

FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

851

May 2026

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

Perpetual professions

Sc. Dang Thanh Sang Dominic	Ho Chi Minh City/VN	20.04.2026
Sc. Ronaldo Mateus Mulima	Chitima/MO	26.04.2026

Ordinations

Olupot Christopher	Mukongoro/UG	06.04.2026
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Holy Redeemer Guild

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

Prayer intentions

May

In the month in which we celebrate the 60th World Communications Day, let us pray that all communications workers in the Comboni Family may share the beauty that inhabits the world with good accounts that edify and give hope. *Lord, hear us.*

June

Faced with growing social and political polarisation, conflicts, and wars in our world, may the Lord help us to build bridges, not walls, so that love may prevail over the barriers that seek to divide us. *Lord, hear us.*

Comboni liturgical calendar

MAY

30	Last Saturday of the month, "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart"	memorial
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JUNE

12	The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus <i>Titular of the Institute</i>	Solemnity (Togo-Ghana-Benin)
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Meaningful anniversaries

MAY

2	St. Athanasius, bishop and doctor of the Church	Egypt
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JUNE

1	Anniversary of the foundation of the Institute	
3	Saint Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs	Uganda
5	San Boniface, bishop and martyr	Memorial DSP (South Tyrol, Austria, Germany)
13	The Immaculate Heart of B. V. Mary	memorial
23	Saturday before Pentecost Our Lady Queen of Apostles	memorial

Publications

JORGE CARLOS NARANJO ALCAIDE, *Comboni's Dream – The Educational Mission of the Comboni Missionaries in Sudan*, is the title of a book recently published in Cairo by the Comboni College of Science and Technology, 2026, pp. 253.

The author, a Spanish Comboni Missionary priest, describes the development of a style of Christian mission – initiated by Daniel Comboni in Sudan – that prioritises interreligious dialogue and is embedded in the history and culture of a predominantly Muslim country.

Comboni schools in Sudan emerged alongside the introduction of modern education in the country. Their development, therefore, is part of the history of Sudanese education. One of these schools, Comboni College, is an educational institution with unique characteristics in the history of the Comboni missionaries and Sudan.

The narrative follows the development of this laboratory of interreligious coexistence, evangelisation, and the promotion of sustainable development, shifting from the third to the first person starting from chapter 5, when Father Jorge Carlos becomes a direct witness and protagonist of events. Educators will find in the book food for thought on the impact that context can have on educational practice and on the very understanding of the concept of education, situated within a dialectical tension between the values of an Islamising and Arabising model and those grounded in Christian tradition. This tension raises a question: what should be the objective of the educational practice of a Catholic school? Students of educational science will find in the book a concrete experience of integrating

cultural, social, and ethnic diversity. Historians, on the other hand, will find evidence of events that have profoundly affected the history of Sudan. Missiologists will find a concrete experience of proclaiming the Gospel in a predominantly Muslim context. Finally, the believer learns of a testimony to the dedication and love of numerous missionaries and many people who, over the course of nearly a century, have dedicated their lives to the education of generations of young people, in a context marked by continuing instability and strong political pressures, including the war which is still in course.

PADRE JOSÉ JAVIER PARLADE, *El Pan Compartido*, edited by AMSUDAN, second edition, February 2026, pp. 152.

Father José Javier Parlade, a Comboni missionary originally from Seville, spent his entire life bringing the Gospel to areas with high levels of religious persecution, such as Sudan and South Sudan, from which he never wanted to return to his home country. Only the outbreak of war in Sudan and his advanced age forced him to leave and return to Spain, where he currently lives. In April 2023, at the start of a conflict which has now lasted almost three years, he was one of the Spaniards evacuated by plane.

The book collects the main stages of his life, entirely dedicated to the mission in areas severely affected by war, famine, and religious persecution. He arrived in 1972 and remained there for 52 years.

With a flowing narrative, rich in touching anecdotes, the book invites us to accompany Father José in his adventures: from his first steps in unknown lands to the great goals that only selfless dedication can achieve. Every page is a reminder of the power of solidarity. The proceeds from this book will go entirely to missions in Sudan, supporting those most in need through the work of the Catholic-inspired NGO Amsudan.

ASIA

Perpetual profession of scholastic Dang Thanh Sang Dominic

April 20th was a day of joy for our Asian delegation: the second Vietnamese Comboni scholastic, Dang Thanh Sang Dominic, professed his perpetual vows, consecrating himself to God for a lifelong mission. The ceremony took place in the Blessed Andrew Community of Phú Yên, in Ho Chi Minh City. Dominic's family and relatives came from his home province in the Mekong Delta, along with his parish priest and other priest friends, to share the joy of our community. The celebration was held in Vietnamese and was presided over by Father Dang Khoa Nguyen Van Tien (Peter), the first Vietnamese Comboni priest, ordained on March

14th. Father Rocco Bettoli, superior of the community, was delegated to receive the vows.

The first fruits of our presence in Vietnam are appearing, and everyone hopes they will enrich the mission *ad gentes* of our Institute. We now joyfully await the diaconal ordination of Dominic Sang! (*Father Aguilar Sánchez Víctor Manuel, mccj*)

EUROPE

Meeting of media heads in Europe

On 27th and 29th April, the directors of Comboni media in Europe met at the General Curia in Rome for their meeting.

Present were: representing Spain, Fathers Bayo Mata Enrique and Armada Díez de Rivera Rafael (*Mundo Negro* and *Aguiluchos*); Portugal, Brother Bernardino Dias Frutuoso (*Além Mar*, *Audácia*, *Família Comboniana*); Poland, Brother Pomykacz Jacek Andrzej (*Misjonarze Kombonianie* and *MINI Kombonianie*); the London Province, Father Carmine Curci (*Southworld*); the German-speaking Province, Father Markus Lorenz Körber (*Kontinente* and *Solidarisch*); Italy, Fathers Giuseppe Cavallini (*Nigrizia*) and Aurelio Boscaini (*Il Piccolo Missionario* and *Azione Missionaria/Missionari Comboni*); the General Directorate, Father Arlindo Ferreira Pinto (Director of the Communications Office).

