Butembo-Beni and for the Comboni family a renewal of faith and missionary commitment to proclaim the Good News and to denounce everything that harms the dignity of the human person and of all creation. *(Father Mumbere Kahongya Mapenzi, mccj)*

## ITALY

### **European Group for Theological Reflection: “Understanding the challenges of today”.**

The European Group for Theological Reflection (GERT) continues its journey into the new year. The Verona meeting (February 2-4) was supposed to address a series of topics related to social and religious changes

in Europe. For various reasons, only a few members were able to attend in person and share the results of their research.

Father Moses Oti, parish priest and formator of the Graz formation community, presented his research on the origins of violence in our society. Father Paolo Latorre presented his interpretation of the shift in social paradigm, drawing on his previous reflections and Pope Francis's invitation to grasp its importance in our time. Father Justino Martínez Pérez proposed a pastoral reading and use of the Bible, especially regarding a pastoral presence in Europe aimed at reaching those who are not yet part of the faith community.

Among the proposals considered by the participants, a study programme on the theme of interculturality stands out, in which young confrères in formation in Europe will also participate. Interculturality is a major challenge for our increasingly diverse societies, but it is also a challenge for the Comboni missionaries themselves. The Comboni Institute is increasingly international, with a growing presence of confrères from Africa and some Asian countries. Working together, bearing witness to the faith together, and committing ourselves to the transformation of our communities, in harmony and unity of purpose, is therefore an important task.

There will be further meetings in 2026, including the Limone Symposium, scheduled for next June. (*Father Giuseppe Caramazza, mccj*)

### **In the wake of Laudato Si' – Embracing Limits – 'Food and its Waste'**

On Friday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, the first evening of the new programme '*In the Wake of Laudato Si'*' took place at our house in Padua, entitled '*Welcoming Limits*'. This is the third programme (we are in the third year of the '*In the Wake of Laudato Si'*' programme), which began with a reflection on the change necessary to envision a new form of well-being and now suggests a possible path by embracing the limitations inherent to the human person and creation.

The meeting (three more will follow – see *below*) addressed the topic of '*Food and its waste in the era of climate change*'.

Three reflections were presented. Davide Pettenella (a professor at the University of Padua and member of the scientific committee of the Lanza Foundation) spoke on '*Food production, logistics, and consumption: waste and best practices*'. Massimiliano Monterosso, head of the project Re.T.E. Solid.A [Territory, Economy, Solidarity, Environment Relations]-Padua, spoke on '*Creating and supporting circuits for the recovery and reuse of surplus food*'. Finally, Francesca Marin (professor at the University of Padua and coordinator of the Ethics, Theology, and Philosophy

project at the Lanza Foundation) concluded with the presentation ‘*Limiting waste is an act of care and an ethical issue*’.

A large audience attentively followed the qualified and well-received contributions of the three speakers. The inspiration for the journey is Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’* (published on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015), both for the entire journey—*Embracing limits*—and for the specific theme of the evening— [*Food*, in particular § 20 (waste and the value of food), §§ 129-131 (land, work, and biodiversity), and § 156 (quality of life and proper nutrition)].

Another powerful phrase from Pope Francis, pronounced in his video message on the occasion of the meeting of 500 national and international representatives – ‘The Ideas of Expo 2015 – Towards the Milan Charter’ – on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2015, also inspired the evening: “There is food for everyone, but not everyone can eat [...]. It is therefore necessary, if we truly want to solve problems and not get lost in sophistries, to resolve the root of all evil, which is *inequality* [...]. To do this, there are some priority choices to make: renouncing the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and acting first and foremost on the structural causes of *inequality*” – a fitting neologism [inequity = ‘unjust inequality’] coined by Francis to describe the root of poverty in an economy that kills and has killed many people.

It is therefore necessary to ‘embrace the limits’ if we want to strive for *just equality* in the production, management, consumption, and waste of food.

#### Schedule of following meetings

- *Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2026 – 18.00*  
The effects of climate change on water resources: how to protect both them and ourselves
- *Friday, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2026 – 18.00*  
Energy consumption and climate. The impact of the digital age
- *Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2026 – 18.00*  
Caring for the person and environmental protection from a One Health perspective

(Father Gaetano Montresor, mccj, and Colibrì – *lo faccio la mia parte*)

## KENYA

### Four important ‘Firsts’

Since the beginning of 2026, the Province of Kenya has experienced four celebrations that, each in its own way, felt like a ‘first’: a perpetual profession in frontier country; a diaconal ordination in the far north; priestly

silver jubilees celebrated in ecclesial communion; and finally, a priestly ordination on the periphery. These events, though distinct, converge in a single experience of grace and missionary renewal.

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026, our confrère Mark Wanyama Musungu made his perpetual profession during a solemn celebration in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Consolation in Marsabit. For the many faithful present, it was the first perpetual profession ever experienced in their community: a moment of intense emotion and profound spiritual edification.

Just two days after permanently consecrating his life to the Comboni charism of serving the “poorest and most abandoned”, Mark was ordained a deacon on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2026, by the laying on of hands by the Bishop of the Diocese of Marsabit, Mons. Peter Kihara.

The presence of Comboni missionaries in this region dates back to the end of 1973. This celebration, therefore, was an eloquent sign of the fidelity and continuity of our witness in this northern frontier. It renewed in everyone the awareness of the common call to be missionary servants in the peripheries and frontiers of history.

