

# Familia Comboniana

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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768

November 2018

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

## GENERAL NOTES - Consulta October 2018

### 1. Appointment

The GC appoints **Fr. Girau Pellicer José Antonio** second formator at the Cape Coast scholasticate as from 1 January 2019.

### 2. Intercapitular Assembly September 2018

The Intercapitular Assembly which is “a meeting of the members of the Council with all the provincial superiors and the heads of the secretariats... to verify the implementation of the Chapter’s decisions and to study new ways for their continued realisation.” (RL 144), was held in Rome from 9 to 29 September.

We in the GC wish to thank all the participants and those who contributed to the smooth running of the Assembly; we again thank the two confrere secretaries and the three confrere translators whose commitment facilitated the work in the hall. Our sincere thanks also to all the confreres and workers of the Generalate who spared no effort to assist all who were involved in the Assembly. Finally, we wish to thank all the confreres and all the members of the Comboni Family who sustained us with their prayers.

The content of the Assembly have been published in the October 2018 issue of *Familia Comboniana*.

### 3. A book on JPIC and the World Social Forum

A book entitled “*Be the change you wish to see in the world*”, by those who took part in the World Social Forum (WSF) and the Comboni Forum (CF) in March 2018 in Salvador de Bahia (Brazil), was launched at the Intercapitular Assembly. The book – printed in Italian, English and Spanish – includes reflections and experiences of the Comboni Family in the last eleven years in the sector of justice, peace and In-

tegrity of Creation (JPIC), and indicates possible pathways for the future. We hope the book will be well publicised in both the printed and digital versions, on our websites and in our magazines, in our communities and houses of formation. We trust it will become a supplement for moments of reflection and retreats, to improve our pastoral in the field of JPIC and help us as we seek new pathways of ministry and new paradigms of mission in its social and environmental dimensions.

#### **4. Letter to the Comboni Brothers**

The four reference Brothers of the respective (sub) continents and the General Assistant Brother who met in Rome for the Intercapitular Assembly have sent a short message to the Brothers to evaluate progress since the last Chapter. At this important moment in the life of the Institute, with its lights and shadows, the message is intended especially to emphasise the signs of hope in the present time from the perspective of ministerial mission.

#### **5. Rule of Life**

The General Council, in evaluating the process of Revisiting and Revising the Rule of Life, wishes to thank all the circumscriptions, communities and confreres for the work done up to now. We are indeed happy with it and we encourage everyone to go ahead with the process.

Analysing the proposals emerging from the Intercapitular Assembly as to whether or not the work of the circumscriptions should be extended until December next year, the General Council, together with the coordinator of the commission, believes it convenient to adhere to the established schedule. Proposals for revision must reach the central commission before the end of February 2019. Any circumscription which, for internal reasons, may be late in doing so, may send its work to the commission before the end of May.

The central commission will operate in two stages: a selected commission (the coordinator and the two secretaries) during the month of March and the full commission in the month of June 2019.

The General Council again encourages the individual confreres and the communities so to continue with enthusiasm this process of revisiting and revising the RL that we may not only achieve a revision of the document but also come to live with greater commitment our vocation and mission.

## **6. New Vademecum**

Removing it from what was formerly the second part of the Directory of the General Administration, on 22 October, the GC approved the new *Vademecum for the administrative management of particular situations of personnel* which will be made available to all circumscription superiors in the various languages.

## **7. Canonical processes**

The General Council, during this Consulta, has examined the canonical situations of various confreres and wishes to thank those circumscription superiors and the confreres themselves who collaborate so attentively and actively in these processes. Nevertheless, they must also point out that, sometimes, collaboration is quite lacking and, in some cases, entirely absent. At times, confreres are left to themselves, with no accompaniment on the part of the Institute. It also happens that the period of exclaustation or absence from community comes to and end but no one sees to the matter of taking the steps necessary to “regularise” the position of those confreres who find themselves in an irregular position. The GC encourages the circumscription superiors or their delegates in the work of the canonical processes or, in the case of confreres in difficulty, to accompany the “exclaustated” confreres or those “absent from community” so that the time requested for vocational and missionary discernment may reach a good conclusion within the established period.

