

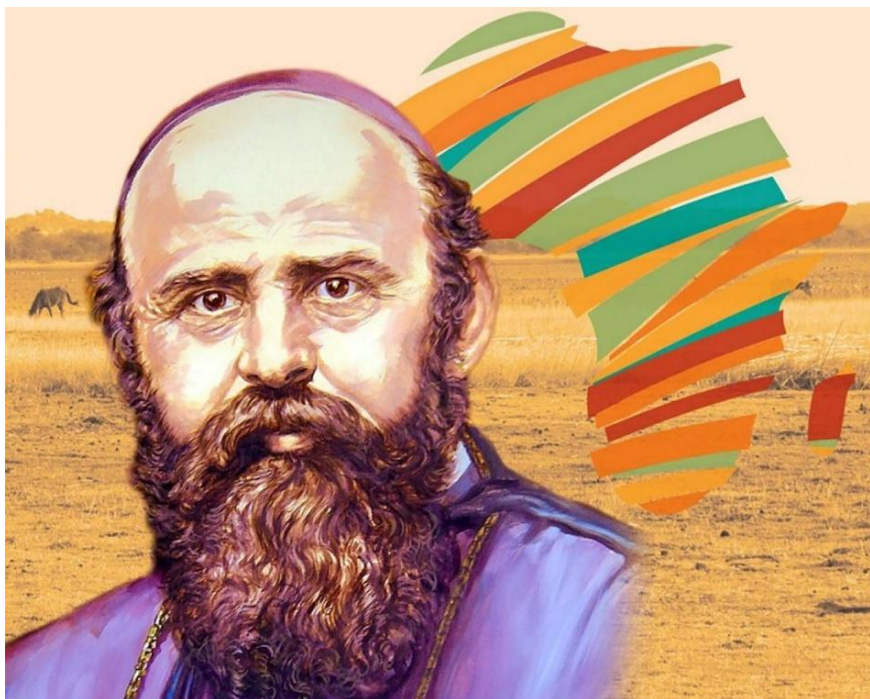
FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

855

October 2026

10 OCTOBER 2026 SOLEMNITY OF SAINT DANIEL COMBONI



DREAMING OF THE NEW

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

Perpetual professions

Sc. Nteyamba Ilundu Étienne /CN)	Madrid	05-09-2026
Sc. Saúl Arnaldo Bazo (MO)	Madrid	05-09-2026
Sc. Asmare Gawo Gebre (ET)	Qillenso/ET	18-09-2026
Sc. Biruk Girma Ababa Haileyesus (ET)	Qillenso/ET	18-09-2026

Ordinations

Fidélío Artu (MO/SS)	Carapira	23-05-2026
Jorge Carlos Joaquim Máquina (MO/RCA)	Mwanza	30-05-2026
Gama Felix Blessings (MZ/EGSD)	Blantyre	22-08-2026

Confrères who have definitively left the Institute – 2026

Fr. Kabuayi Tshibi Charles	13/01/2026	PE
Bro. Kasusi Apele Antoine	13/02/2026	CN
Sc. Martínez Cervantes Eusebio	24/03/2026	M
Sc. Aguehunde Marc Aurel Mindessè	24/03/2026	TGB
Sc. Agbokabulo Bayaa Jacques	24/03/2026	CN
Sc. Amade Queliso	30/04/2026	MO
Bro. Umir James Ukongo Jenesio	01/05/2026	SS
Sc. Millan Moses Juma	30/04/2026	KE
Sc. Zindikirani Cornelius Jelenimo	13/05/2026	MZ
Fr. Bonandi Arturo	24/05/2026	I
Sc. Kambale Musumba Oscar	23/06/2026	CN
Sc. Adriano Agostino Lapuia	26/06/2026	MO
Bro. Ruch Siegfried	28/07/2026	DSP
Bro. Rodriguez Fayad Jorge Arturo	11/08/2026	M

This table lists the names of professed confrères who have definitively left the Institute from the beginning of 2026 to the present. From now on, every issue of *Familia Comboniana* will report any definitive separations from the Institute.

Holy Redeemer Guild

October	01 – 07 RCA	08 – 15 TCH	16 – 31 RSA
November	01 – 15 SS	16 – 30 T	

Prayer intentions

October

We pray that all members of the Comboni Family, sustained by the Holy Spirit and inspired by Saint Daniel Comboni, may proclaim the Gospel

with joy and be signs of light, hope, and tenderness among the peoples to whom they are sent. *Lord, hear us.*

November

As we celebrate this month the 10th World Day of the Poor, we pray that those with responsibilities in nations may restore justice to the poor and help them rediscover dignity and hope. *Lord, hear us.*

Comboni liturgical calendar

OCTOBER

1	Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, virgin and doctor of the Church, <i>Patroness of the missions</i>	feast
10	Saint Daniel Comboni, bishop, <i>Founder of the Comboni Family</i>	solemnity
20	Bl. David Okelo and Bl. Gildo Irwa, martyrs	opt. mem.

NOVEMBER

1	Commemoration of deceased confrères, relatives and benefactors	date to be fixed each year
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Significant anniversaries

OCTOBER

12	Our Lady of Aparecida	Brazil
16	Saint Margarte Mary Alacoque, virgin	general
19	Saints John di Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, priests and companions, martyrs	NAP (USA and Canada)

NOVEMBRE

21	Our Lady of Quinche	Ecuador
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Publications

Tonino Falaguasta Nyabenda, *Bibbia: una parola per noi. Breve introduzione alla Bibbia*, Missionari Comboniani, Verona, luglio 2026, 4ª edizione, pp. 80 – This booklet is a useful tool for getting to know Sacred Scripture. “Every Christian,” writes Father Salvatore Marrone—Superior of the Motherhouse in Verona—in the preface, “must be initiated into reading and meditating on the Bible. It is only in this ‘Library’ that we can encounter Christ and discover the path to salvation and happiness.”

Tonino Falaguasta Nyabenda, *Missionari Comboniani Veronesi* / 2, Verona, marzo 2026, pp. 112. In this booklet, Father Tonino presents a list of the 37 Comboni missionaries from Verona who were still alive on 1st January 2026 (including their birthplaces and current residence, as well as the countries where they are still engaged in mission work), along with very brief obituaries for 161 deceased Comboni missionaries from Verona. Why remember them? “Because they were outstanding for who they were and for what they accomplished in their missionary lives, embodying the charism of our Holy Founder.”

CURIA

16 Comboni bishops in Rome for their biennial meeting

On 16th September, sixteen of the 23 Comboni bishops serving in Africa and Latin America gathered in Rome at the General House for a week of formation, prayer, and sharing. Present were Bishops Juan José Aguirre Muñoz, António Manuel Bogaio Constantino, Christian Carlassare, Victor-Hugo Castillo Matarrita, Dominic Eibu, Giuseppe Filippi, Giuseppe Franzelli, Damiano Giulio Guzzetti, Claudio Lurati, Matthew Remijio Adam Gbitiku, Menghesteab Tesfamariam, Léonard Ndjadi Ndjate, Odelir José Magri, Guerrino Perin, Jesús Ruiz Molina, and Raphael P'Mony Wokorach.

Bishop Claudio Lurati, Apostolic Vicar of Alexandria of Egypt and coordinator of the Union of Comboni Bishops, explained that the meeting would “consist of a week dedicated to sharing experiences regarding episcopal ministry, but it will also be an opportunity to catch up on the journey of the Comboni Institutes and the Church.”

Father Elias Sindjalim Essognimam, Assistant General, welcomed the participants on behalf of the General Council. “Your presence among us is a cause for great gratitude,” he emphasised, “and it reminds us that, beyond the specific service the Church has entrusted to you, your bond with the Institute and the communion we share remain alive and profound. Indeed, you are one of the faces of our shared Comboni charism.” This was followed by a reflection on the mission and ministry of Comboni bishops – guided by Father David Glenday – in light of the encyclicals *Dilexit nos* and *Dilexi te*. At 12:00 PM, the Eucharist was celebrated, presided over by Msgr. Menghesteab Tesfamariam, Archbishop of Asmara (Eritrea), who was marking the 25th anniversary of his episcopal ordination that very day.