On 7<sup>th</sup> February, our confrères, Father Andrew Wanjohi and Father Percy Carbonero, who recently celebrated their silver jubilee of priesthood, were officially awarded a certificate by Bishop Kihara. Philip Anyolo, Metropolitan Archbishop of Nairobi, during the celebration of the World Day of Consecrated Life, held at the Minor Basilica of the Holy Family in Nairobi. They were among many others from other religious congregations. Elevating this event to a large, shared celebration was a first, and as well as being a powerful testimony, it strengthened the appreciation the Comboni missionaries enjoy among consecrated persons in the country.

On 14<sup>th</sup> February, in the heart of the Catholic Diocese of Ngong, a new page in history was turned: the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Erankau hosted its first priestly ordination. Only a few years have passed since the Comboni missionaries expanded their presence to Erankau, a territory traditionally inhabited by the Maasai people. In a celebration imbued with profound faith and vibrant cultural richness, Comboni Deacon Nicholas Mbithi Mwilu was ordained a priest, becoming a sign of hope for the local community of the faithful and the entire Comboni family. The Church of St. John the Evangelist in Erankau is part of the Holy Spirit Parish in Kandisi.

Officiated by Bishop John Oballa Owaa of Ngong Diocese, the ordination marked a symbolic transformation: Erankau, from a simple local outpost, has become a true missionary launching pad. The Bishop expressed words of appreciation for the Comboni missionaries, recalling how the seed of faith they planted many years ago in the parish of Santa Maria

in Ongata Rongai has borne fruit, generating numerous other parishes in the diocese. After professing his perpetual vows before this very altar, Father Nicholas is now preparing to carry the spirit of Ngong beyond national borders with his first assignment in the Comboni Province of Mexico.

We have raised our prayers that this historic event may mark the beginning of a new chapter for the faithful of the Erankau area and become a credible and prophetic sign that every periphery can be transformed into a fruitful centre of vocational growth and a concrete expression of the universal dimension of our missionary vocation. (*Father Andrew Wanjohi Thumbi, MCCJ*)

## MOZAMBIQUE

### **Mons. Constantino takes possession of the new diocese of Caia**

On 25<sup>th</sup> February, the new diocese was erected in Caia, Mozambique, with the inauguration of its first bishop, Msgr. António Manuel Bogaio Constantino, in the parish church of St. Matthew the Apostle, now the cathedral. Mons. Cláudio Dalla Zuanna, Archbishop of Beira, introduced the celebration by recalling the history of evangelisation in the Zambezi Valley. Apostolic Nuncio, Msgr. Luís Miguel Muñoz Cárdenas read the papal bull of erection issued by Pope Leo XIV and the decree appointing the bishop.

In his homily, Mons. Bogaio emphasised the importance of unity: “*Tinaphata basa pabodzi*” (‘we will work together’), recalling that God first demands conversion, holiness, and unity. He expressed his desire to get to know the people of the diocese, support priests and catechists, encourage young people, and walk with families, drawing inspiration from Saint Daniel Comboni: “*Ndabwera kakhala pakati pano*” (‘I have come to be among you’).

He also proposed a new decentralised administrative structure to bring justice and services closer to the people, and recalled the legacy of the ancient missionaries. The celebration was attended by ecclesiastical and political authorities, faithful, and clergy from Caia and Beira. Bishop Constantino was Auxiliary Bishop of Beira; the Diocese of Caia includes the districts of Caia, Chemba, Cheringoma, Chinde, Doa, Luabo, Maringue, Marromeu, Mopeia, Morrumbala, Mutarara, and Tambara. (*Father Sérgio M. Vilanculo, mcccj*)

## PERU

### **Marcelino, the first Nomatsiguenga permanent diocesan deacon: “We are Amazonising the Church”.**

Comboni’s dream continues to be realised: that indigenous people be protagonists in the evangelising mission of their own brothers and sisters. This approach to the regeneration of peoples, begun in Africa, has arrived in America, in a Nomatsiguenga community called Mazaronquiari, in the Peruvian Amazon rainforest, in the department of Junín, in the district of Pangoa. Here, on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2025, Marcelino Shuente Chumpate was ordained a permanent deacon of the Vicariate of San Ramón by Bishop Gerardo Zerdín, bishop of the vicariate.

Marcelino Shuente Chumpate was born on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1987, in the indigenous community of Alto Anapati (an indigenous community in the central jungle of Peru). He received his primary education in Anapati. To complete five years of secondary school, he moved to Mazaronquiari. He says: “Despite the difficulties inherent in our communities, I managed to complete my secondary education with commitment and perseverance, always trusting in God’s help.”

After finishing school, he did not return to Anapati but remained in Mazaronquiari. He fell in love with a classmate, Amanda Vergas Piori, and they married, accompanied by Father Oscar Gámez, a Mexican Comboni missionary. Today they have five children.

Marcelino is a farmer: he grows coffee to support his family, and cassava and bananas for family consumption. He is grateful to God for his family: “God has blessed me. I live happily with my family and my brothers. I am grateful to God for this great gift.”

Marcelino belongs to an Evangelical family. His parents had welcomed the Evangelical pastors who lived in Anapati. I know his father: a generous man who always welcomed me with a traditional drink (masato). His mother often gave me cassava to bring to the community. I thank God for having introduced me to this family.

I worked with Marcelino and can testify that he is a person of deep faith: he truly experienced an encounter with Christ. I remember an interview we had on Spanish television. The journalist asked Macheko (the nickname the native communities gave him): “How did you become a Christian?” He replied: “Jesus touched my heart. I live happily with God, recognising that He is the only one who has transformed my life.”