Excused absences: Father John McGuire Downey (*Comboni Mission*), of the London Province; Brother Alberto Lamana, of the General Directorate; and Father José Antonio Mendes Rebelo, Provincial of Portugal and European Head of the Media Sector.

The morning of 27th April began with a training session. Marco Damilano, a journalist for the newspaper Domani and, for several years, host of *Il Cavallo e la Torre* — “Politics, Powers, and People of Our Times” — on Rai 3 prime time, spoke remotely. Marco had been asked to speak on “Artificial Intelligence and Its Implications for the Future of the Press.” AI represents an opportunity, but it also carries the risk of a new form of colonisation, as it draws primarily on content generated in the Global North. Hence, the importance of news reporting by witnesses, such as missionaries, living in the Global South.

The second part of the morning was led by Father Angelo Giorgetti on the theme of sustainability as a normal horizon for all planning. Father Angelo referred to Nos. 35 and 36 of the *2022 Chapter Acts*: “The sustainability of the Institute depends on the ability of each one to share all that he is and has, even if apparently insignificant. The heart of a sustainability plan is to give the best of oneself, one’s life and one’s work as

the fruit of a profound conversion” (35); “We dream of an Institute that is sustainable from an economic, social, and ecological point of view, thanks to Providence and an effective sustainability plan” (36). Sustainability is sustained if each member of the Institute feels and lives as a missionary who, as in the primitive Christian community, puts everything in common. The discussion following Father Angelo’s speech highlighted the financial difficulties all magazines are experiencing – difficulties also linked to the steady decline in print subscriptions – but also underscored the importance of the printed magazine, which builds reader loyalty and ensures financial resources. Hence, a renewed commitment to seeking alternative sources of funding, always with sustainability in mind.

An important part of the meeting was the presence of Father Luigi Codianni, Superior General, who returned from the provincial assembly of the DR Congo on the morning of Tuesday, the 28th. Father Luigi emphasised the importance of the work the magazines can do to support the transition required by the 2022 General Chapter toward the formation of macro-regions and a new Comboni identity based on ministry, in which the dimension of the charism (commitment *ad gentes* and *ad pauperes*) is expressed through the testimonies of missionary life.

The meeting also provided the directors with an opportunity to share their experiences, take stock of what is being accomplished in the various provinces, and emphasise the importance of regularly exchanging information and projects, working together, and advancing a common vision for our magazines and other digital platforms that we, as Comboni Missionaries, are committed to. Following the Founder’s example, this involves both denouncing evil (for example, the arms system) and – above all – committing to the values of the Kingdom (justice, peace, the option for the poorest, etc.), which have always given meaning to the Comboni Missionaries’ presence in the Church. (*Father Elio Boscaini, mccj*)

DR CONGO

Spiritual exercises in Kisangani

From 13th to 18th April, about thirty Comboni missionaries from various communities in the province of DR Congo gathered in Kisangani for a ‘time of rest’. For these men, accustomed to the intense pace of the apostolate, the six-day retreat was much more than a simple break: it was a true return to the source. It was, after all, the first meeting of this magnitude since the February 2023 assembly in Kinshasa.

In the intimate atmosphere of ‘Saint Joseph’s house’, time seemed suspended, offering a privileged space to heal wounds, revisit the journey

travelled, and allow the Word of God to once again enrich hearts. Accompanied by the wisdom of Father Ntima Nkanza, a Congolese Jesuit, the confrères were guided to the heart of the psalmist's prayer: "Teach us to number our days" (*Psalms* 90:12a).

During his sermon, Father Ntima touched the humanity of those present with simple yet incisive words. His reflection, centred on the metaphor of song, was profoundly affecting. "Our life is a song," he insisted: "a polyphonic song, in which God is the first soloist, the one who intones the melody of our existence. We sing for ourselves. But others also sing for us, with their presence, their support, and their witness."

The Jesuit also offered a realistic perspective, recalling that missionary life is not always an easy path: "Sometimes, others sing poorly, casting discredit, criticism, or prejudice upon us." These dissonances, far from being a failure, become a challenge to charity. The invitation extended to each person was to harmonise the song of their own life, to restore its right melody. This teaching resonated like a balm amidst the accumulated hardships, reminding us that peace is not born from the absence of conflict, but from the ability to harmonise one's heart with that of Christ.

Through teachings, spiritual sharing, and personal prayer, the exercises rebuilt a fabric of communion with God and among the confrères. The participants thus rediscovered that, amid the tumult of challenges facing the province of DR Congo, the song of their lives remains precious. And they emerged from the six days not only with some 'good intentions', but also with a deeply rooted certainty: if God is the composer of each person's history and that of the Institute, it is up to each of us, with humility and perseverance, to be its most faithful interpreter. The six days served not only to restore our strength; they also represented a stage in preparation for the provincial assembly, in which they met with about twenty confrères to address the most important issues in the life of the province. The whole group felt in communion with the entire Institute, thanks also to the presence of Father Luigi Codianni, Superior General, and Father Elias Sindjalim, Assistant General for Francophone Africa. (*Father Romain Tollet, mcccj*)

Provincial assembly – Facing challenges with clarity and hope

"Your presence in the various dioceses of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a living page in the history of salvation in our local Church and a testimony of fidelity to the missionary intuition of Saint Daniel Comboni: 'Save Africa with Africa'," declared Archbishop Marcel Utembi, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kisangani, on 20th April 2026, at

the opening of the provincial assembly of the Comboni missionaries at 'Saint Joseph's House' in Kisangani.

On behalf of the bishops of the dioceses where we are present, Archbishop Utembi thanked us for our dedication and commitment, especially in peripheral areas: "In many cases, you have been pioneers of evangelisation in hard-to-reach areas... With your apostolic zeal, you have proclaimed Christ with perseverance and courage; You have given life to vibrant Christian communities, inculturating the faith in local realities."