Throughout the week, the bishops met with representatives of the Comboni Institutes, engaged in moments of episcopal and Comboni

spirituality, and had opportunities to delve into topics related to their ministry.

Two main contributions were offered by external experts. On the morning of 17th September, Msgr. Krzysztof Józef Nykiel, of the Apostolic Penitentiary, presented the role of bishops in relation to priests – with particular reference to the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation – and discussed various pastoral, spiritual, and canonical aspects.

On the morning of September 18, Father Giuseppe Crea addressed the issue of stress and burnout in episcopal service, emphasising the importance of active listening in dialogue with priests and of “self-care” as essential dimensions of healthy leadership.

The program also included visits and moments of pilgrimage. The bishops visited the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, where they met with the Community of Sant’Egidio, and undertook a pilgrimage to Franciscan sites in the Rieti Valley, visiting the friaries of Greccio and Fonte Colombo as well as the Sanctuary of La Foresta. The program concluded with a visit to the Rieti Cathedral and a meeting with the local bishop.

At the end of the gathering, before returning to their respective sees (starting Tuesday, 22nd September), the bishops reconfirmed Msgr. Claudio Lurati as coordinator of the Union of Comboni Bishops.

BRAZIL

Provincial Assembly and Inauguration of the Jubilee Year

Around fifty missionaries gathered from 6th to 11th September, at the provincial headquarters in São Paulo for an extraordinary provincial assembly. The gathering had two main objectives: to reflect on the Comboni mission in the current context and on the reconfiguration and merging of Comboni circumscriptions; and to officially inaugurate the Comboni Jubilee Year, marking two milestones: 75 years of Comboni presence in Brazil and the 160th anniversary of the Institute’s founding.

Attendees included nearly all members from the 14 communities of the Brazil province, the Superior General (Father Luigi Codianni), the Vicar General (Father David Domingues), and the major superiors from the Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia circumscriptions.

► **‘Going beyond’ in mission** – Provincial Superior Father Raimundo Rocha opened the proceedings by outlining the assembly’s goals, emphasising the importance of commemorating the Comboni presence in Brazil while simultaneously looking toward the future through the lens of present-day challenges. “We wish to reflect on our missionary presence and mission today, with the aim of making our presence and missionary

action more meaningful and consistent with the *Rule of Life*, ensuring higher-quality missionary service, and deepening our reflection on the process of unifying the circumscriptions.”

Over the course of the four days, participants reflected on the theme “The Comboni mission today and the call to go beyond,” drawing inspiration from Jesus’s invitation: “Put out into the deep” (*Luke 5:4*). The program alternated between moments of prayer, sharing, reflection, and discussion, aiming to foster a shared understanding of the challenges facing the Comboni mission and the new demands placed upon communities and missionaries.

One of the assembly’s central themes was the process of unifying the Brazil Province with the circumscriptions of Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia.

► **75 Years of Presence** – On 9th September – the liturgical memorial of Saint Peter Claver, the Institute’s patron – the assembly also inaugurated the Comboni Jubilee Year. This was marked by a Eucharistic celebration at the Santa Cruz da Reconciliação Shrine in the Caxingui neighborhood of São Paulo. Presided over by Father Raimundo, the Mass was attended by members of the Shrine community, Comboni Missionary Sisters, scholastics, and representatives from the São Sebastião parish in Sapopemba. The Jubilee Year will run from 10th October 2026 to 10th October 2027 — a twelve-month period celebrating 75 years of Comboni presence in Brazil (which began in 1952 with the arrival of the first group of Comboni missionaries in Vitória) and the 160th anniversary of the founding of the Comboni Missionaries Institute in Verona by Daniele Comboni on June 1, 1867. (*Father Raimundo Rocha, MCCJ*)

Towards the New South American Province

The project to unify the Comboni circumscriptions of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru is taking shape. From 16th to 19th September, the commission tasked with guiding this process met at the provincial headquarters in São Paulo.

The commission includes Fathers Raimundo Rocha and Mossi Kuami (Brazil); Father Jorge Benavides and Brother Abel Godfrey (Colombia); Fathers Nelson Mitchell and Edison Lopez (Peru); and Fathers Juan Rodríguez and Alcides Costa (Ecuador). The meeting was also attended by the Superior General, Father Luigi Codianni, and the Vicar General, Father David Domingues, who were visiting the Brazil Province.

This meeting is part of the process of reflection and discernment initiated by the Institute regarding the reconfiguration of the Comboni presence in South America. After gathering input and proposals from the various local

contexts, the commission drafted an initial version of the future *Provincial Directory*. This document, to be presented to the General Council in January 2027, aims to outline the character of the new Province, highlighting its missionary identity and the significance of the Comboni presence on the continent. Key elements under consideration include missionary priorities, areas of activity, services, and other fundamental aspects of the future provincial organisation.

The commission's work thus represents another step forward in the journey toward a new configuration of the Comboni presence in South America—the result of dialogue and contributions from the various circumscriptions. (*Father Raimundo Rocha, MCCJ*)

Father Alfonso Cigarini – A Centenarian with 70 Years of Religious Life

On 9th September, Father Alfonso celebrated the 70th anniversary of his perpetual vows. He is actually 100 years old, having been born on 7th January 1926. He was ordained a priest on 15th June 1957.

Immediately after his ordination, Father Alfonso worked in Mozambique from 1957 to 1962. From 1963 to 1976, he lived in Portugal. After spending two years in Italy, he was assigned to Brazil in 1978; he still lives there today as a resident of 'Casa Comboni' – a home for elderly and infirm missionaries – in São José do Rio Preto, in the Diocese of São José do Rio Preto, southeastern Brazil.

On the occasion of his 100th birthday, he said: "What motivates me is the presence of Jesus, who invites us to hope for a new heaven and a new earth. What I leave to the many people I have met and loved is an invitation to live a fulfilling life, striving to set a good example, loving one's neighbor, and maintaining hope for a better future." Hats off to you, Father Alfonso! (*Father Raimundo Rocha, MCCJ*)

ERITREA

Visit of Father Austine Radol Odjambo The Comboni missionaries in Eritrea are deeply grateful to the General Council for sending Father Austine, Assistant General, for an official visit. His visit, which took place from 3rd to 10th September, was a source of great joy and strong encouragement for all of us serving in the country's four communities.

Visits to Eritrea by members of the General Council are rare, primarily due to the difficulty of obtaining entry visas from the government. Thanks to his previous experience living in Eritrea for several years and his status as a Kenyan citizen, Father Austine was able to secure a three-month residence permit.

During his stay, Father Austine led a brief meeting with the confrères and had the opportunity to meet each of them personally; he managed to visit three of the four communities: the provincial headquarters and the postulancy (Asmara), the minor seminary (Decamere), and the scholasticate (Asmara). Members of the community that was not visited – those serving in the parishes of Delle and Hykota – traveled to Asmara to meet him. The confrères were particularly impressed that, despite having left Eritrea many years ago, he had not forgotten a word of Tigrinya.

Father Austine also met with the Archbishop of Asmara, Msgr. Mengh-esteab Tesfamariam, who invited him to dinner. Additionally, he celebrated the Eucharist at the Comboni Sisters' provincial house and visited other elderly sisters.

We hope that he will now share with the General Council what he saw and experienced during his visit, and that he will remind the entire Institute of our profound sense of isolation, asking all our confrères to pray for us. (*Father Gaim Haileselassie, MCCJ*)

ESPAÑA

Two sons of Africa rekindle hopes for vocations in the province

On 5th September, in the chapel of the Comboni provincial headquarters in Madrid, Nteyamba Ilundu Étienne (from the Congo) and Saúl Arnaldo Bazo (from Mozambique) made their perpetual vows in the presence of Father Miguel Ángel Llamazares, the provincial superior, who was representing the Superior General, Father Luigi Fernando Codianni.

A week later, on 12th September, the two newly professed men were ordained deacons at the Comboni parish of Virgen de las Mercedes in Granada. The celebration brought together the ordinands' families and friends, parishioners, members of the Comboni Family, and professors and students from Loyola University in Granada.

The solemn Eucharist was presided over by the Archbishop of Granada, Msgr. José María Gil Tamayo; it was concelebrated by about twenty priests and assisted by a deacon. Comboni scholastics animated the liturgy.