Marcelino met the Comboni missionaries thanks to Father Oscar Gámez, who visited the native *Nomatsiguenga* communities, using him as an interpreter. “With the arrival of the Comboni missionaries, my faith was

strengthened. One of them gave me the opportunity to translate the Gospels into the Nomatsiguenga language.” Soon, God called him from being a translator to becoming an evangeliser.

When I first arrived in Pangoa, I asked him to accompany me to the communities. Thanks to him, I was able to enter many of them. At first, during Mass, after the sermon, I would ask him to add something of his own. Soon, I began to let him do the entire sermon. I immediately understood that he had a calling to evangelise. I prepared a programme of liturgical celebrations in the communities. On Sundays, each person would take care of two communities. During the week, each person would have four celebrations.

Marcelino says: “They entrusted me with the task of celebrating the Liturgy of the Word every week or every fortnight. My mission is to evangelise and serve the people of God, especially in the indigenous communities.”

With the religious community of Pangoa, we sent Marcelino to the School of Evangelisation (ESCA), an institution for the training of Christian animators and catechists of the Vicariate of San Ramón. This training lasted three years. Marcelino demonstrated a strong spirit of sacrifice, having to care for his family while, at the same time, dedicating himself to his studies. After completing his preparation, the vicariate accepted his candidacy for permanent diaconate.

Marcelino is enthusiastic about the charism of Daniel Comboni: “I thank all the Comboni Missionaries for their support and for the wonderful moments we shared. My vocation was strengthened by their arrival: they allowed me to continue the journey of evangelisation in the native communities, such as San Pablo de Mazaronquiari, Alto Anapati, Cubantía, Menkoriari, Chuquibambilla, Jerusalén de Miñaro, and Santa Teresita.”

I truly believe that Marcelino’s permanent diaconate not only actualises the charism of Comboni, who dreamed that every recipient of the mission would become a missionary for his brothers, but also makes concrete the dream of the universal Church that Pope Francis expressed in the document *Querida Amazonía*: to have a Church with an Amazonian face. From today, we can begin to say that we are ‘*Amazonising*’ the Church. *(Father David Nyinga Dunga, mccj)*

### **Provincial Assembly 2026**

From 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> January, we gathered at our house in Monterrico for our annual assembly, which had the theme: ‘Rekindling the Fire of Mission’. Nearly all the confrères participated, and the atmosphere was one of deep reflection, true fraternity, and fraternal communion.

Using the approach of synodality, listening to the Spirit who guides us on this journey to discern where we are and where we want to go, we followed the letter of the General Council on the Comboni mission today, *Going Beyond*. At the same time, we experienced this process in communion with the local Church, which is celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canonisation of Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo, a great missionary from Peru.

The assembly began with an initial reflection entrusted to a young diocesan priest, Father Yadir Candela, of the Archdiocese of Lima, on the theme '*Passion for Mission in Light of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canonisation of Saint Toribio de Mogrovejo*'. He offered a highly engaging presentation on the Spanish Saint Turibius (1538–1606), Archbishop of Lima, Peru. A tireless evangeliser, Turibius travelled thousands of leagues on foot across a vast archbishopric, preaching in indigenous languages and promoting the inclusion of indigenous people, people of African descent, and people of mixed race. For the people of Peru, he was a beloved missionary pastor, a father of the Latin American Church, and a model of patience and charity.

This was followed by a second reflection on '*Passion for Mission in the Light of Saint Daniel Comboni*', seen against the backdrop of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Central Africa, marked by exploration, colonialism, the slave trade, disease, poverty, and high mortality.

In both Saint Turibius and Saint Daniel Comboni, mission was a proposal of integral dignity. From both presentations, the question addressed to everyone became clear: what excites us and challenges us in our mission today?

In answering this question, it was emphasised that a total surrender to God and to the mission is necessary. We are called to be missionaries with complete chastity, steadfast faith, humility, self-denial, generous dedication, charity, and a lively sense of God (*Writings*, 2484, 2887). Without these foundations, emptiness and desolation are the result. A missionary must possess an apostolic charity, inflamed by divine love, in which privations become sweet through love. Love for Jesus Christ and love for the poorest and most abandoned are inseparable and superior to earthly affections. Total availability and trust are also essential, being ready for anything, in joy and sadness, in life and death, trusting in the Cross, in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in Mary.

The first day concluded with a Mass presided over by Father Nelson Mitchell, marking the beginning of the second three-year term (2026–2028) of his service as provincial superior. During the celebration, Father Nelson renewed his profession of faith and oath of fidelity. Two great

missionaries in Peru who recently passed away were also remembered: Fathers Albino Grunser and José Schmitdpeter.

On the second day, Father Edison López presented the topic '*Our Dioceses and Synodality*', in which he illustrated the implementation of the synodal process as the practice of discernment, suggesting some pathways for local Churches. As the main pillars of this approach, he listed the conversion of pastoral approaches, inclusive listening, structural renewal, ecclesial assessment, theological and spiritual integration, and priority attention given to relationships with women, youth, and the poor.

The remainder of the second day and the third were dedicated to various reports. It began with the report on the state of the Province presented by the Provincial Superior. Then, the secretariats and communities evaluated the Six-Year Plan, asking themselves, "Where are we?", "Where do we want to go?", "What remains to be accomplished", and "What path should we take", all in light of the orientations suggested by the General Council regarding the Institute's reorganisation process, using the method of 'conversation in the Spirit'. We also listened to the Comboni Missionaries, the Comboni Lay Missionaries, and the Laudato Si' Centre. The fourth day was dedicated to recreation and fellowship, with a lovely community outing, while the fifth concluded with voting on the motions and the final Mass.