The archbishop invited us to be proud of the richness of the Comboni charism, which drives us to commit ourselves to the formation of catechists, diocesan priests, men and women religious, and lay people, as well as to work to support the Congolese people in the fields of health, education, ecological pastoral care, etc.

Archbishop Utembi then urged us to look at current challenges with clarity and to face them with hope, in collaboration with the local clergy. Furthermore, he invited us to be 'artisans of synodality', to invest in in-depth formation (with particular pastoral attention to young people), to strengthen our presence in the peripheries, to promote justice, peace, and the protection of creation, and to bear witness to authentic community life.

Finally, Archbishop Marcel wished us a fruitful provincial assembly, an opportunity to remember together, revisit the journey we've made, discern together, and open new perspectives for missionary work.

During the assembly, which concluded on Friday, 24th April, the Comboni Missionaries of the DR of Congo benefited from the guidance of Father Luigi Codianni, Superior General, and Father Elias Sindjalim, Assistant General for Francophone Africa. Their presence was a sign of unity and communion with all of us, and also of encouragement in our common mission: to proclaim the Gospel to the poorest, inspired by the charism of Saint Daniel Comboni. (*Brother Kakule Silusawa Lwanga, mccj*)

EGYPT/SUDAN

Egypt – Celebration of the post-baptismal mystagogy at the tomb of the martyrs in Alexandria

On Friday, 17th April 17 – according to the Eastern calendar, the occasion fell during Easter Week – over 150 Sudanese adults who were baptised on Holy Saturday in various parishes in Cairo went on a pilgrimage to Alexandria. They were led by Msgr. Claudio Lurati, Apostolic Vicar of Alexandria, the only Latin-rite bishop in Egypt.

During the pilgrimage, each neophyte placed the white robe they received at baptism on the altar of Saint Sabina, martyr, inside the Church of Saint Catherine, and then received from the bishop a mandate to continue their journey of faith with joy and generosity, following the example of the martyrs.

At a time when migrants face tremendous difficulties in their integration journey, this 200-km pilgrimage outside Cairo represented a powerful moment of encouragement.

Like the disciples of Emmaus, we know we are not alone on this journey.

Lebanon – Scholastics renew their vows

Taking advantage of the temporary ceasefire, on 25th April, the feast of St. Mark the Evangelist, the seven Comboni scholastics of the Beirut community renewed their vows in the presence of the Provincial of Egypt-Sudan, Father Diego Dalle Carbonare.

Life in Lebanon seems to be resuming after weeks of tension, with the implementation of a curfew that – we hope – will bring an end to the bombings, which have been particularly heavy in the south of the capital and the country.

Five of the seven scholastics who renewed their vows are completing their theological studies. We accompany them with our prayers and friendship, as some prepare for missionary service, others for perpetual vows. May the Lord bless their upcoming missionary assignments with peace, and make them missionaries of peace and reconciliation in the province of Egypt-Sudan and throughout the world.

ETHIOPIA

Annual assembly

From 21st to 24th April, the Comboni missionaries working in Ethiopia gathered for their provincial assembly at their headquarters in Hawassa. Twenty-one confrères were present, from the eight communities that make up the Province: Gilgel Beles and Gublak (among the Gumuz), Addis Ababa (provincial headquarters and postulancy), Hawassa (missionary and vocations promotion centre), Daye (among the Sidama), and Qillenso and Haro Wato (in the Guji territory). Only two were absent.

Two special guests were present: Brother Alberto Lamana, general councillor who ‘accompanies’ the English-speaking African provinces and Mozambique, and Father Franck Mandozi, from the Kosti community in Sudan, representing the Comboni Province of Egypt-Sudan.

Also present at the assembly were Msgr. Merhakristos Gabezayehu, Apostolic Vicar of Hawassa, who was ordained bishop in February 2025,

and Sister Weynshet Tadesse, head of the Comboni Missionary Sisters in Ethiopia. Bishop Merhakristos presided over the Eucharist on Thursday, the 23rd, bringing the work of the day to a close.

The morning of the first day was dedicated to ongoing formation. Brother Lamana presented an in-depth reflection on the missionary community in the digital age and the challenge of techno-capitalism. Among other things, he stated: “The internet is everywhere and is part of our daily lives. It could have a negative impact on community life and the quality of the mission we carry out.” His presentation was followed by group discussions on the use of the internet by missionaries, the possibility of a digital mission, the opportunities and risks it entails, and best practices in this area. After the plenary session, Brother Lamana presented a second presentation on how the internet works and how it should be used safely and correctly.

In the afternoon, Father Asfaha Yohannes, provincial superior, presented the report on the state of the province, offering an optimistic outlook. The province is growing in terms of local vocations, thanks to new missionaries assigned to it by the general council. From a personnel perspective, Ethiopia is a relatively young and international province. Father Asfaha emphasised that “the provincial assembly is a great opportunity to listen to the Holy Spirit and to listen to one another.” The day’s work concluded with the Eucharist, presided over by Father Chávez Ixchacchal Mynor Rolando, a Guatemalan, one of the young confrères who recently arrived. Over the next two days, participants evaluated the implementation of the *2023-2028 Six-Year Plan* (we are now halfway through). Each community studied the provincial guideline document, and the reflections were then shared and summarised according to the three areas to which they belong. On Friday the 24th, the final morning of the provincial assembly, participants discussed the proposal to unite the Comboni Province of Ethiopia with the circumscriptions of Egypt-Sudan and Eritrea.

The provincial superior presided over the concluding Eucharist, during which two brothers – Mihretu Tundedo Lintamo and Marius Baïssa Atakpa – and two scholastics – Biruk Girma Ababa Haileyesus and Asmare Gawo Gebre – renewed their temporary vows.