Representing the families of the two ordinands were Saúl's father, Ribeiro José Bazo, and his godmother, Lucrecia Venancio Mateus – who had traveled from Mozambique – as well as Étienne's uncle and cousin, Hubert Lwaramanga and Benjamín Kwepanga, arriving from Belgium and Italy, respectively.

In his homily, Msgr. José María expressed his gratitude for the presence and work of the Comboni missionaries in Spain, who are particularly known for their commitment to missionary animation, including through

the magazine *Mundo Negro*. Addressing the two ordinands, he reminded them that the path they were embarking upon “is not a career, but a service” – as the very word ‘deacon’ (meaning ‘servant’) implies. He then urged them to be “servants of the Word.” During the ordination rite, the archbishop handed the Gospel to each of them, pronouncing the words prescribed by the ritual: “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become: believe always what you proclaim, teach what you have learned in faith, and live what you teach.”

At the end of the celebration, Father Miguel Ángel—after thanking Msgr. José María and all those present—spoke about the history of the formation community in Granada, which has been recognised as an international scholasticate since 2023.

This marks a significant milestone for the Comboni Province of Spain. Perpetual professions and diaconal ordinations had been absent from its calendar of celebrations for many years: one has to go back 15 years to find the previous perpetual profession, and more than 20 years for the previous diaconal ordination.

It is no minor detail that the ones reopening this chapter of Comboni history in Spain are two young African missionaries. Étienne and Saúl arrived in Spain in 2021 and, after a year dedicated to learning Spanish, began their theology studies at Loyola University in Granada. Upon completing their studies, they chose to remain in Spain for their first missionary assignment: Étienne in Barcelona and Saúl in Madrid. Their presence—however brief—also reflects the increasingly international face of the Comboni mission. (*Father Boniface Gbama, MCCJ*)

ETHIOPIA

Mons. Tesfaye installed as Archbishop of Addis Ababa

On Sunday, 6th September 2026, Monsignor Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie – appointed Archbishop of Addis Ababa on June 12 – was installed as the new head of the Catholic Archdiocese of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during a moving liturgical celebration lasting over four hours.

The event marked a historic moment for the Catholic Church in Ethiopia and for the Archdiocese of Addis Ababa. After nearly 27 years of pastoral leadership, Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel handed over the pastoral ministry of the archdiocese to the new Archbishop, Tesfaye. Present at the Eucharistic celebration of installation were Archbishop Brian Udaigwe, Apostolic Nuncio to Ethiopia and Djibouti; numerous Ethiopian bishops, priests, and religious men and women serving in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country; as well as members of the

Comboni family, including Brother Alberto Lamana, Assistant General. Also in attendance were the head of the Orthodox Church in Addis Ababa, a representative of *L'Œuvre d'Orient*, and benefactors, family members, and friends of Monsignor Tesfaye. The theme of the handover of pastoral ministry was: "Looking back with gratitude, walking forward with hope."

► **Solemn celebration in the Ethiopian Catholic rite** – The first part of the Eucharist, celebrated according to the Ethiopian Catholic rite, was presided over by Cardinal Berhaneyesus up to the proclamation of the Gospel. The homily was delivered by the Apostolic Nuncio, who began by saying: "I have few words of advice for the new archbishop, given his already significant episcopal experience" (Msgr. Tesfaye has been a bishop since February 2025 – *ed.*). However, he urged him to keep his gaze fixed on Jesus Christ – the Good Shepherd and model for all shepherds – reminding him that Jesus did not come to liberate His people through the force of arms, as many Israelites had expected, but through love and, ultimately, through the Cross, thereby setting an example of how to lead and serve the people.

Msgr. Udaigwe continued: "A shepherd is called to *walk ahead* of the flock to show the way, *in the midst* of the flock to keep it united, and *behind* the flock so that no one is left out... *Duc in altum* ('put out into the deep') without fear."

After exhorting the faithful and the clergy to cooperate closely with their new archbishop, the Nuncio thanked the Comboni family for gifting one of its members to the Church for such a noble and important service. Following the homily, the liturgy was presided over by the new archbishop.

► **A call to renewal and hope** – In its official message of gratitude and welcome, the Curia of the Archdiocese of Addis Ababa invited the faithful to view the installation not merely as a ceremony, but as an opportunity for spiritual renewal: "May this installation and the transition of pastoral ministry truly be a renewal of our baptismal commitment—a moment for every Catholic to ask themselves: 'What is Christ asking of me today? Where is He sending me? Whom am I called to serve?' [...] May the Catholic Church in Ethiopia continue its service with confidence: grateful for the past, attentive to the present, and courageous in facing the future."

The celebration was followed by a fraternal lunch, which concluded with entertainment and cultural performances by various religious groups and other participants. Gifts were also presented to the new archbishop as a

sign of welcome and support for his new pastoral mission. (*Father Hippolyte Awoumessi Apedovi, MCCJ*)

Perpetual vows and diaconate

Scholastics Asmare Gawo Gebre and Biruk Girma Ababa Haileyesus professed their perpetual vows on 18th September, in the hands of Father Asfaha Yohannes, Provincial Superior, acting on behalf of the Superior General. The celebration, held at the Qillenso mission in the Diocese of Hawassa (southern Ethiopia), was attended by several Comboni missionaries, two religious sisters (one of whom is Asmare's sister), and a group of the faithful.

On Sunday, 20th September, at the Church of Saint Daniel Comboni in Adola, Asmare and Biruk were ordained deacons by Msgr. Merhakristos Gobezaayehu Getachew Yilma, Apostolic Vicar of Hawassa. In his homily, the bishop reminded the candidates that they had been chosen for this ministry not because they were the best, but because "they were called by God's mercy for His service."

At the end of the ceremony, Father Asfaha congratulated the newly ordained deacons and the large assembly gathered for the important occasion. He told the two deacons: "You have reached this milestone thanks to God's grace. I encourage you to continue bearing witness to the Gospel through your lives and your new ministry." The celebration concluded with a shared meal at the "Saint Daniel Comboni" Public Library.

Asmare will continue his ministry in Haro Wato, while Biruk will remain in Qillenso. (*Father Habtamu Masresha, MCCJ*)

ITALIA

Father Marco Innocenti – 25 years of priesthood among the Gumuz

On 19th September, the Montebonello community gathered in the parish church alongside about twenty local priests and several Comboni missionaries from Florence and other communities across Italy. Priests from Ethiopia and other parts of Africa were also present, all gathering around Father Marco Innocenti to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his priestly ordination. The Eucharistic celebration – animated by the parish choir and Comboni Lay Missionaries from Tuscany – served as a highlight for thanking God for the wonders He has accomplished through Father Marco's missionary service among the Gumuz people over the course of 23 years.

Father Marco began the Eucharist by thanking those present, especially his parents; they had found it difficult to let their only son leave, yet remained convinced that, in God's logic, it is by giving that one receives. He also expressed sincere gratitude to the many benefactors and supporters of his missionary work.

Father Marco chose to join his own jubilee celebration with that of Father Renzo Salvatici – his former parish priest – who was marking his 65th anniversary in the priesthood. This was a deeply meaningful gesture, highlighting priestly communion and the synodal, missionary service rendered to the People of God by all ministers. “May this Eucharist be an act of thanksgiving to God,” he said, “for the blessings He bestowed upon me by calling me to be a priest and missionary, and for what He chose to convey – through me – to you and to the *Gumuz* people, whom I have always strived to serve to the best of my ability over these past 25 years.” At the conclusion of the Eucharist, numerous messages of congratulations were read out – sent from Ethiopia, as well as from various bishops, the Superior General, and some of those present.

After Mass, the many guests continued the celebration with a fraternal meal prepared by a special parish committee. There were even fireworks! A fundraiser was also held to build a school for the poorest of the poor among the *Gumuz* people. (*Father Fernando Zolli, MCCJ*)

Brescia celebrates the prophetic memory of Mons. Franco Masserdotti

Msgr. Franco Masserdotti – who died in a tragic road accident on 17th September 2006, after being struck while cycling one Sunday afternoon along a road in Balsas, the seat of his diocese – was commemorated in Brescia on the twentieth anniversary of his passing through three separate events.