We experienced with great joy the perpetual profession of scholastic Mathews Mwaba, who said his definitive 'yes' to a lifelong mission. A delicious and festive lunch followed immediately afterwards.

On 7<sup>th</sup> February, we again gathered around Mathews, who received the diaconate in the parish of San Martín de Pangoa, by the laying on of hands by Bishop Luis Alberto Barrera Pacheco, MCCJ, Bishop of Callao. It was a beautiful, joyful, and profoundly missionary celebration, organised by the parish community and the Colegio San Daniele Comboni, to whom we extend our deepest gratitude for their generosity and all the work they did. (*Father Nelson Mitchell, mccj*)

## UGANDA

### **Transfer of the community of Palorinya from the Province of South Sudan to that of Uganda**

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026, the community of Palorinya was officially transferred from the Province of South Sudan to that of Uganda. The transfer took place on Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> January, during a solemn Eucharist celebrated by Father Onzima Moses, a diocesan priest appointed by the bishop as parish priest of the sub-parish of Palorinya, representing the

diocese. Concelebrating were Father Gregor Schmidt (Provincial Superior of South Sudan), Father Kibira Anthony Kimbowa (Provincial Superior of Uganda), Father Abraham Hailu, representing the Comboni community of Palorinya, and Father Ngbo Fufunga Justin (of the Lomin community). Also present were two other members of the Comboni community of Palorinya: Brother Erich Fischnaller and Brother Lawrence Okello. The celebration was attended primarily by the local community of the sub-parish of Palorinya.

The presence of the Comboni missionaries in Palorinya is linked to the arrival of refugees from South Sudan. Since 1987, the confrères, especially from the Lomin mission (in the Diocese of Yei), decided to move with the people until they finally settled in Palorinya. Here, the Comboni Missionaries have assumed the pastoral care of the refugees and opened several workshops to provide vocational training to the population. Both the pastoral work and the training centre have had a significant impact on the lives of the refugees and the local community. Pastoral care will continue in the 17 chapels located in the large refugee camp.

The two provincial superiors, Father Gregor and Father Anthony, visited Msgr. Sabino Ocan Odoki, bishop of the diocese of Arua. It was a very enriching meeting, during which great appreciation was expressed for the Comboni missionaries' continued presence with the refugees in Palorinya. Several aspects of pastoral collaboration with the diocese were then clarified.

We are grateful to the Lord and to the entire Institute for this opportunity to be close to our brothers and sisters living in the refugee camp, who are truly one of the most tangible reflections of the poorest and most abandoned of our time.

May our presence and willingness to walk with these least fortunate of society open new doors of hope for them. *(Father Kibira Anthony Kimbowa, mccj)*

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **FATHER VINCENZO SANTANGELO (2.12.1934 – 13.1.2026)**

Vincenzo Santangelo – or simply Enzo – was born in Eboli, in the province of Salerno (Italy) on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1934. He was baptised the same day. He was confirmed on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1943.

While still a boy, he entered the Pontifical Regional Seminary of Salerno, where he attended middle school, a two-year high school, and a three-year secondary school. He struggled somewhat with his studies: he

repeatedly failed his September retakes; a couple of times, he was forced to repeat the school year. However, he managed to complete his preparatory course and was promoted to the first year of theology, again at the Salerno seminary.

However, for some time, Vincenzo had been nurturing the desire to become a missionary. He mentioned the idea to the superiors of the diocesan seminary and to the parish priest, but neither was in favour. Enzo, however, had been in correspondence with Father Bano since 1955, who urged the boy to be patient. Those most opposed to the idea of Enzo becoming a missionary were his parents: Vito and Carmela.

Enzo wanted to enter the Comboni novitiate as soon as possible. He urged Father Bano to write a letter to his parents, as a last-ditch effort to convince them of the possibility of having a missionary son. Their response was one of some annoyance, bluntly expressed in a letter dated August 1956, and addressed to the "Dear Superior of the Comboni Missionaries": "We have learned from a letter from you that you are expecting our friend to come to your institute, and are also requesting a document that will eventually be used to issue his passport. This means we have been deceived...[...] We wish to clarify that we, Enzo's parents, will in no way consent to our son entering your institute, also because his health does not allow him to face the difficulties of missionary life; since childhood, he has suffered from severe neuralgia due to organic deterioration, combined with a severe – almost chronic – exhaustion of the nerve centres. We therefore ask you not to further disturb our peace and tranquillity and that of our son, and instead, as true Christians, advise him to continue his studies where the Lord placed him from the beginning."

The desire to help 'the poorest and most needy people' was deeply rooted in Enzo's heart. He was also fascinated by the ideal of Saint Daniel Comboni, to the point that he would adopt the motto of the great missionary of Central Africa for his missionary priestly life: "Africa, my first love!"