## **8. Year of Interculturality**

According to the Guide for the Implementation of the XVIII General Chapter and its themes of on-going formation, 2019 will be the year of interculturality (cf. CA '15, 47, 1-6). To carry out this proposal, the General Secretariat for Formation (GSF) has prepared supplements for personal and community reflection and prayer, to assist the whole Institute to study this theme, bearing in mind the riches of inter-culture lived by the Institute. “*Multi-culture is a grace that has been part of the ‘charismatic patrimony’ of our Institute ever since its foundation*” (RV 18).

To assist each confrere, each community and circumscription in this journey, the GSF has organised a workshop in Rome to run from 20 to 27 January 2019. Each circumscription will send a representative to this workshop, possibly the person who, in the Secretariat for Formation, is responsible for formation or accompanies on-going for-

mation so that he may then animate the whole of the circumscription on the theme of interculturality: organising, accompanying, evaluating and making known the results of the work. This work of animation will be organised especially with the preparation of the community superiors and according to chosen modalities, bearing in mind the local situations: one community at a time or a number of communities together etc. The process on the theme of interculturality is a journey of ongoing formation: there will be times for reflection, attending to the challenges that we face, of searching for instruments to make this gift bear fruit for our growth, at the personal level, the level of community life and that of missionary witness.

This seminar has as its objective to enable the participants to have an experience of interculturality and to reflect on past experiences, using a methodology similar to that of the Ratio Missionis. This will then lead each community to choose concretely how to live this gift, to describe this commitment and insert it into its community charter.

Furthermore, a letter will be sent from the GC/GSF containing the motivations and practical orientations to live deeply this year of interculturality.

We shall also have other instruments of animation on the level of the General Direction. E.g. printed material-supplements on the theme of interculturality through *Familia Comboniana*, already published messages and articles such as the Limone Symposium and the intervention of Fr. Mileto Palmiro at the Intercapitular, and new initiatives. The GC wishes to encourage continental and circumscription initiatives to increase our understanding of the theme.

## **9 – Projects presented to the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI)**

Due to comments received by the GC, it is now established that all conferees requesting finance for projects they present to the CEI, apart from the approval of the local Ordinary, must also obtain approval from their Provincial Councils and also the General Council.

## **10. Journeys and commitments of the GC**

### ***Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie***

30 October – 10 November	Poland (visit and spiritual exercises)
21 – 23 November	USG - Ariccia
24 Nov. – 16 December	Visit to the province of Peru with Fr. Alcides Costa
17 December	CLM General Assembly

**Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins**

19 Nov. – 15 December Visit to Sudan

**Fr. Pietro Ciuciulla**

5 – 15 November Visit to the province of Togo-Ghana-Benin  
26 – 29 November Financial Council  
27 – 30 November Provincial Assembly, Italy

**P. Alcides Costa**

24 Nov. – 16 December Visit to the province of Peru with Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse

**Bro. Alberto Lamana Cónsola**

13 Nov. – 10 December In Paris studying French

**Perpetual professions**

Sc. Kasereka A. Wasingya (CN)	Cairo-Zamalek (EG)	07/10/2018
Sc. Antonello Giovanni (I)	Cairo-Zamalek (EG)	07/10/2018

**Priestly ordinations**

Fr. Wamalwa Kelly Maino (KE)	Kitale (KE)	13/10/2018
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**Holy Redeemer Guild**

November	01 – 15 SS	16 – 30 T
December	01 – 15 PE	16 – 31 U

**Prayer intentions**

**November** – For the Lay Comboni Missionaries as they celebrate their VI General Assembly, that they may renew their commitment for life to the mission, accepting the challenges of today and giving themselves in a way that is truly lay and Comboni. *Lord hear us.*

**December** – That we may allow the light of Christ incarnate to shine in us as we proclaim that light to all who await the Lord in the darkness and solitude of suffering. *Lord hear us.*

**Publications**

**Fr. José Joaquim L. Pedro**, *Rhetoric and Orality in 2Tm 4,1-8: Hermeneutics in the light of the Hortatory Speeches of the Makuwa people of Mozambique*, CUEA (Catholic University of Eastern Africa), Nairobi 2017, pp. 270. With this doctorate thesis in Biblical Theology, with

numerous supporting notes and a vast bibliography, Fr. José Joaquim examines the rhetoric and orality of some verses of the second letter of St. Paul to Timothy and proposes a comparison with the exhortative discourses of the Makhuwa people of Mozambique.