The first was a Eucharistic celebration held on 17th September, 2026, in Concesio (Brescia); it was presided over by Father Mario Andrichetto, with a homily delivered by Father Severino Perin – both of whom served as missionaries in Brazil.

The second event, held on Thursday, 18th September, was a discussion hosted at the offices of *Il Giornale di Brescia* on the theme “Prophetic Memory: The Enduring Relevance of Dom Franco Masserdotti.” Journalist Francesco Alberti engaged in conversation with Father Dario Bossi and – joining remotely – Father Mansueto Dal Maso; both men possess extensive experience in Brazil and deep insight into the life and work of Msgr. Masserdotti.

The bishop was portrayed as a brilliant, engaging, and intelligent individual, grounded in a solid theological and sociological education. A

dynamic and creative missionary in Brazil, he served as a member of the Comboni Missionaries' General Council, a formator at the Comboni scholasticate in São Paulo, and ultimately as the Bishop of Balsas.

From his days simply as "Father Franco," he was a missionary who lived among a people impoverished by injustice; even as a bishop, he continued to embody the "preferential option for the poor" – a hallmark of the Latin American Church – with great passion, often at the risk of his own life.

His was a style of presence that placed him at the forefront, in the midst of, and alongside the people, fostering relationships characterised by simplicity, empathy, and courage. It almost seems as though Msgr. Franco anticipated certain expressions that later became characteristic of Pope Francis, such as "Church going forth," "smelling of the sheep," and "Church as a field hospital."

The third event took place on Sunday, 20th September, at his home parish in Fiumicello (Brescia), where a Mass was celebrated by Father Dario Bossi, attended by about fifteen Comboni confrères.

In his homily, Father Dario highlighted the work Monsignor Franco accomplished in building the Kingdom of God – something he loved to define as the "growth of what is human." He described Franco's approach using a simple image: "When you encounter an impoverished man on a riverbank, you give him a fish to help him, but you also motivate him by giving him a fishing rod, and together you try to clean the river of whatever is polluting it."

Towards the end of the Mass, his niece Federica offered a brief reflection that beautifully captured her uncle's personality: "Dom Franco was a straightforward person who spoke to the heart and left a positive impression on those who listened to him. Possessing a deep spirituality – charismatic yet simple – he had an extraordinary gift for building relationships. He had a big heart, a youthful spirit, and a sense of humour. His life was entirely dedicated to serving the impoverished, to dialogue, and to the pursuit of justice."

After Mass, a gathering took place in the parish hall where Father Giovanni Munari—a former Comboni missionary in Brazil—spoke movingly and passionately about Monsignor Franco to a large audience. Also significant was the presence of a group of friends from Trentino who had long collaborated with Monsignor Franco and who remain committed to supporting the mission in Brazil today.

Father Munari presented the figure of 'Father' and 'Monsignor' Franco Masserdotti by focusing on four key stages of his mission:

- his time of formation;
- the first period of his mission in Brazil;

- the second period of his mission in Brazil;
- his time as Bishop Franco.

Father Franco underwent his theological training at a unique moment in the life of the Church: the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. He subsequently attended the Faculty of Sociology in Trento, amidst the intense ferment of student movements demanding more active participation in societal life, including in the realms of academia and politics. He thus experienced the stirrings of a Church seeking change and a role in the service of the world, all within a university environment marked by fierce protest. Among his fellow students were individuals who would later become founders of the Red Brigades.

During the first phase of his mission in Brazil, he shared the vision of the Conciliar Church – a vision embraced by Latin American bishops and championed by the *Pact of the Catacombs* (signed on 16th November 1965) and the Medellín Conference (1968). It was an exhilarating time filled with hope, as the guidelines set forth by the Latin American bishops were adopted: the preferential option for the poor, the development of base ecclesial communities, and the promotion of ecclesial ministries.

In the second phase of his mission in Brazil, however, Father Franco found himself in a vastly different environment. The Church appeared more cautious after the Vatican deemed certain choices made by the Latin American bishops “suspect.” Through targeted interventions, many initiatives were gradually halted, and much of the reflection that had developed over the preceding years was curtailed; Liberation Theology, too, was entering a period of decline.

Father Franco, who had always sought to maintain communion with the Church, thus found himself torn in his obedience between two vastly different visions of the Church.

He was first appointed coadjutor to Monsignor Carlesi and subsequently Bishop of Balsas. In addition to his diocesan work – characterised by a spirit of closeness to the people – he was entrusted with the role of lead bishop for pastoral care among Indigenous peoples, with whom he forged a deep bond of solidarity.

A single episode illustrates this commitment well. During the *March of the Year 2000*, organised to mark the 500th anniversary of the evangelisation of Brazil, the Indigenous community decided not to join the official event; instead, they gathered separately at a location not far from the main assembly. Dom Franco was with them. At one point, the group of Indigenous people was intercepted by law enforcement agents who proceeded to make several arrests. Among those arrested was Monsignor Franco. An officer recognised him and decided to release him, but he

refused, saying: “These are my people. I am staying with them.” In the end, after six long hours, everyone was released.

Father Munari’s intervention was greatly appreciated and warmly applauded. That applause served both to remember – and almost acclaim – Monsignor Franco Masserdotti and to embrace his message of life, even today. (*Father Gaetano Montresor, MCCJ*)

MÉXICO

Golden Jubilee of the Missionary Animation Centre in Mexico City.

On 21st September 2026, the Missionary Animation Centre (CAM) of the Comboni Missionaries, located in Mexico City’s Tabacalera neighborhood, celebrated its 50th anniversary. The CAM prepares and distributes the magazines *Esquila Misional* and *Aguiluchos*, as well as books, brochures, and other materials dedicated to missionary animation.

The Centre was inaugurated on 21st September 1976, during a simple ceremony presided over by the then-Superior General, Father Tarcisio Agostoni. Attendees included the Italian Ambassador to Mexico, Raffaele Marras, numerous priests, Comboni lay associates, benefactors, and friends.

Throughout its history, the CAM has also faced difficult times. The building sustained severe damage during the earthquake that struck Mexico City in 1985, necessitating major structural reinforcement work. Nevertheless, the Centre continued its operations and remains one of the Combonis’ primary tools for missionary animation in Mexico.

Over these fifty years, numerous Comboni priests and brothers have served at the CAM, handling magazine editing and publication, administration, and relations with benefactors. Alongside them, many collaborators have contributed their efforts to keeping this vital service to the mission alive.

The Centre has also hosted numerous initiatives for missionary animation, formation, and awareness-raising, fostering knowledge of the mission and supporting the spread of the missionary spirit throughout Mexico.

To mark this significant anniversary, the CAM community and staff attended a thanksgiving Mass, giving thanks to God for fifty years of service to the missionary cause. The celebration was presided over by Father Rafael González Ponce, who had witnessed the Centre’s beginnings and personally experienced the dramatic days of the 1985 earthquake. During the homily, Father Rafael movingly recounted the history of CAM’s origins and early years of activity, placing them within the social, ecclesial, and Comboni context of that time.

Following the celebration, missionaries and staff shared a fraternal lunch in an atmosphere of gratitude and festivity.

Fifty years later, CAM thus continues its mission through communication and missionary animation. The community and its staff have renewed their commitment to this service, ensuring that *Esquila Misional* and *Aguiluchos* can continue to reach many families and keep the spirit of the mission alive in Mexico. (*Father Ismael Piñón, MCCJ*)

IN PACE CHRISTI

In this issue of *Familia Comboniana*, we are publishing abridged obituaries of three confrères who passed away in 2025. Gathering news, personal accounts, and information regarding the lives and service of confrères who have gone to the Father's House is not always easy and can take considerable time, partly due to the difficulty of obtaining material from their respective provinces of origin. We apologise for the delay in publication and thank all those who helped gather the necessary information. The full versions of the obituaries for the confrères who died in 2025 will be published in the upcoming *In Memoriam 2025* volume.

FATHER ISAAC MARTÍN ARNAZ (07.12.1936 – 01.05.2025)

Father Isaac Martín Aranz was a Comboni missionary who dedicated much of his life to Sudan and South Sudan, distinguishing himself through his passion for Africa, interreligious dialogue, communication, and a commitment to peace and justice.