In October 1956, Enzo decided to enter the novitiate in Gozzano (Novara). On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1958, he took his first religious vows. For his theological studies, he was assigned to the scholasticate in Venegono Superiore (Varese, Italy), where he made his perpetual religious profession on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1969. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1961, he was ordained a priest in Milan Cathedral by Cardinal Giovanni Battisti Montini, the future Pope Paul VI (1963-1978), who would be canonised on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

Like all Comboni Missionaries, Father Vincenzo hoped to be immediately assigned to the African missions, but he was assigned to the Bologna

community, with Father Enrico Galimberti, as deputy director of Editrice Nigrizia and director of Messis Film (the then Comboni Film Centre). In September 1962, he was sent to Paço de Arcos (Lisbon), Portugal, as editor and administrator of the missionary magazine *Além-Mar*. In March 1964, he was assigned to the Apostolic School of Vila Nova de Famalicão, not far from the city of Porto, where he served as vice-rector, teacher, and vocations promoter. The following year, he was a professor, the vice-rector, the bursar, and a vocations promoter at the seminary in Viseu.

In December 1966, Father Vincenzo was finally able to leave for the missions, not in Africa, but Brazil, a country undergoing a difficult period under the dictatorship of the military regime, following an uprising led by the armed forces against President João Goulart, which took place between 31<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> April 1964, and ended with Goulart's deposition, inaugurating the phase of Brazilian political history known as the Brazilian military dictatorship.

Having landed in Rio de Janeiro, he immediately went to Ibirajú, in the State of Espírito Santo, where he served as vice-rector and professor, as well as a vocations promoter.

In 1968, he was sent to the city of Jerônimo Monteiro, to the parish dedicated to Mary, Mother of the Church, in the southern State of Espírito Santo, to begin the construction of a Comboni seminary together with Father Bartolomeo Lino Cordero. Father Cordero was rector, while Father Enzo was vice-rector, vocations promoter, and assistant pastor. The two immediately got along well and earned the respect of their colleagues, parishioners, and, after a short time, even that of the first seminarians. They were considered 'democratic formators', animated by a fraternal spirit and mutual respect. The style of formation they proposed was characterised by mutual respect, love, and self-discipline, and from the very beginning, the atmosphere in the seminary was pleasant for everyone.

In September 1970, Father Vincenzo returned to Italy, largely at the insistence of his mother, Carmela. He was assigned to the community of Naples, where there was a Missionary Animation Centre (CAM). He was the director of the CAM and vice-superior of the community. He edited the *Azione Missionaria* newspaper with skill and imagination. While writing, publishing, and distributing, in 1973, he decided to become a journalist: he enrolled in a journalism course to qualify for the state professional qualification exam to become a professional journalist. He would list this title in all the numerous books he published: "Member of the Order of Journalists, no. 16170, at the Ministry of Justice of Rome". He published articles in magazines and newspapers such as *Roma Sera*, *Napoli Notte*,

*L'Osservatore Italiano, Avvenire, Luce Serafica, and Correio Lageano* of Santa Catarina, and also began publishing books in Italian.

In 1977, Father Enzo returned to Brazil and was assigned to be the parish priest in Pinheiro, in the State of Espírito Santo, where he remained for two years. From January 1980, he served as assistant priest for two years in Nova Venécia.

In 1983, he was sent to Santa Catarina, a municipality in the State of Santa Catarina, as a vocations promoter throughout the state, also reaching northern Rio Grande do Sul and southern Paraná, with the task of visiting parishes, seminaries, communities, and schools, presenting the ideal of Saint Daniel Comboni. He worked with simplicity, charisma, and joy, guiding many young people toward the priestly and religious life, as well as lay men and women toward pastoral service. His face always wore a broad smile, a sign of his simplicity and contagious joy.

In 1989, Father Enzo moved to São Paulo to direct the magazine *Alô Mundo*, part of the *Sem Fronteiras* team. He remained there for eleven years, editing the magazine, publishing books, preparing missionary programmes, and producing videos for Catholic broadcasters in Brazil. In 2001, he was sent back to the State of Espírito Santo, where he served as parish priest for a year in the parish of Carapina.

In 2002, he arrived in Taguatinga, in the Federal District, at the parish of the Holy Family, which has been run by the Comboni Missionaries for about 40 years. Faithful to the charism of Saint Daniel Comboni, they transformed it into a place of welcome and formation, striving to integrate faith and service, especially to the poorest and most needy. He worked there for three years with enthusiasm, infecting everyone with his simplicity, joy, and pastoral zeal. Welcoming and charismatic, he won over everyone, especially the young people and children. He was always available to serve both the 'mother church' and the two chapels, Nossa Senhora Aparecida and Nossa Senhora de Lourdes.

In the first half of 2002, he was in Rome, at the Generalate, for a renewal course. In June, he returned to Taguatinga, where he remained until October 2007, when the parish of the Holy Family was handed over to the Archdiocese of Brasília, and he was transferred to Nova Venécia, in the State of Espírito Santo, until December 2009. The following month, he was assigned to the provincial house in São Paulo, where he edited the magazine *Missão sem Fronteiras* (Mission without Frontiers) and served at the Santuario Santa Cruz da Reconciliação (Sanctuary of the Holy Cross of Reconciliation), in the Diocese of Campo Limpo.

He would not move from here again until he closed his eyes to return to the Father's house on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026. But for the more than 15 years

he spent there, he certainly wasn't idle. He collaborates assiduously with the Shrine of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus in Taboão da Serra and the Parish of Saint Joseph the Worker, among others.

From time to time, he goes to spend some time at Casa Comboni in São José do Rio Preto, a place he calls 'a glimpse of heaven'. Here he relaxes and rests, sees friends and confrères, and, above all, writes new books and edits updated editions of previously published works. He has published 84 books! Some even in Italian. He has published with various publishing houses – *Ave Maria, O Recado, Edições Loyola, and Alô Mundo* – and on a wide variety of topics: mission, the missionary vocation, Daniel Comboni, Africa, the apostles and saints, youth, martyrs, Mary, women in the Bible, Jesus, parapsychology, ecology, and more. His last book, published shortly before his death, bears the title of the reason for his entire missionary life: *You are the Christ*.