ITALY

Padua – ‘In the wake of *Laudato si’*’ – Embracing Limits (Second Meeting) – ‘Climate Change and Water Resources’

The meeting held at the Comboni Missionaries’ house in Padua, part of the third year of the ‘In the wake of *Laudato si’*’ programme, addressed the impact of climate change on water resources, offering a

reflection that combines scientific, ethical, and operational dimensions. The series of meetings, launched in previous years with the aim of rethinking the concept of well-being, now focuses on 'accepting limits' as a necessary perspective for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. (For the first meeting, held on 6th February 6, on the theme 'Accepting Limits – Food and its Waste' – see FC 849, March 2026, pp. 3-5).

The evening of this second meeting (March 20, 2026) was introduced by Father Gaetano Montesor, who drew attention to the universal value of water, invoking both an African proverb and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'*. In the latter, water is recognised as a fundamental human right and an essential condition for life, while its increasing scarcity and privatisation represent a grave injustice, especially towards the poorest populations. Reference to United Nations data—billions of people without access to drinking water and adequate sanitation—highlighted the global scale of the water crisis.

The first presentation, by **Mauro Marani** of the University of Padua, offered a scientific analysis of the phenomenon, based on historical data and climate models. Long-term observations do not show a significant increase in the frequency of droughts, but models indicate a growing intensification of extreme events. The most significant finding is the rapidity of current climate change, unprecedented in observed history. Existing infrastructure is often inadequate for these new scenarios. Consequently, the need to design interventions that maintain the level of risk unchanged, despite changing climate conditions, emerges.

Guido Zanovello, president of the Christian Union of Entrepreneurs and Managers of Padua, proposed a more practical reflection, emphasising the need to "accept the limits" of water resources through more responsible and informed use. Due to climate change, rainfall is often excessive and destructive, while it is scarce precisely when it is most needed. Faced with this reality, we need to rethink resource management, promoting an ethical culture of water and adopting existing technical solutions. These include: protecting aquifers, collecting and reusing rainwater, improving water networks, and reusing wastewater. Zanovello also highlighted the high level of water waste in Italy and the poor enforcement of existing regulations, indicating the need for more effective and binding policies. Water, a limited public good, must be recognised as a pillar of economic and social development.

The closing remarks by **Sofia Belardinelli**, a postdoctoral researcher at the Polytechnic University of Milan, broadened the perspective, offering an ethical reflection on the meaning of water as a common good. Criticising the reduction of all values to economic dimensions, she questioned the '*homo oeconomicus*' model and emphasised the importance of non-utilitarian, social, and relational values. The water crisis highlights profound inequalities: between the global North and South, between those with access to resources and those excluded, and between those who make decisions and those who suffer the consequences. From this perspective, water is not just a resource, but a condition for life and a global common good, requiring shared responsibility and respect for ecological limits.

In summary, the meeting demonstrated how the water crisis is not merely a technical issue, but a knot that intertwines environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Rethinking the relationship with water also means reviewing development models and criteria of justice, recognising that not everything can be reduced to a commodity and that sustainability requires a profound cultural shift. (*Father Gaetano Montresor, mccj*)

Padua – 'In the wake of *Laudato si'*' – Embracing limitations (3rd meeting) – 'Energy consumption and the impact of digital technology'

The meeting, held on 17th April 2026, at the Comboni Missionaries in Padua, addressed the topic of energy consumption and the impact of digital technology, bringing together three complementary perspectives: scientific, experiential, and value-based. The shared goal was to understand how energy and technological innovation can be directed toward the common good, while being aware of environmental and social limitations.

Father Gaetano Montresor introduced the evening, recalling the underlying theme of the entire cycle: embracing limitations not as obstacles, but as resources to be embraced with responsibility and freedom. Reference to Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si'* provided the inspiring framework: the need for an urgent energy transition, overcoming dependence on fossil fuels, and promoting an integral ecology that combines environmental protection and social justice. The challenge is not only technological, but profoundly cultural: it is necessary to rethink development models, lifestyles, and decision-making criteria.

Professor **Marco Zanetti** of the University of Padua offered a scientific analysis of the relationship between artificial intelligence and energy consumption. AI relies on enormous amounts of data, sophisticated

algorithms, and growing computing power, which requires massive infrastructure such as *data centres*. The model training process is particularly energy-intensive, while daily use, while less costly per individual operation, is multiplying on a global scale. Currently, AI energy consumption represents approximately 1% of global production, with a significant portion lost as heat. The rapid expansion of applications and users means this impact is set to grow. While not yet out of control, the phenomenon requires attention and timely intervention: development of more efficient technologies, less energy-intensive models, infrastructure powered by renewable sources, and the integration of AI into emissions reduction policies. AI, now indispensable, also raises economic and geopolitical implications, making sustainable management of its development even more urgent.

Giulia Lorenzato (Infocamere) presented a concrete example of good practice, illustrating the interventions implemented by the Infocamere group to reduce energy consumption at its offices, particularly in Padua. The actions undertaken involved both improving building efficiency and optimising the organisation of spaces and technological infrastructure. The introduction of renewable energy sources and the improvement of heating and cooling systems have produced significant results, demonstrating that it is possible to combine environmental sustainability and cost-effectiveness. This experiential approach highlighted how existing solutions can be successfully implemented, making a concrete contribution to reducing climate impact.

Stefano Nassuato, from the University of Padua, proposed a broader and more value-based approach, interpreting the climate crisis as a question of justice. Indeed, the energy transition is not just about reducing emissions, but also about the equitable distribution of costs, benefits, and impacts. The consequences of climate change hit the most vulnerable groups the hardest, while the economic benefits of the energy system tend to be concentrated in a few. This requires a new model that integrates equity, participation, and inclusion through rules and tools capable of redistributing resources and opportunities.

The comparison between fossil fuel and renewable energy models reveals a structural shift: while the former is based on large, centralised plants and a continuous flow of fuels, the latter values local, free resources, favouring distributed production and greater territorial autonomy. Furthermore, renewable energy can be implemented more rapidly than other solutions, better responding to the climate emergency. In this context, energy communities are particularly important, allowing citizens and businesses to become key players in energy production and management.