Born in Valladolid into a Catholic family, Isaac grew up in a deeply Christian environment. After completing his business studies, he seemed headed for an ordinary professional life. However, his missionary vocation emerged quite unexpectedly. In 1960, while he was hospitalised, a cousin brought him some magazines, including the first issues of *Mundo Negro*, the new Comboni missionary magazine founded in Madrid. Those pages about Africa sparked in him an ever-growing desire to become a missionary.

After informing his family of his decision to become a missionary priest, Isaac began his Comboni formation. He entered the novitiate in Corella in 1962, took his first vows in 1964, and continued his theological studies in Italy, in Verona and Venegono Superiore. He made his perpetual profession in 1968 and was ordained a priest the following year in Moncada. Even during his formation years, he developed a particular interest in the Islamic world and interreligious dialogue. When asked to list the countries where he wished to conduct his missionary ministry, he wrote only

one name: Sudan. His request was granted, and after a period of Arabic study in Lebanon, he was finally able to arrive in Sudan in 1971.

In **Omdurman**, and later in **El Obeid**, Father Isaac dedicated himself to pastoral work and, above all, to engaging with Muslims. He was deeply convinced that mission work consisted not only of evangelisation but also of the ability to recognise God's presence in every person's life. During those years, he also struck up a friendship with Mahmud Muhammad Taha—an engineer, theologian, political activist, and key figure in Sudanese Islamic reformism (of which he was considered an apostle)—who was arrested, tried, and executed in 1985. Father Isaac shared a journey of friendship and a quest for the common good with him. For Father Isaac, interreligious dialogue was not merely a pastoral activity but a dimension capable of transforming his own life.

In 1982, he returned to Spain, settling in **Madrid**. There, his missionary experience in the Arab world found new expression in the field of communications. He joined the *Mundo Negro* team, collaborating on radio programs and managing audiovisual media for the Comboni province. During those years, he was also entrusted with creating the African Museum in Madrid, which opened on April 15, 1985, to mark the 25th anniversary of *Mundo Negro*. Father Isaac oversaw the project and its layout with a clear educational aim: to foster an understanding of Africa through its history, cultures, peoples, and values. Maps, photographs, artifacts, and personal accounts brought back by missionaries became tools to help visitors—especially young people and school groups—overcome stereotypes and prejudices regarding Africa. Until his return to Sudan in 1989, he personally guided thousands of visitors, enthusiastically sharing his passion for the African continent.

In 1988–1989, he returned to Sudan – this time to **Khartoum** – to serve as the head of communications for the Sudanese Episcopal Conference at the Encounter Centre. Despite lacking formal training in journalism, he served in this capacity for about eleven years. He collaborated with Comboni missionary sisters, Christians of various denominations, Sudanese journalists, and translators, helping to establish the Church's first audiovisual studio in Sudan.

Communication also became a means of giving voice to the suffering experienced in the country. Working with the Diocesan Commission for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Father Isaac helped inform African and European church bodies about human rights violations, the destruction of churches, and the arrest of priests.

In Khartoum, he also dedicated himself to youth ministry and the promotion of small Christian communities. He encouraged young people to take

an active role in the life of the Church and supported cultural initiatives, such as the *Kuwato* theater group – whose name means ‘their strength’. Theater, thus, became a tool for education and raising awareness. Among the most significant productions was a play dedicated to the life of Saint Josephine Bakhita.

In 1999, Father Isaac was assigned to **Wau**, in southern Sudan. These were years marked by the civil war between the North and the South. Daily life was heavily influenced by the military presence, and even traveling to reach the chapels required permits.

A new phase began with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 and, subsequently, South Sudan’s independence in 2011. For Father Isaac, the mission now had to contribute to building a new society founded on reconciliation and peace. He therefore dedicated himself with particular intensity to non-violence, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, also taking on the coordination of the diocesan JPIC commission.

In Wau, he was valued for his organisational skills and his focus on empowering catechists. He devised ways to reach the most isolated and dangerous communities, even when foreign missionaries could not get there. In this way, pastoral care could continue even in the most difficult locations. Among his many activities, he also oversaw the management of the leper colony.

After many years in Wau, Father Isaac was assigned to Lomin, in the Kajo-Keji region of southern South Sudan, near the Ugandan border. Shortly after his arrival, the mission was struck by violence: eleven people, including a catechist, were killed. The population fled towards Uganda, and Father Isaac followed the refugees alongside other confrères.

From 2017 to 2020, in the **Palorinya** area, Father Isaac dedicated himself to pastoral care for South Sudanese refugees. Living in extremely simple conditions, he celebrated the Eucharist and conducted catechesis under the trees, gradually organising small Christian communities within the refugee camps. Even in this emergency situation, he continued to live out his mission through presence, listening, and accompaniment.

In 2020, after fifty years of priesthood, he received his final assignment to the Comboni province of Spain. He was already in Moncada, at a centre for elderly and sick Comboni missionaries, having gone there to receive treatment for a severe respiratory infection. He spent the final years of his life there and passed away on 1st May 2025.

Reflecting on his long missionary career, a figure emerges who was characterised by an extraordinary ability to adapt to the needs of the mission: priest, missionary, man of dialogue, communicator, educator, promoter of justice and peace, and companion to communities.

From the chance reading of a missionary magazine in a hospital bed to his final years spent alongside elderly and sick confrères, his life appears as a long journey marked by a profound conviction: mission is born from encounters with people, from respect for their cultures and faith, and from the desire to build paths of peace and fraternity together.

Mundo Negro—the magazine that had ignited his missionary desire more than sixty years earlier—thus symbolically accompanied his entire journey: from the beginning of his vocation to the enduring memory of a missionary who strove to make Africa known, to build bridges between Christians and Muslims, and to stand by populations marked by war, poverty, and exile. (*Mundo Negro*, Father Franco Moretti, Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, and others)

BROTHER AVO TANZI BAUDOUIN (18.10.1950 – 21.09.2025)

Brother Avo Tanzi Baudouin is a historic figure in the Comboni missionary journey in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Born in Watsa – in what was then the Belgian Congo – into a family of ten children, he showed an early aptitude for manual labor and learning a trade. He would go on to become the first Congolese Comboni Brother, embodying in a tangible way Saint Daniel Comboni's dream of '*Saving Africa through Africa*'.

After primary school in Tadu, Baudouin continued his training in Faradje, Rungu, and Isiro, focusing primarily on carpentry and other practical skills. Meanwhile, the desire to consecrate himself as a Comboni Brother grew within him. Missionaries who knew him often saw him in the mission workshops, carpentry shops, and construction sites, always eager to learn and to place his skills at the service of the community.

In 1975, he began his novitiate in Gombari. He took his first vows in 1977 and continued his formation in Kisangani before being assigned to the Nangazizi parish. His technical expertise, combined with his simplicity and willingness to help, soon made him a valuable collaborator in the missions.

A mission built through work – In 1982, Baudouin was assigned to the Comboni province of Togo, specifically to the Afanya mission. There, he met Brother Adone Santi – one of the pioneers of the Comboni presence in the country – from whom he learned a great deal about carpentry, construction, and vocational training.

In Afanya, the work of the Brothers also had a strong social dimension. Many young people, lacking opportunities for education or employment, were forced to seek their fortunes in the cities or in neighboring countries.

The mission's vocational school offered them the chance to learn a trade and build a future. When Brother Santi had to leave Afanya in 1988, Baudouin took over responsibility for the work.

He continued to develop the workshops, train young carpenters and masons, build churches, chapels, and schools, and construct wells for nearby villages. The transfer of responsibility from a European Brother to an African Brother held great symbolic significance: the missionary work could now be carried forward by Africans themselves—those trained by the missionaries.

In 1990, after six years in Togo, he returned to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Superior General, Father Francesco Pierli, wrote to thank him for his service and to highlight the particular significance of his presence in Togo: he had been the first Zairian confrère sent on a mission abroad, becoming a point of reference and a source of encouragement for other African confrères.

A Missionary even in Italy – After various assignments in the Congo, Baudouin was assigned to the Italian province in 1994. He spent nine years in the Comboni community of Cavallino, in the Salento region. There, alongside his community duties, he dedicated himself especially to welcoming the immigrants who were arriving in large numbers on the Apulian coast during the 1990s.