Throughout his life, Father Vincenzo was always available to his superiors, ready to go wherever he could still be useful. He loved to say: "Pray for me, that I may always do the Father's will, following the example of Jesus." And we can be certain that he truly did God's will in everything, allowing himself to be consumed by the Gospel, living in simplicity and faithfulness, 'serving' at the altar, in hospitals, in confessionals for endless hours, in cemeteries, in Christian communities for pastoral visits... always in the service of God and others and always faithful to the 'Father's Plan'. (*Father Raimundo Rocha, MCCJ, Provincial of Brazil, and FM*)

### **FATHER MICHELE PIO SARDELLA (16.07.1949 – 14.01.2026)**

Michele was born in Orta Nova, in the province of Foggia, on 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1949, to Giuseppe and Antonia Trabacci. He was baptised on the 21<sup>st</sup>. After attending primary school in Orta Nova, he entered the Apostolic School in Foggia for middle and high school. He then attended secondary school at the Comboni Seminary in Carraia (Lucca).

On 8<sup>th</sup> October 1968, he entered the novitiate in Florence, where he took the habit on 27<sup>th</sup> October. He was in poor health. He often had stomach problems. His nervous system also suffered. His Father Master wondered if he might not be prone to attacks involving a veritable nervous breakdown. However, he was very generous, kind-hearted, and hardworking. A little impulsive and nervous, but very committed to what he did.

Following the 1969 General Chapter, the novitiate was suspended for two years. This was a time of great vocational crisis, which also affected the Comboni family. Several novices returned home. Michele, after leaving

the novitiate, went to Naples and had a pastoral experience in the parish run by the Comboni Missionaries, led by Father Ivo Ciccacci, superior of the community and parish priest. Although not yet a legally recognised Comboni Missionary, Michele lived in this community.

In September 1972, Michele began his novitiate again in Venegono Superiore. There, he took his first temporary vows on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1974. In July of the same year, he went to Elstree to begin his scholasticate. He made his perpetual religious profession on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1976.

In a letter addressed to the Superior General, Father Tarcisio Agostoni, he expressed his preferences for a possible missionary commitment: he opted for Ethiopia or Kenya, specifying his desire to work among the Sidamo, Borana, or Turkana ethnic groups. On 27<sup>th</sup> March 1977, he was ordained a priest by the Archbishop of Bari, Msgr. Anastasio Alberto Ballestrero, in the parish of Maria Santissima Addolorata. Immediately thereafter, he was assigned to the Province of Italy as a formator at Bari High School. He remained there until June 1977, when he was assigned to the minor seminary in Troia. In 1980, he was appointed local superior. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1985, the Superior General, Father Salvatore Calvia, wrote to Father Michele: "It is with great pleasure that I write you this letter because I know that your assignment to the mission brings you great pleasure. With this letter, I assign you to the Province of Ethiopia, effective 1<sup>st</sup> July 1985."

For many reasons, particularly the difficulty of obtaining a work permit in Ethiopia, in April 1987 the new Superior General, Father Francesco Pierli, wrote to him: "Since all hope of obtaining a permit to enter and work in Ethiopia has now faded, the General Council has decided to direct you to the province of Malawi-Zambia, to which you have de facto belonged since 1<sup>st</sup> July 1987."

By July 1987, Father Michele was already in Chiringa, in the diocese of Blantyre (Malawi), as assistant parish priest. In 1990, he was appointed superior of the community and elected vice-provincial of Malawi-Zambia. In 1993, he was assigned to Phalombe Parish as superior. He remained there until November 1999, when he returned to Italy for treatment, a guest of the 'Ambrosoli Giuseppe' Centre for the elderly and sick in Milan. In October 2000, he moved to the Generalate in Rome to study for a licentiate in Missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. On 20<sup>th</sup> June 2003, he graduated *summa cum laude*. Meanwhile, he was appointed Assistant Archivist of the Curia. In January 2004, he was assigned to the General Secretariat; in March, he became the personal secretary of the Superior General, Father Teresino Serra.

In March 2008, he was sent to the Italian province, assigned to the

community of Pesaro, a centre for ongoing formation and missionary outreach. In 2010, he published a book, *Under the Tree of Life*, in which he recounts the life of the Lomwe people who live in the mountains between Malawi and Mozambique. Their existence is marked by ancient rites, the legacy of a unique Bantu culture that has maintained its cultural integrity to this day. Father Michele, as head of the local Catholic community, was welcomed among the traditional authorities by these people, partly because he knew their culture down to the smallest details. In the nearly 400-page book, he explains it with the expertise of an anthropologist, but also with the affection and concern of a pastor.

In May 2022, he was sent to the community of Bari, where he served in ministry. His health problems were increasing. On 10<sup>th</sup> January 2026, he was rushed to the 'Brother Alfredo Fiorini' centre in Castel d'Azzano, where he died on the 14<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, a funeral mass was celebrated in the centre chapel. His remains were removed to Orta Nova, where, that evening, they were taken to Purgatory Church. The following day, the funeral was held in the Mother Church of Orta Nova. (*Father Franco Moretti*)

### **Remembering Father Michele Sardella**

Father Michele Sardella dedicated thirteen years of his missionary life to the *Lomwe* people of Malawi, in the missions of Chiringa and Phalombe. During those years, he did not simply 'bring' the Gospel, but allowed himself to be evangelised by the people, gaining a profound understanding of their culture, proverbs, and wisdom. His presence combined a simple yet profound faith, a remarkable capacity for reflection, a joyful disposition, and a concrete vision of the mission.