In summary, the meeting highlighted how the energy and digital challenge require an integrated approach capable of combining technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Embracing limitations means directing development toward more balanced and inclusive forms, in which progress is measured not only in terms of efficiency or growth, but also in terms of responsibility toward our "common home" and future generations. (*Laudato Si' Community – Padua, and the Colibri Working Group*)

Veneto Region Comboni Relatives Day in Padua

On Sunday, 19th April 2026, the Comboni community of Padua joyfully enjoyed a moment of reunion with the families of several confrères from the Veneto region, after a two-year hiatus due to renovations to the house. The renovated facility has been significantly repurposed to accommodate university students on scholarships, as a concrete sign of attention to the needs of the city and the lives of young people.

Approximately eighty people attended the Day, which was marked by a family atmosphere, serenity, and gratitude. It included moments of welcome, sharing, a Eucharistic celebration, and a fraternal lunch.

From the beginning, it was wonderful to meet, recognise, and share the lives of their Comboni family members, present in Italy and in various missions around the world.

During the time of sharing, led by Father Gaetano Montresor, confrères who have marked the history of the Padua community were remembered, some of whom have already returned to the home of the Father, others are engaged in missionary service in various countries. The impressive richness of a broad missionary family, uniting the Veneto Region with many peoples and Churches around the world, emerged.

Father Pietro Ciuciulla, Provincial Superior of Italy, expressed gratitude to the families for their support and closeness to the vocation of their loved ones, recalling how the missionary call often involves the entire family in a single journey of faith. He then presented the current situation of the Italian province, marked by fragility and ageing, but still vibrant and generous in missionary service, especially in missionary outreach, youth ministry, the welcoming of migrants, the promotion of peace, justice, and integral ecology, in collaboration with the Church and civil society.

The Eucharistic celebration, animated by Comboni lay missionaries and presided over by Father Pietro, centred on the Gospel of the disciples of Emmaus, a sign of a journey that always invites us to rise again, to set out anew, and to recognise the Lord who accompanies us with discretion and faithfulness on each day's journey.

The day concluded with a fraternal lunch shared in simplicity and joy, where mutual service and sharing further highlighted the family spirit. The meeting left participants with a profound sense of gratitude and communion. (*Father Gaetano Montresor, mcccj*)

NAP

Provincial assembly in Cincinnati

The Comboni Missionaries of the North American Province (NAP) gathered for their provincial assembly from 13th to 17th April at the provincial headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio. Provincial Superior Father Jorge Ochoa welcomed all members of the province and the three scholastics gathered for this important meeting. In his opening address, Father Jorge introduced the theme of the assembly: '*Rekindling the Fire of Missionary Passion*'.

Bishop Earl Kenneth Mario Fernandes of Columbus, Ohio, was the invited speaker who opened the assembly. His address was meaningfully aligned with the meeting's theme, placing it in the context of the Church's new evangelisation initiatives in the United States. Bishop Fernandes outlined the main trends, opportunities, and challenges related to the new evangelisation, a process in which the Comboni Missionaries play a fundamental role.

The assembly devoted considerable time to sharing the various pastoral activities carried out by each community in the province. Furthermore, the group work provided an opportunity for discernment on issues relevant to the life of the province and the Institute as a whole.

The presence of the Vicar General, Father David Costa Domingues, enriched the discussions and discernment on the various issues that emerged, in a spirit of communion with the Institute.

Openness to the Spirit was also emphasised in the journey the Institute is undertaking toward the unification of the circumscriptions, with the aim of re-qualifying our missionary service in the Spirit of the Risen Christ and the passion of Saint Daniel Comboni.

Regarding ongoing formation, a reflection was held on the theme: *Formation on Limits in Relationships with Adults, Social Media, and Electronic Communications in 2026*. Paola Muñoz, a risk consultant at *Præsidium* – a nonprofit organisation dedicated to the welfare of minors – and a long-time advocate for abuse prevention, highlighted the various areas requiring attention to prevent abuse in the contexts in which we live and carry out our ministry.

We were also honoured by the visit of Most Rev. Raphael P'Mony Wokorach, MCCJ, Archbishop of Gulu, Uganda, to whom we extend our most sincere thanks. His brief visit gave us the opportunity to connect with other missionary situations in Uganda.

SOUTH AFRICA

Renewal of religious vows in Pietermaritzburg

On Saturday, 25th April, the 15 scholastics of Pietermaritzburg renewed their consecration to God for the mission in the presence of Father John Baptist Keraryo Opargiw, Provincial Superior of South Africa. Four of them were ordained to the ministry of lector and three to that of acolyte. It was a lively and colourful celebration, in which the Comboni community of Pietermaritzburg joined together with some parishioners, friends, and religious from neighbouring communities.

The ceremony was the culmination of a very intense week spent in the scholasticate, marked by the canonical visitations of the two provincial superiors: Father Andrew Bwalya, of the Malawi/Zambia Province, and Father John Baptist of South Africa.

Father John Baptist led a day of spiritual retreat on the theme "Our Consecrated Life Today – Challenges and Opportunities," focusing on the beauty and meaning of consecrated life and our identification with it as an authentic call to missionary discipleship. He also warned against the clericalism present among some scholastics, who consider religious profession merely a transitory and non-essential phase, awaiting the 'true goal': priestly ordination. In his homily, he explored what he called "the divine boldness of the missionary mandate" – "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel" – a mission entrusted with confidence to a few fragile disciples and, today, to us too. He finally encouraged all participants to commit themselves to being men of prayer, with a deep love for the Word of God and the Eucharist.

During the week, the entire scholasticate community also participated in academic conferences at St. Joseph's Theological Institute in Cedara, on highly relevant issues, including: 'Faith in Action: The Church's Response to Social Crises in Africa'; 'The Church as a Sign of Hope: Faith's Responses to Violence and Inequality in African Townships'; 'Witchcraft in Africa: A Theological Imagery of Its Liberation'; 'Artificial Intelligence and Faith in Action'.