## ASIA

### **Bishops promote Comboni**

The President and the Secretary of the Vietnamese Episcopal Conference have sent the Holy See an official request asking for Saint Daniel Comboni to be placed in the universal calendar of the Catholic Church so that his liturgical memorial may be celebrated everywhere in the Mass and the liturgy of the hours on 10 October. This was decided by the bishops of Vietnam at their recent Assembly at the end of September. The letter, addressed to Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, shows how the motivations of the request are based upon the life, witness and charism of the Holy Founder, evangeliser of the African peoples, animator of missionary collaboration between churches and model of an “*Outgoing Church*” to bring the “*joy of the Gospel*” to all people, as Pope Francis teaches. The letter was added to similar requests sent to Rome and may be more easily successful if more such requests were to be received from various countries. It is important to note the meaningful and tactful gesture of the Vietnamese bishops in signing their request with the date of 10 October, *dies natalis* and feast of St. Daniel.

## CURIA

### **Notice**

As from the first of November, the Curia community will have a new superior: Fr. Celestino Prevedello, e-mail: [supeur@comboni.org](mailto:supeur@comboni.org)

### **Celebration of the solemnity of St Daniel Comboni**

On Wednesday, 10 October 2018, the community of the General Curia in Rome, together with their friends and benefactors, celebrated the solemnity of the Father and Founder of the Institute, Saint Daniel Comboni. Now more than ever before, the personality of Comboni and his work are still light and inspiration for all Comboni men and women,

both religious and lay, who learned from him to be believers and missionaries and to look with the eyes of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, on the world and each human being.

The Eucharist was presided by Mons. Giuseppe Franzelli, Bishop of the Ugandan diocese of Lira, and concelebrated by Mons. Damiano Giulio Guzzetti, Bishop of Moroto (Uganda), by the resident priests and by the Combonis taking part in the Course for the Elderly Confreres in Rome.

“To celebrate Comboni – said Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins, Vicar General, during his homily – means to live the joy of being Comboni Missionaries: being more deeply aware of the richness and the relevance of our charism; assuming responsibility for actualising it and making it known in the Church and in society”. The Eucharist was followed by a fraternal meal together.

### **Third edition of the Course for the Elderly**

The idea of the Comboni Course for the Elderly (CCE), for confreres over seventy who may benefit from it, emerged in 2012 with the objective of providing a help to live one’s old age serenely and fruitfully, to grow in intimacy with Our Lord in interior freedom and to deepen one’s relationship with Saint Daniel Comboni and the feeling of belonging to the Institute.

The third edition of the CCE was held from 8 September to 1 October in Verona and Limone sul Garda and then, from 1 October to 4 November, at the Centre for Ongoing Formation at the Generalate in Rome.

“Write us off or up-cycle us? The question arises – as Fr. Renzo Carraro, one of the participants, wrote – and, in the case of the elderly, the more constructive policy would unquestionably be to recycle them. This was the choice of our superiors who instituted the Course for the Elderly. In this third edition of the Course we are 23 Combonis, both priests and brothers, between 70 and 87 years of age, still in reasonably good health. Altogether, our missionary service amounts to about 800 years of missionary work.

We saw these two months of the Course as something of a dream come true: we were happy to spend time together, without the pressure of pastoral commitments, resting, playing, attending practical lessons relevant to our life that help us to share our long missionary experience ... In two weeks the Course will have finished but the bene-

fits of this exceptional experience will stay with us. We extend our appreciation to the members of the formation team who truly edified us with their intelligence, preparation, dedication and especially their unity of intent”.

DSP

### **New Provincial Procurator**

Fr. Hubert Grabmann has been appointed Provincial Procurator of the DSP as from 1 July 2018. He replaces Bro. Hans-Dieter Ritterbecks who has returned to the province of South Sudan. Fr. Hubert is originally from Berching in the district of the Upper Palatinate. He brings a broad missionary experience obtained during the last twelve years when he worked among the Pokot in northern Kenya. He will now be in contact with many missionaries and will be responsible for overseeing the projects supported by the DSP in other provinces.

Meanwhile, Bro. Hans Eigner has begun his work in charge of the missionary calendar of the Province: “The Work of the Redeemer” (Werk des Erlösers – WdE). Bro. Hans has also had ample missionary experience, having worked in the missions of Kenya and South Sudan. He replaces Fr. Bernhard Riegel who has been given another responsibility.

ESPAÑA

### **Barcelona community celebrates its Golden Jubilee**

On Sunday 14 October, the community of Barcelona celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation. Around two hundred people – relatives, friends and benefactors – attended the event.