A genuine spirituality was at the heart of his life. The faith that sustained him was that received from his family and his hometown. He was deeply attached to Padre Pio, whom he had known personally and to whom he remained devoted; it is no coincidence that his parents had named him Michele Pio. He was a discreet man of prayer: he did not speak much about spirituality, but he lived it every day with naturalness and authenticity.

His joyful disposition and sense of humour made him close to everyone, especially the common people. He knew how to put situations into perspective and create a peaceful atmosphere. A colleague recalls an episode in the community: when it was time for supper, someone pointed out that Vespers had not been prayed. Michele, smiling, responded with a joke that made everyone burst out laughing. It was his way of living his

faith with evangelical freedom, without unnecessary rigidity, bringing lightness and fraternity.

One of the things that struck people most was his ability to spend time with the people. At the mission, there were two elderly custodians, Manjolo and Musiwa, with whom he stopped to talk every evening. It wasn't a pastoral strategy, but the simple pleasure of sharing time, listening to stories, and laughing together. In those conversations, the profound meaning of his mission emerged: not to place himself above others, but to walk with them. Those custodians were not the recipients of the mission, but friends and life teachers.

His relationship with the people was spontaneous, cordial, and full of openness. Michele was truly a man of the people, capable of creating sincere and respectful relationships.

Over time, he also became one of the most profound experts on *Lomwe* culture. His knowledge was not academic but born from listening and sharing life. With the approval of traditional leaders, he promoted a rite of Christian initiation that preserved the values of *Lomwe* tradition in the light of the Gospel. He was convinced that the Gospel should not be imposed from the outside, but should blossom within the culture of the people. He also built sincere and respectful relationships with traditional authorities. A significant example was his meeting with a Muslim village chief, whom Christians were asking for land for a chapel: he not only accepted, but offered one of the best plots, saying that one cannot refuse a place for God.

Father Michele also had a very concrete pastoral vision. He did not work alone, but built communities. In Phalombe, he promoted the training of approximately 1,500 pastoral leaders, including catechists and heads of the various mission centres, which included eight large churches and forty chapels. There were more than 220 small basic ecclesial communities. He devoted serious attention to the catechumenate, valued the role of women in the liturgy and funeral ministry, and encouraged the participation of young people: over two thousand boys and girls served at the altar. He also closely monitored Catholic schools, convinced that education was a fundamental path to human development.

Alongside his pastoral ministry, he had a strong sense of mission sustainability. He believed that part of the economic needs should be covered by local contributions, without burdening the poor. For this reason, he promoted various initiatives: animal breeding, dairy cows to help the sick at the Holy Family Mission hospital, soybean cultivation, and community gardens. This was a sign of a concrete love for the people, who desired not only spiritual growth but also dignity and autonomy.

Father Michele was a complete missionary. He lived his vocation with simple faith, joy, respect for the local culture, closeness to the people, and a concrete pastoral vision. His life reminds us that mission is not just about bringing something to others, but about allowing ourselves to be transformed by our encounter with them.

His heart remained in Africa, among the *Lomwe* people, among the Christian communities formed during those years, among the people with whom he shared his life. And this is perhaps the most beautiful legacy a missionary can leave. (*Father Villaseñor Gálvez José de Jesús. MCCJ*)

### **FATHER JOSEF SCHMIDPETER (14 FEBRUARY 1936 – 26 JANUARY 2026)**

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026, a rich and eventful life quietly ended: that of Father Josef, born in Laibstadt, diocese of Eichstätt, Bavaria, on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1936, into a family of four children. He was preparing to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In 1949, he entered the 'Josefinum' Mission House in Ellwangen as a student and attended the Peutinger-Gymnasium, an ancient and renowned Jesuit school in the city, where he passed his high school diploma with flying colours in 1959.

After his novitiate and first vows, pronounced on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1959, in Mellatz, he spent five years studying theology in Bressanone, South Tyrol. On 6<sup>th</sup> January 1963, he took perpetual vows and was ordained a priest in that city's cathedral on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1963.

### **Formator of seminarians at Milland and Ellwangen**

Father Josef was small in stature but full of energy, sustained by a joyful and healthy spirituality and a love of mission. He was a friendly, helpful, accessible, and communicative priest and colleague, a good soccer player, and an excellent singer and trumpet player.

Given his many talents, after completing his theological studies in 1963, he was appointed formator of students at the Missionary Seminary in Milland. Thanks to his pedagogical talent, he was appointed formator of the 'Josefinum' Seminary in Ellwangen in 1967. He also taught religion at the Peutinger-Gymnasium, attended by students of the Serafinum. From 1973 to 1979, he was general councillor of the then Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MFSC). In this capacity, he also participated in the General Chapter of reunification in 1979.

In the 1970s, the seminaries gradually lost their original purpose. The Josefinum was the first to be closed in 1981. Father Schmidpeter was then freed for the mission in Peru.

### **Missionary in Peru: 1981-1991 and 2011-2022**

His Spanish confrère, Father Franco Lorenzo Conrado, pastor of the Good Shepherd Parish in Arequipa, lived with Father Josef for many years in the same community and worked together in the parish. Here is his testimony.