The week was truly a fruitful celebration of the Comboni charism, of consecration to God for mission and ministry in the Church, as well as a time of profound theological formation. (*Father John Baptist Keraryo Opargiw, MCCJ*)

IN PACE CHRISTI

FATHER GUIDO OLIANA (22.05.1951 – 19.11.2025)

Guido Oliana was born in Roncone (Trento) on 22nd May 1951, to Tobia and Matilde Rizzonelli. After primary school in the village, he entered the Apostolic School of Trento and continued his studies in Padua and Carraia, distinguishing himself everywhere for his lively intelligence. He graduated from the 'Barbarigo' High School in Padua in 1970 and, in the same year, began his postulancy in Florence, where he attended the first two theology courses (1970-1972) at the Florentine Theological Institute.

In September 1972, he entered Venegono Superiore to begin his two-year novitiate. On 5th May 1974, he took his first religious vows. He was then assigned to the international scholasticate in Kampala, Uganda, after spending a period in London studying English. In Uganda, he distinguished himself for his commitment to study and his ability to integrate into the local context, even mastering Luganda, the language of the Baganda.

On 28th April 1977, Guido made his perpetual profession in the presence of Father Angelo Biancalana, then regional superior of Uganda, and on May 22, he was ordained a deacon in the Cathedral of Rubaga-Kampala by Cardinal Emanuel Kiwanuka Nsubuga. In dialogue with Father Tarcisio Agostoni, superior general, he obtained permission to be assigned to the Uganda region for his first missionary service.

On 26th June 1978, he was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of Trento by Archbishop Alessandro Maria Gottardi.

Uganda – He immediately returned to Uganda and was assigned to the mission in Kassala, where he remained until 1981. Those were intense and formative years, marked by a demanding apostolate in a large parish with numerous chapels scattered throughout the area. In that context, Guido also experienced the tensions typical of a young missionary eager for renewal, confronting a more traditional pastoral style. This period already revealed some of his personality traits: a critical spirit, a desire to delve deeper into evangelisation, and a passion for new forms of proclamation. At the same time, he demonstrated a capacity for dialogue and obedience, even when this involved personal hardship.

On the occasion of the centenary of the death of Daniele Comboni (1981), Father Guido composed a musical operetta, with the participation of many people—adults, children, and boys and girls from the Kassala school and

the neighbouring parish. Some of the songs were sung for years throughout Uganda.

Licentiate and doctorate – Shortly thereafter, Father Guido was recalled to Italy to pursue specialised studies in liturgy at the Pontifical Institute of Saint Anselm in Rome. He devoted himself to his studies with great dedication, earning his licentiate in 1984 and his doctorate in 1986, both with honours. His theological reflection focused on the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ, already demonstrating the speculative depth that would characterise his entire life.

That same year, he was assigned to the United States, to the international scholasticate in Chicago, as second formator (the first formator and superior of the community was Father Campdepadrós Domingo). In 1989, he enrolled at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, pursuing a Master's degree in theology, which he received on 3rd June 1990.

On 21st June 1990, a letter from Father Pierli, Superior General, appointed Father Guido as first formator of the scholasticate, replacing Father Domingo, who had been assigned to the parishes of St. Donatus and Seven Holy Founders on Blue Island, in the Diocese of Chicago, Illinois. In November, Father Mengheseab Tesfamariam arrived as second formator.

Both Father Guido and the newcomer were gifted with sharp minds and clear ideas... which did not always align. In this service, Father Guido combined academic competence and a passion for education, despite experiencing moments of difficulty in relationships and in managing the formation community. With great honesty and a sense of responsibility, he himself requested a change, expressing his willingness to take on new roles.

Again in Uganda – In 1994, he returned to Uganda, where he served as rector of the minor seminary in Moroto. He was subsequently elected Provincial Superior of Uganda for two terms (1998-2004), during a period of significant transformation of the Comboni presence, which was increasingly oriented towards an international and African dimension. His leadership was marked by clarity, vision, and the ability to accompany change.

In 2005, while in Italy for treatment for a serious lymphatic system disease, he continued his intellectual pursuits and enrolled at the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy (GTIS, Milan section), pursuing a degree in Theology.

Kenya – In March 2006, he was assigned to the province of Kenya as a teacher at Tangaza College (where he soon became prefect of studies) and at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). Here, too, he distinguished himself for his academic integrity and dedication to education.

After several years, marked by health problems, in April 2011, he resigned as prefect of studies at Tangaza College and returned to Italy for medical tests and medical. At the end of the year, he graduated in theology from GTIS with honours and accepted a new missionary challenge in the newly formed state of South Sudan, joining the educational project of the young local Church.

South Sudan – In Juba, he was intensely involved in teaching in the philosophical and theological seminaries, taking on a considerable workload. He taught numerous disciplines—from liturgy to systematic theology—and, when necessary, took on additional courses to ensure continuity of education. This commitment reveals his extraordinary capacity for study, his passion for research, and his desire to offer students a solid and thorough education.

Alongside his teaching, he published several books on liturgy and theology, including a comprehensive work on liturgy and sacramental theology—*The Liturgy, Source and Summit of the Life of the Church: Explorations in Liturgical Liturgy*—which represents a mature synthesis of his thought. Despite the intensity of his work, he also devoted himself to the spiritual guidance of his students, demonstrating a focus on integral personal growth.

Return to Italy – In his final years in Juba, he experienced fatigue and health limitations, which forced him to return to Italy in 2024. After a brief recovery, he offered his services for missionary outreach in the Trento community, continuing to passionately share his experiences, especially regarding the difficult situation in South Sudan.