He collaborated with the Diocese of Lecce and a Scalabrinian priest to establish the Migrants' Office, helping to organise a reception and support service that engaged numerous volunteers. Those who knew him during those years remember him as a simple, peaceful, and joyful man—a man of few words who communicated primarily through concrete acts of service. However, his time in Italy was also affected by serious heart problems; for several years, he had to remain in the country to receive necessary medical treatment and medication. In 2004, when his health permitted, he was finally able to return to his homeland.

His return to the DRC and his final years – In the Congo, he was first assigned to the Kisangani Multi-purpose Centre and later to the Yanonge mission, on the banks of the Congo River. For nine years, he oversaw building maintenance and, from 2014 onwards, also managed the finances of the community and the parish. Many young men in formation passed through the community and found in Baudouin a man capable of conveying—through his life even more than his words—the value of work, responsibility, and service.

In 2017, he attended a renewal course in Rome. Upon returning to the Congo, he was assigned to the Magambe Ongoing Formation Centre and, subsequently, to Saint Anne's Parish in Isiro. Even after reaching the age of seventy, he continued to handle building maintenance and assist with pastoral activities.

In his final years, heart and liver problems became more serious, yet Baudouin continued to carry out his service with trust. In August 2024, he attended the first continental meeting of Comboni Missionary Brothers working in Africa, held in Nairobi. Despite his age and the challenges regarding health and language, he actively participated in the gathering, offering – through his very presence – a testament to long-standing fidelity to his vocation.

He returned to Isiro in early 2025, but his health deteriorated. He was taken to Anualite Hospital in Mungbere, where he received the care he needed. He passed away peacefully on 21st September 2025, surrounded by the prayers and affection of his fellow brothers.

Brother Baudouin's life can be seen as a long, tangible embodiment of Comboni's dream: an Africa that is the protagonist of its own mission. As the first Congolese Comboni Brother – a mentor to young people, craftsman, builder, community animator, and a man who embodied hospitality – he left behind a legacy defined above all by people: the young men he trained, the communities he helped to grow, and the fellow religious to whom he demonstrated that mission work is built upon competence, simplicity, daily labor, and faithfulness.

As Brother Duilio Plazzotta wrote when recalling the first Congolese Comboni Brothers, they were men of "solid character and substance," capable of achieving extraordinary things with simplicity and competence. Among them, Brother Baudouin holds a special place: a pioneer who blazed a trail and successfully passed the baton to the generations that followed. (*Mundo Negro; Fr. Franco Moretti, Fr. Gian Battista Moroni, and others*)

FATHER GIORGIO POLETTI (26.11.1941 – 05.12.2025)

Giorgio was born on 26th November 1941, in Ferrara and grew up in the parish of San Giovanni Evangelista in the Quacchio district. After completing primary and middle school, he attended the State Vocational Institute for Industry and Crafts, where he obtained his electrician's diploma in June 1959.

He had long since decided to join the Comboni Missionaries; on 18th August 1959, he entered the Comboni house in Gozzano as a "postulant." Following his novitiate in Florence, he took his first temporary vows on

19th March 1962, and was assigned to the General Procuratorate in Rome, where he managed household maintenance and, specifically, the electrical systems. In 1965, he moved to the Generalate in Rome (EUR).

Assignment to Mozambique – In late 1966, Brother Giorgio was in Moncada, Spain, when he received his first missionary assignment: Mozambique. Before departing, he was sent to Viseu, Portugal, to work on electrical systems and learn Portuguese.

On 10th December 1967, he wrote to the Superior General, Father Gaetano Briani, asking to be admitted to perpetual profession and thanking him for the assignment to Mozambique. He took his perpetual vows on 19th March 1968.

In Mozambique, he worked first at the Netia mission and later, starting in 1972, at the Carapira Industrial School. In 1973, during a visit back home, he reached a decision that would change his life: to become a priest.

“I want to be a priest” – After a long period of prayer and reflection, he wrote to the Superior General, Father Tarcisio Agostoni: “I have been thinking about the priesthood for some years. I have reflected on it at length to understand whether I was trying to escape a difficult situation or an inferiority complex, or if I was seeking a ‘human advancement.’ [...] Now I ask to be admitted to theology courses to become a priest.”

The response was positive. Giorgio began his philosophy and theology studies in Rome and later continued them in Chicago. He was ordained a deacon on 1st April 1978, and a priest on 7th September. In 1979, he earned a Master of Divinity degree from the Catholic Theological Union. In Chicago – and especially in nearby Gary – he lived through his first powerful ‘frontier experience’, working in African American neighbourhoods marked by segregation and profound social injustices. A commitment to social justice would become a constant in his life.

Between Italy and Mozambique – After completing his studies, he returned to Italy and was assigned to the community of Venegono Superiore, serving as a vocation promoter and a member of the GIM (*Giovani Impegno Missionario* – Young People for Missionary Commitment) team. In 1983, he returned to Mozambique – specifically to the Alto da Manga parish in the Diocese of Beira – to serve as local superior and parish priest. From 1990, he was based in Anchilo, working in both the parish and the catechetical centre.

In 1992, he returned to Italy – first to Brescia and then, starting in 1994, to Padua – he began his work at the postulancy for aspiring Brothers.

There, he became involved with the '*Blessed Are the Peacemakers*' movement, where he met and collaborated with individuals dedicated to disarmament, non-violence, and justice.

Casavatore and Castel Volturno – In May 1996, he was assigned to Casavatore, in the Naples area, for missionary outreach. He soon dedicated himself to the local immigrant population and was appointed to oversee immigrant pastoral care at the Church of Santa Maria dell'Aiuto in Castel Volturno. He served as a "parish priest *ad personam*," meaning he exercised pastoral care over a specific group of the faithful united by a particular characteristic, regardless of where they resided within the diocese.

From 2001 onwards, a highly active Comboni community developed there: it welcomed foreign women in distress and victims of human trafficking, and opened both a nursery school and an after-school centre. Father Giorgio spoke out against exploitation and the collusion between the Camorra, politicians, and business interests; he also promoted initiatives to defend immigrants' rights, thereby drawing threats and opposition.

In 2003, he organised a demonstration against the Bossi-Fini law, bringing approximately one thousand immigrants to Rome. On another occasion, together with his fellow Comboni missionary Francesco Nascimbene, he chained himself for ten days to the windows of the Caserta Prefecture to protest against police operations targeting immigrants. He even went so far as to distribute symbolic '*Residence permits in the name of God*' outside 22 Italian prefectures.

In 2004, alongside other Comboni missionaries and members of civil society, he spoke out publicly against war and in support of the poor and migrants. In 2005, he received the National 'Human Rights' Award for his social activism in Campania.

On 18th September 2008, six immigrants from Togo, Liberia, and Ghana were killed by the Camorra in Castel Volturno. An immigrant uprising broke out the following day. Father Giorgio and Fabio Basile, from the Ex Canapificio social centre in Caserta, managed to mediate with the authorities and restore calm.

The final years – Father Giorgio left Castel Volturno in November 2009 and, following a period of rest, was assigned to the Motherhouse in Verona in 2010. In 2011, he was in Rome, working with the Comboni Association for the Service of Migrants and Refugees (ACSE). In 2014, he was elected provincial councillor and appointed coordinator of the Migrants Commission.

He returned to Verona in 2016, and from 2017 onwards, he was based at the provincial headquarters in Bologna, actively engaged in ministry. His health began to decline gradually, and in late 2020, he was assigned to the “Fratel Alfredo Fiorini” Centre in Castel d’Azzano for medical care. Nevertheless, he maintained a special bond with Bologna and the ‘San Sigismondo’ University Residence, where he was hosted by Father Francesco Ondedei.

In late October 2025, he was admitted to the Borgo Roma Hospital in Verona. A few weeks later, he returned to Castel d’Azzano. On 26th November – his birthday – he was doing relatively well. Father Francesco recalls the day spent together, filled with phone calls, messages, and a cake shared with Brother Giancarlo Bianchi, with whom he shared the same date of birth.

A few days later, his condition took a turn for the worse. On 3rd December, a worsening infection led to his return to the hospital. During the night between 4th and 5th December, he placed his life in the hands of the Lord who had given it to him. (*Father Franco Moretti, MCCJ*)

FATHER GREGÓRIO RODRIGUES DOS SANTOS (26.04.1942 – 15.06.2026)

Who better than Father Manuel Horta to tell us about the life of Father Fidelis? They entered the seminary just a year apart, they immediately became lifelong friends.