Father José arrived in Peru in 1981 and was assigned to the Comboni community of the Holy Spirit Parish in Arequipa, where he served as parish priest until 1991. He became known for his close ties with the people of this remote area. He was deeply committed to supporting neighbourhood organisations to ensure their access to basic services, such as healthcare, clean water, sanitation, electricity, and food. He also helped build community centres and chapels for the ever-growing population. He was a tireless, compassionate, and generous man who listened and helped everyone. He was deeply committed to creating jobs for the people who had emigrated from the Arequipa highlands and other regions of southern Peru. To this end, he introduced the Kolpingwerk [an international Catholic social and educational association founded by the German priest Adolph Kolping in 1850 in Cologne] to the parish and established work cooperatives for families. He built a medical clinic, a school, a carpentry shop, an art studio, and other facilities. His remarkable social commitment created many jobs for families in the large community of the Holy Spirit Parish. His first stay in Peru lasted until 1991, when he was transferred back to his home province. During this long absence, however, his heart remained in Peru.

Father Josef was tormented by deep anxiety. He recounted the following event many times. One day, while returning home from a visit to a chapel, he clearly heard the voice of the Lord saying to him: “José, take care of my sick.” He was deeply touched by this inner voice, and from then on, the sick became his favourites.

After completing his commitments in Germany, he convinced his benefactors to found an association to support the sick in Peru. Thus were born the ‘Polyclinics of the Holy Spirit’.

In 2011, he was able to return to the parish of ‘El Buen Pastor’ in Arequipa to continue his social and pastoral commitments. He dedicated countless hours to maintaining contact with benefactors and the board members of the polyclinic association, encouraging their collaboration.

Even today, two day-clinics in Arequipa and one in Lima are a striking testament to his dedication to the sick.

After his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, he began to experience health problems. Despite this, he continued to manage the polyclinics with his characteristic dedication, without neglecting parish ministry. In 2021, his health forced him to return home for medical treatment, but his thoughts remained with the sick and the people of Arequipa.

Father José embodied charity. For nearly 22 years, he dedicated himself to missionary work in Peru, offering a clear example of the missionary spirit and great solidarity of St. Daniel Comboni towards those most in need. Rest in peace, Father José, and help us from heaven to live the merciful love of the Good Shepherd. (*Father Franco Lorenzo Conrado, mccj*)

**Second period in the DSP** – Returning to Germany in 1992, he served as superior of the Neumarkt community in the Diocese of Eichstätt. Shortly thereafter, the bishop appointed him director of the diocesan mission centre. This position allowed him to visit all the parishes in the diocese and revitalise them for the missions.

In 2001, he became the superior of the Ellwangen community. Here, he deepened his connection with the city's very active Kolpingwerk, which had helped him so much in Peru. Naturally, he also maintained his many contacts with his friends and the people of Arequipa.

There were also some difficulties and resistance from the Church and even from the Institute. This was not a question of resentment or envy. Rather, the fear was that works too closely tied to the founder would be launched, destined to collapse after his death or departure. Father Schmidpeter, however, was aware of this risk and built his work on solid foundations: among them, the Kolpingwerk and the friends and supporters of Pro Espíritu Santo in Germany. Church organisations such as Misereor also played an important role: they not only offered financial assistance, but also counselling and support. The German Embassy in Lima, with its competent staff, with whom Father Josef always maintained good relations, was also involved. This undoubtedly contributed to the German government awarding Father José the Bundesverdienstkreuz [Germany's highest honour for special merit] in Stuttgart in 2016.

**Definitive return to the DSP** – In 2022, Father Josef returned to Germany due to his age (86) and health problems and was assigned to the retirement home in Ellwangen. He never gave up hope of returning to Peru. Ultimately, however, this proved impossible. In relatively good

health, he celebrated his sixtieth anniversary of priesthood on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023, together with his confrères, family, and friends.

When signs of severe mental deterioration became evident, he was admitted to the nearby Sant'Anna retirement home. He spent several months there until his peaceful passing during breakfast on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

More than 20 priests, brothers, and diocesan priests attended his funeral Mass in Ellwangen, along with many of his friends and benefactors. Father Conrado Franco, his successor as parish priest of the 'Buen Pastor', wrote: "For me, Father José embodied the Good Samaritan."

**Some testimonies from friends and former students:** "Father Josef knew how to encourage young people and had faith in their abilities. He played sports with us young people and joined our morning runs. He was always uplifting and encouraging; he would pat us on the back and tell us, 'You can do it'."

"I always saw Father Josef as a passionate, committed, and down-to-earth priest, a missionary, and educator who encouraged people to do their part. Whether it was a soccer tournament or a religious celebration, he always had a big heart for others."

"I admired Father Josef's positive outlook, his courage, and his faith in others. He believed in people, encouraged them, and inspired them in their actions, true to the motto: 'You can do it'." (*Father Franco Conrado and confrères*)

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

**THE MOTHER:** Lucinda, of Brother João Paulo da Rocha Martins (PT)

**THE SISTERS:** Ines, of Father Pino Mariani (I); Flora, of Father Musaka Zoé (E); Giuliana, of Father Norberto Stonfer (EGSD)

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS** Sr. Canali M. Antonietta (1); Sr. Sánchez Aragón María de la Luz (E); Sr. Bicego Agnese (I); Sr. Storato Maria Bertilla (EG/I); Sr. Papi Irma Maria (I); Sr. Gardini Angela (I); Sr. Rasia M. Agnese (I)