In October 2025, he was admitted to the Trento hospital due to his worsening health. He was then transferred to the 'Brother Alfredo Fiorini' Centre in Castel d'Azzano, where he spent the last days of his life, marked by a profound inner trial. Accustomed to an intense and constantly controlled life, he had to confront his fragility and dependence on others. This phase represented a decisive transition for him; one he experienced with hardship but also with trusting abandonment. He died on 19th November 2025.

On the morning of the 22nd, his funeral was held in the Centre Chapel. In his homily, the Centre superior, Father Giovanni Munari, captured the significance of this final stretch of his journey, emphasising how his life had

been a constant dialogue with the Lord: not so much based on his accomplished works, numerous and significant as they are, but rather on his personal relationship with Christ. Precisely in the experience of weakness, Guido was called to live his *sequela* in a new way, allowing himself to be led where he would not have wished to go.

Servant of the Gospel right to the end

Father Guido was a missionary of great intelligence, passion, and depth. A man of rigorous study and a demanding teacher, he educated generations of students, transmitting not only knowledge but also a passion for research and a desire to delve deeper into their faith. His critical spirit and inner freedom sometimes led to confrontations and tensions, but always with sincerity and a sense of responsibility.

His missionary life, spent in Africa, Europe, and America, testifies to a constant dedication to the Gospel and to the formation of the Church, particularly through the education of future priests and missionaries. In recent years, the trials of illness revealed a further aspect of his faith: the ability to trust, learning to be guided.

After the funeral held in Castel d’Azzano, his body was returned to Roncone, where he received the final farewell of his community and family. He now rests in his home parish, next to his loved ones.

We remember a passionate, demanding, and deeply dedicated confrère who sought to serve the Lord with all his energy, right to the end. (*Father Franco Moretti*)

FATHER TESFAZION MERKE ZEMICHAEL (01.12.1952 – 22.12.2025)

Father Merke was born on 1st December 1952, in Bab Gengheren, Keren province, in the Apostolic Vicariate of Asmara, Eritrea, into a deeply esteemed Christian family. His mother was Ameteldet Babana Amine and his father Zemichael Tesfazion. Three days later, the child was baptised in the parish of Kidanemhret in Bab Gengheren.

After receiving a solid human and Christian education, at the age of 13, in 1966, Merke entered the minor seminary (then called the "Apostolic School") of the Comboni Missionaries in Decamerè. Merke was one of the 53 'little apostles' (*apostolini*) there. He still didn't know exactly what he intended to become. A few years later, he wrote in a note: "I entered that seminary with the sole desire to serve the Kingdom of God." Slowly, however, reading and listening to stories about the missions and about St. Daniel Comboni, "the desire to become a Comboni missionary clearly blossomed in me and has only grown since then."

Tragedies and sufferings – In 1967, a year after he entered the seminary, his village was razed by order of Emperor Haile Selassie, who was eager to quell the Eritrean independence movement.

The situation in Eritrea went from bad to worse. In 1970, Merke's father, while going to the market to sell some fruit and vegetables, was arrested, beaten, and murdered by Ethiopian soldiers simply for being Eritrean. Years later – already a student at the scholasticate in Kampala, Uganda – he would return to these two horrific events in his written request for perpetual vows and priestly ordination: "The massacre in my home village and the killing of my father affected me deeply, leaving an indelible mark on me and allowing me to experience firsthand the meaning of suffering and the presence of God in those who suffer. In other words, I found myself immersed in the mystery of suffering."

Formation – Merke completed secondary school at Comboni College in Asmara, and also began philosophy studies at Villaggio Genio (due to the war, he was forced to continue his studies in Uganda). On 16th August 1976, he entered the novitiate in Fullasa, in the diocese of Hawassa. At the end of the two-year course, his novice master, Father Mansueto Zorzato, wrote of him: "Merke has a good and conciliatory character, inclined to action rather than speculation... At times, he seems influenced by intelligent personalities stronger than himself." Those who knew him, however, testify that Merke was a person who never deviated from his profound interests. He himself admitted that his studies were somewhat burdensome, mainly due to the lack of an adequate methodology, but he trusted in God's mercy more than in his own intellectual abilities – a clear sign of profound wisdom.

On 25th April 1978, Father Mansueto delivered a letter to Merke. It read: "Before you leave the novitiate, I feel obliged to thank you for the trust and friendship you have placed in me. I have noticed in you a healthy tendency toward trust and optimism, and a clear ability to lift hearts with joy. This tendency, cultivated and made a virtue, helps you do good because you are open to everyone, ready to welcome them with kindness. You are also optimistic and do not give up in the face of difficulties: you always have hope. [...] Thank the Lord who called you to live in community. The presence of confrères is a powerful help to you in continual renewal. I accompany you with my prayers that you may become a holy missionary."

On 3rd May 1978, Merke made his first religious profession in the presence of Father Lorenzo Ceresoli, regional superior. For his theological studies, he was assigned to the international scholasticate in Kampala, where he attended theology courses at St. Mary's National Major

Seminary in Ggaba, obtaining a diploma in theological and pastoral studies in April 1982.

On 3rd May 1981, he made his perpetual religious profession. On 11th October of the same year, he was ordained a deacon in the parish church of Mbuya by Bishop Giovanni Battista Cesana, MCCJ, Bishop Emeritus of Gulu. On 16th May 1982, he was ordained a priest in Asmara.

Decamerè – Father Merke's first commitment was teaching at the Decamerè seminary. He remained there until December 1988, initially as a professor; from 1984, also as local bursar.

At the end of 1982, the Addis Ababa government launched a massive military attack, dubbed the 'Red Star Campaign', in an attempt to crush the Eritrean 'rebels'. All of this shook Father Merke's heart. Once again, he was struck by numerous losses. In 1983, his village was again reduced to ashes by Ethiopian soldiers. His entire family and almost all his relatives had to flee to the nearby town of Keren, where they were forced to live in the open. Father Merke went to visit them and found them in a pitiful state. And what did he do? Humbly, he simply sat with them, listened to them, consoled them, and encouraged them to resist. He stayed with them for a few days, then returned to Decamerè with a heavy heart. This writer recalls the many times he met him. He always told me he could do nothing but pray to the Holy Spirit to grant him the consolation that only He can give, and to help him forgive. He said, "My father was the family's sole breadwinner. After his death, my family lived in abject poverty. Despite the many sufferings, my faith and that of my loved ones only grew. What else could they do?"