Gregório Rodrigues dos Santos was born in Cabrum (Arões, Vale de Cambra, Diocese of Viseu) on 26th April 1942. After completing primary school, he came into contact with Father Rino Carlesi, who was responsible for missionary animation, vocation promotion, and preaching popular missions (he would later become the first bishop of the Diocese of Balsas in northeastern Brazil). In 1953, Gregório entered the Comboni seminary in Viseu to begin the first stage of Comboni formation in Portugal (covering the first five years of secondary school). The following year, it was my turn to enter the same seminary, having also been “recruited” by Father Rino Carlesi and Father Dante Greggio. A deep friendship blossomed between Gregório and me—one that would strengthen over the years, despite the different paths we took in life and within the Institute’s activities.

In September 1958, Gregório was assigned to the novitiate in Vila Nova de Famalicão. This was the second Comboni house, inaugurated in 1956 in an old building adjacent to the ancient Romanesque church of Antas, situated next to a plot of land owned by the parish (a parish endowment).

Constructing the new building intended to serve as the novitiate was by no means easy. The church, in fact, was listed as a 'national monument', making a modern structure nearby unthinkable. It took the intervention of the Archbishop of Braga and several influential friends to reach a compromise. The new building was inaugurated in 1959.

The year we spent together remains an indelible memory for me. In addition to praying and studying, Gregorio and I begin raising chickens, turkeys, and ducks, using an old kerosene-heated incubator located in the attic of the house – a setup that requires constant attention and vigilance, even at night, to ensure the temperature remains steady.

Formation years – Gregório made his first profession on 9th September 1960, the Solemnity of Saint Peter Claver. My turn came on the same date in 1961. Unfortunately, Gregório began to experience lung-related health issues and was forced to spend a year strictly obliged to bed rest, unable to attend classes. Thus, in September 1961, we found ourselves together again to begin our first year of philosophy studies in Maia, at the new “Quinta dos Leões” (an agricultural estate with extensive grounds). We shared many adventures during those three years of philosophy. I had a knack for taking shorthand notes during the professors' lectures and then sharing them with my classmates; Gregório would always thank me for this help.

After completing the philosophy course, the group of graduates left for Italy in 1964. Some—including Gregório—went to the scholasticate in Vene-gono Superiore, others to Verona, while a fellow confrère and I went to Rome, to the Generalate, which was then nearing completion.

Ordination – The Portuguese scholastics who finished their theology courses in 1968 (five in Italy and two in Portugal) gathered in Viseu to prepare for priestly ordination, which took place on 13th July 1968, in our seminary chapel. Of the seven ordained, only Father Manuel dos Anjos Martins and I were able to leave for Mozambique on October 14 (Father Manuel would later pass away in Tete in 2022). Father Gregório, meanwhile, was assigned to the house in Famalicão – which had by then become a minor seminary—and remained there until 1975, when he was elected Provincial Superior, succeeding Father Ramiro Loureiro da Cruz († 2023). In July 1978, it fell to me to succeed Father Gregorio as provincial superior; once he had handed over his responsibilities, he implored me to let him leave for the mission field. It gave me great joy to place him at the disposal of the General Council, which assigned him to the North-east Brazil Province; he remained there from October 1978 until mid-

1983, when the Portugal Province requested his return to take on the role of administrator for our publishing house.

Father Gregório possessed no particular administrative gifts, but the administration still operated manually, using cardboard index cards for each subscriber to record renewals, various offers, and all other relevant information. His appointment was due above all to his dedication, conscientiousness, and honesty, as well as his ease in dealing with people and his cordial nature—qualities deemed more than sufficient for the role.

Brazil – In 1987, Father Gregório returned to Brazil, remaining there until 1999. The spirit of availability that characterised his entire life led him to accept an invitation to serve another term in Portugal, this time as provincial treasurer (1999-2005). His work was marked by numerous contacts and frequent visits to friends and benefactors. When in the office, he worked tirelessly: cataloging and updating archives and promoting the Portuguese Association of Friends of Raoul Follereau (APARF), while meticulously allocating every single *escudo* received to the genuine needs of leprosy victims and all the “forms of leprosy” found in the world. In 2005, Father Gregório returned to Brazil for another long period of missionary service lasting until 2017, focusing primarily on pastoral work in Uruçuí, Paraibano, São João dos Patos, Santa Rita, Timon, Pastos Bons, and Teresina, in the Northeast of the country .

Return to Portugal – In 2018, as his health began to fail, he returned to Portugal. After a brief stay in Lisbon, he was assigned to the community in Viseu, home to a care centre for the elderly and the sick. True to his characteristic generosity, Father Gregório remained available for the ministry he was still able to perform: filling in for a parish priest or curate—especially his own parish priest during holidays—and dedicating himself to the ministry of reconciliation and spiritual guidance in our chapel, serving both parishioners and his fellow religious.

As the years went by, his ailments began to take a more serious toll. Although he managed to lose some weight, he struggled greatly with mobility, and a walking stick became his constant companion. An active social media user, he spent much of his time communicating and sharing news, thoughts, and spiritual reflections.

In May 2025, when I was transferred from Famalicão to Viseu, I found Father Gregório in a very precarious state; symptoms such as a persistent cough, frequent choking spells, and immense difficulty speaking and making himself understood indicated that something serious was affecting his larynx and respiratory system.

Unfortunately, our healthcare system is not always able to respond promptly or effectively: it takes months to secure a specialist appointment, and there is often uncertainty regarding biopsies. Sometimes, biopsy samples taken in Viseu have to be sent to Coimbra; one is then forced to wait many weeks for a diagnosis—invariably deemed inconclusive by the doctors who requested it – and the entire process has to start over again. Father Gregório was now very ill. Despite our persistent urging that he stop his ministry of reconciliation, he only allowed himself to be persuaded during the final week of his life – when, with great charity and thanks to the friendship between us, I made him realise that penitents were leaving his confessional and coming to tell me they wanted to confess again, because they had understood nothing of what Father Gregório had tried to say to them.

The final week of his life was harrowing. His symptoms worsened, and respiratory crises became more frequent and acute. On Saturday, 13th June 2026, he had to be rushed to the hospital in Viseu. Given the severity of his condition, a tracheotomy was immediately performed to enable him to breathe. However, he then had to wait on a stretcher for hours on end before a bed became available for his admission – something that did not happen until Sunday the 14th.

While the doctors evaluated possible procedures and the necessary intervention, Father Gregório's condition deteriorated. By then, there was no sign that the situation might improve.

At 5:00 a.m. on 15th June, a phone call from the hospital informed us that Father Gregório had just passed away. It was the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary! Father Gregório had celebrated his own Easter and was accompanied to the Father by the one he had so deeply venerated and loved: the Blessed Virgin Mary.

At 9:00 a.m. on 16th June, Father Gregório's body was placed in our chapel, where it remained for viewing until 11:00 a.m. The funeral Mass then began, presided over by the Provincial Superior, Father José Rebelo, and concelebrated by about thirty Comboni and diocesan priests. Present were members of the Viseu community, some family members, and a large number of friends and regular worshippers from our chapel. His body was then transported to Cabrum, his birthplace, where it lay in state until Mass was celebrated at 6:30 p.m. in the parish church of Arões. Joining the principal celebrant, Father José Rebelo, were the Vicar General of the diocese – representing Bishop Dom António Luciano, who was abroad – numerous Comboni missionaries from various communities, and several diocesan priests from neighbouring parishes. During the

thanksgiving portion of the service, the author shared a personal testimony regarding Father Gregório's life and work.

Messages – Thanks to the speed of modern communication, news of Father Gregório's death reached the most remote corners of the world – particularly those 'marked' by the presence of Comboni missionaries. Messages of condolence and shared grief – feelings that inevitably accompany such moments, despite our faith and hope – have poured in from fellow missionaries, friends, and Christian communities.