Every time we spoke about the war or the Ethiopian soldiers, his wound – never fully healed – would bleed again. Over and over again, he confided in me that he was afraid. Yet, despite his pain, Father Merke was known by all for his joy, his positive attitude, his welcome, and his enthusiasm. Whenever he could, he went to visit the displaced: he knew how to be close to those who were suffering. Only saints know how to be at peace and radiate joy in the midst of excruciating pain. After venting his feelings, he invariably repeated: "I'd rather suffer a thousand times in silence than hurt anyone even once."

Uganda – On 16th June 1988, the Superior General, Father Francesco Pierli, sent him a letter of assignment to the Province of Uganda effective from 1st January 1989. He clarified: "After your initial period of service in Uganda, you will attend a specialisation course (possibly lasting two years) for seminarian formators."

In October 1988, Father Merke travelled to London for a three-month introductory course to the mission. In December, he returned to Ethiopia for a brief visit to his family, to whom he bid farewell with a heavy heart, especially his mother. The heaviness in his heart was also due to the fact that, at this time, he was already experiencing serious health problems: doctors diagnosed him with a severe form of diabetes, which would accompany him until his death.

In January 1989, he flew to Kampala. The provincial superior assigned him to the mission of Kanawat, in the Diocese of Moroto, in the northeastern Karamoja region, first as parish priest, then as superior of the local community. In May 1991, part of the territory of the Diocese of Moroto was detached and erected as the Diocese of Kotido, assigned to Msgr. Denis Kiwanuka Lote, appointed in May and ordained in August. Shortly thereafter, Father Merke was appointed vicar general. He learned the local language very well and was greatly loved and respected by the people. Speaking of languages: Father Merke eventually spoke nine. The list is astonishing: Amharic, Bilen, Gheez, English, Italian, Karimojong, Kunama, Spanish, Tigrinya; and he also understood Luganda well.

Specialisation and return to Ethiopia – In October 1997, he moved to Lambton, a residential suburb in the centre of Germinston, South Africa, for the Comboni Year of Ongoing Formation. From July 1998 to August 1999, he was in Rome. He resided at the Generalate but attended a course for seminary formators.

The General Council gave him a letter assigning him to the Province of Ethiopia, proposing that he become novice master. Recognising his limitations, Father Merke replied: “Don’t ask me this. I don’t consider myself suited for such an important task. Moreover, at present, I feel ‘spiritually empty and physically tired.’” The final decision was left to the Provincial of Ethiopia, who assigned him to the postulancy in Asmara, initially as the seminary’s treasurer, then as a formator of postulants.

In October 2008, he was assigned to the mission of Fode, in the Diocese of Barentu. In 2009, he moved to the mission of Delle, also in the diocese of Barentu, among the Kunama ethnic group, where he engaged in the apostolate of first evangelisation. On 1st January 2011, he was appointed counsellor to the Eritrean delegation.

In Italy for treatment – Meanwhile, his diabetes began to cause him serious problems. From December 2011 to the end of January 2012, he was hospitalised in Asmara hospital for the amputation of his right leg, 15 centimetres below the knee. In June 2012, he was transferred to Milan,

Italy, to the Father Giuseppe Ambrosoli Centre for sick confrères for specific treatment and to receive a temporary prosthesis for initial rehabilitation, followed by a permanent prosthesis. He remained at the Milan centre for ten long years. He returned home once for a vacation, which he spent with his family.

Thanks to his great ability to connect with people, he developed deep friendships in the large Lombard metropolis, especially among the large Eritrean community. In June 2021, he received news of the death of his mother, Ameteledet Amine. In August 2022, he was transferred to the 'Fratel Alberto Fiorini' centre for sick confrères in Castel d'Azzano (Verona). A few days later, he received news of the death of his sister, Akiar. I visited him several times, both in Milan and in Castel d'Azzano. Despite his terrible physical suffering, I always found him serene and enthusiastic. His eyes lit up when I told him that he was remembered by all 'his' seminarians – now professed brothers or priests – for the service he performed in the postulancy and for the joy he radiated. I brought him greetings and prayers from the people of the parishes of Sesah, near Decamerè, Fode, and Delle, and I said, "They asked me to tell you that they remember you for the exemplary nature of your service."

The last time I visited him, I jokingly said, "Merke, you don't call me like you used to. Why? I could stop calling you too." He replied, "No, you will never stop calling me and coming to visit me, because you are my brother." Oh yes, Merke was truly a brother: humble, joyful, serene, enthusiastic, and helpful.

After much suffering, on 22nd December 2025, Father Merke returned to the home of the Father. On the 27th, the funeral took place, presided over by Bishop Abune Kidane Yabio of the diocese of Keren, where Father Merke's family still lives. Concelebrating were about twenty priests from Eritrea and other communities. Then the body was taken to the monumental cemetery of Verona for burial in the area reserved for Comboni missionaries. (*Father Alazar Abraha, MCC, and FM*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHER: David Antonio, of Father David Octavio Aguilar Guzmán (BR)

THE MOTHER: Maria Ribeiro, of Brother José Eduardo Macedo de Freitas (P/U)

THE SISTERS: Lina, of Father Marillo Spagnolo (I); Anna, of Father Maneschg Johann (DSP); Maria Madalena, of Father Gregório Rodrigues dos Santos (P)

THE COMBONI SISTERS: Sr. M. Antonia Hailé Solomon (I); Sr. Frizzo Teresa (I); Sr. Espinosa González M. Carmen (I); Sr. Biasia Silvana (I); Sr. Comberlato M. Lucia (I)