On 22nd June, a Mass marking the seventh day since his passing was celebrated in the chapel of the Viseu house. The service was presided over by Bishop António Luciano, who wished to pay tribute to our confrère and to the Comboni missionaries for their collaboration in the diocese's pastoral activities and, above all, for the invaluable ministry of reconciliation that has been faithfully provided in our chapel for many years. (*Father Manuel Horta, MCCJ*)

FATHER FIDELIS PEZZEI (23.03.1932 – 13.09.2026)

Father Fidelis was born on 23rd March 1932, into a farming family in Campill, in the Val Badia (Badia Valley) of South Tyrol, Italy. He was baptised that same day and received the sacrament of confirmation on 23rd May 1943. The family spoke Ladin, a Rhaeto-Romance language spoken primarily in the Dolomite valleys; however, instruction at school was conducted in Italian. These were the years of the Fascist era (October 1922 – July 1943), when Italy was ruled by the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini.

Fidelis was the eldest of five children and was expected – and indeed desired – to become a farmer and take over the family farm. First, however, he wished to broaden his education, perhaps by attending secondary school.

He was assisted in this by his uncle, Father Johann Pezzei—also a native of Campill and a Comboni missionary—who took Fidelis and his brother Jakob (who was a year and a half younger) to the Xaverianum seminary in Milland, which had opened in 1947.¹

As he was of Ladin origin, Fidelis initially struggled with the German language and was frequently mocked by his classmates –

¹ Father Johann, ordained a priest in 1940, left for Peru in 1948, where he would serve until his death. The two boys had another uncle—Father Johann's brother—Brother Ignaz Pezzei, a Comboni missionary who carried out his missionary work in South Africa, where he died in Lydenburg in 1982.

partly due to his often somewhat awkward manner. Yet, he accepted it all with equanimity.

Although they lived at the Xaverianum, the two boys pursued their studies – two years of Ginnasio and three of Liceo – at the Vinzentinum episcopal seminary, one of the most prestigious and historic educational institutions in the Diocese of Bolzano.

At the Xaverianum, the brothers were surrounded by Comboni missionaries, and the desire to become one of them grew within them: “I want to become like my Uncle Johann,” they would often say.

After completing his secondary education at the Vinzentinum, Fidelis began his novitiate at the Comboni house in Bamberg in 1955. There, too – despite his many years of schooling – he retained the accent, cadence, and idioms characteristic of his native Ladin language. During his two-year novitiate, he attended introductory courses in philosophy and theology.

Upon completing his novitiate, Fidelis took his first religious vows on 29th September 1957. He then returned to Bressanone to finish his theological studies and made his perpetual profession on 19th March 1960. He was ordained a deacon on 3rd April and a priest on 19th June by Msgr. Joseph Gargitter, the Bishop of Bressanone.

Father Fidelis had hoped to leave for the mission field immediately, but his superiors assigned him to the Milland-Bressanone community, where he dedicated himself to missionary outreach within the diocese. Finally, in early 1963, he received the letter assigning him to the Comboni province of Peru. Five years earlier, the Holy See had entrusted the newly established Prelature of Tarma – which would later become the Diocese of Tarma – to German-speaking Comboni missionaries. Father Fidelis was assigned specifically to the parish of Tarma.

The majority of the population, as in much of Peru and South America, were baptised, yet the local Church was in urgent need of priests and pastoral workers. Numerous towns—some with populations of several thousand, particularly in the mountainous regions—lacked the permanent presence of a priest. Those were the years of the Second Vatican Council, which was opening up new horizons for the Church and ushering in a renewed way of living out the mission. It was an environment in which Father Fidelis immediately felt completely at home.

The workload was immense. “You can’t walk here... You have to run,” he used to say. And run he did; he was constantly on the move. He had a car at his disposal, and it was always in motion. Because of his driving style – somewhat abrupt, to be honest – people quickly nicknamed him “The Speedy Good Shepherd.” This nickname played on the idea of the “Good Shepherd always on the move,” carrying a double meaning:

physical travel from one community to another and the pastoral journey alongside his people. He visited numerous remote communities, oversaw the restoration of churches and chapels – often beautiful but neglected – and recruited catechists, establishing centers for their training. The same held true for his subsequent pastoral assignment in the Diocese of Huánuco. Just how highly regarded he was, and how much his work there was appreciated, became evident after the local bishop died in January 1991; Father Fidelis was immediately appointed administrator of the diocese pending the appointment of a new bishop.

It was during this period that an incident occurred which left a deep mark on him. It was during the years of terror caused by the *Sendero Luminoso* ('shining path'). Guerrilla forces primarily targeted vulnerable locations and people in the mountains. Following a guerrilla attack, police and military forces would quickly arrive, often acting with equal brutality against the civilian population. Even the journeys themselves—often long and arduous—to these areas were extremely dangerous at the time; one could easily lose one's life.

Father Fidelis allowed himself to be neither restricted nor intimidated. During Holy Week in 1993, he decided to travel to a specific location and stay there for a few days. He disregarded all advice against going, whether from his fellow religious brothers or from the local people. And the guerrilla attack was not long in coming. After destroying, ravaging, and looting the entire village with extreme violence, the guerrillas left. The army intervened immediately. There were many casualties. In the end, Father Fidelis's car, too, was riddled with bullet holes.

Once Holy Week was over, Father Fidelis patched up the vehicle as best he could and returned to his base. The people of Huánuco recognised the car immediately, and everyone wanted to see it up close. News of the incident spread rapidly, becoming a topic of conversation throughout the city. Father Fidelis gave the authorities a precise account of the events and then described what had happened to the press and television—without mincing words. From a "strategic" standpoint, it was not an entirely wise move. But that was simply the kind of man Father Fidelis was.

After some time, word reached the Comboni missionaries that the police and army intended to silence Father Fidelis by staging a traffic accident—something that, given the dangerous and rugged mountain roads, would have been all too easy to pass off as a tragic mishap. Consequently, the provincial leadership decided to recall Father Fidelis to his home country. Thus, his missionary work in Peru came to an end in 1994. From then until his death on 13th September 2026, Father Fidelis served within the German-speaking Comboni province: first as superior of the

Milland-Brixen community (from 1994 to 1998) and later as the person in charge of missionary animation for the province.

In 2002, he was transferred to the provincial headquarters in Bamberg to carry out the same role. He remained there until October 2008, when he was assigned to the community in Neumarkt (Upper Palatinate); there, he worked with equal zeal on missionary animation and parish pastoral care until April 2026. He willingly accepted any task entrusted to him and embraced every situation – however difficult – without asking for explanations. While in Neumarkt, on the occasion of his 60th anniversary of ordination on 29th June 2020, he had the joy of receiving a personal letter of heartfelt congratulations from the Superior General, Father Tesfaye Tadesse.

Wherever he served, he managed to connect with the many immigrant workers from Peru and Latin America, whose spiritual and human well-being was very close to his heart. There was little more he could do for them, however, than celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays. When he was no longer permitted to drive due to his age, he would arrange for someone to pick him up.

We always saw him smiling. He knew how to laugh – especially at himself. He had been that way since childhood, when he was teased for his way of speaking and his somewhat awkward mannerisms.

He accepted the ailments of old age without complaint, even going so far as to laugh about them and make amusing remarks on the subject.

He was a deeply religious person... but in his own way. He once confided to a fellow religious that he recited three rosaries every day.

When he required constant care in April 2026, he bade farewell to his confrères in Neumarkt and voluntarily moved to the community for the elderly in Ellwangen. There, he bore his illness with great patience. Despite pain that was at times intense, he continued to participate in community life until just a few days before his death, when he was admitted to the nearby hospice run by the Sisters of Saint Anne. He passed away there two days later, on 13th September 2026, at the age of 94.

We extend our deepest condolences to his brother Jakob – a Comboni religious and a member of the same community.

Father Fidelis now rests in the Ellwangen municipal cemetery, alongside the confrères who preceded him to the Father's house (*Father Reinhold Baumann and others*).

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHER: Apolinar, of Father Vázquez Hernández Felipe de Jesús (ME/KE)

THE BROTHER: don Gianni, of Mons. Spagnolo Olindo Natale (†) and a cousin of Father Spagnolo Marillo (I)

THE SISTER: Sr. Angelina-Martha Nagler (Franciscan Tertiary Sister), of Brother Eduard Nagler (DSP)

THE COMBONI SISTER: Sr. Maria Adele Recalcati (I)