The Eucharist of thanksgiving was celebrated in the local parish church of St. Frances Xavier at which the auxiliary bishop of the city, Mons. Sergi Gordó, presided, together with the Provincial Superior Fr. Pedro Andrés and the Parish Priest, Fr. Manuel Pérez. The bishop emphasised the important role played by the Comboni Missionaries in the course of the past fifty years in the field of mission promotion and pastoral work in the parishes.

After the Eucharistic celebration all those present moved to the house of the community at number 59, Calle Feliu i Codina, where refreshments were provided for the festive evening. The many Comboni

confreres who passed through the community were remembered, especially Fr. Giovanni Vedovato, now in the community of Lucca (Italy), who was one of the founders together with Fr. Juan Aranguren, Bro. Giovanni Cattaneo, Fr. José Rubio and Fr. Isidro Sans.

The parish community presented the members of the community with a plaque bearing the inscription: "From the community of St. Francis Xavier, in gratitude for the fifty years of work in Barcelona, 1968 - 2018".

## ITALIA

### **Nigrizia wins the Ferrari award for "Front page of the month"**

We are happy to announce that the front page of the July-August issue of Nigrizia – "The Revolt of the Clothes. Imported second-hand clothes suppress African production" – has been declared the winner of the award "Front page of the month", introduced by Cantine Ferrari for the following reasons: "There are many ways by which to vex black Africa, including that of flooding it with used clothes at extremely low prices with one obvious aim: to nip in the bud the local entrepreneurship that dares to produce clothing. But there are some who rebel and Nigrizia, the monthly magazine of the Comboni Missionaries, now more than a century in circulation, has made an enquiry that is summed up in a cover page which, in minimum terms and due to its immediately understandable title, is extraordinarily effective".

The Ferrari award is an initiative of the Trent winery to celebrate the creativity expressed by Italian editions, with prizes for the best title, article and cover of the year.

## POLSKA

### **Krackow: missionary picnic**

Also this year, at the Krakow Comboni house, the long-awaited missionary picnic was held.

On a beautiful September afternoon, the Comboni community provided a number of enjoyable activities, not only for children but also for adults. At the entrance, the children received a passport, a diploma and a "MiniKomboniane" diary, and had the immediate opportunity to test their manual dexterity by creating Africa-style decorations at the

*Become an Artist* stand. Other attractions included fashion, cooking, music, sport and even a short first-aid course.

Of course the missionary picnic aimed to make St. Daniel Comboni known and to present the youth movements and groups connected to the Combonis who, among other things, had helped to organise the event. An interview with Ewa, a Comboni Lay Missionary just returned after four years in Uganda, was a perfect occasion for the guests who heard how people live in that country, what it means for Ewa to be a lay missionary and how she lives out her vocation.

There was no shortage of food: by way of refreshments there were drinks, snacks and cakes, including the typical Polish *bigos* prepared by volunteers.

Several hundred people took part in the picnic, making it a great success. The magazine *Misjonarze Kombonianie* containing many missionary articles, was distributed to all.

## TOGO

### **Celebrating Comboni with the colours of a Silver Jubilee**

“God has called us all to be friends with Him and one another”. This was the theme of the homily preached by Fr. Timothée Hounaké, the bursar of the Togo-Ghana-Bénin Province, during the Mass for the solemnity of St. Daniel Comboni. Fr. Timothée, who was celebrating his twenty-fifty anniversary of ordination to the priesthood (14.08.1993-14.08.2018), referred to the Gospel of St. John 15.15, emphasising that Jesus calls us to be friends with him despite our limitations. He then named the confreres who operated in the province in friendship with Christ and who now rejoice in eternal friendship with him in heavenly beatitude. He also drew the attention of the confreres to the necessity of friendship among them, insisting on prayer as the foundation of fraternal relations.

The Mass was preceded by a conference on the Founder in which Fr. Sandro Cadei, who returned to the province on 17 August 2018, brought about some notable aspects of the personality of Comboni, among which was his firm decision to advance the work of God despite the many difficulties at that time.

After a fraternal meal, the provincial Fr. Victor Kouandé shared some information on the recent Intercapitular Assembly and the province. The entire Comboni Family: priests and brothers, sisters, lay people,

postulants and novices present in the three countries that make up the province of TGB.

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Bro. Olindo Tognon (31.03.1928 – 31.07.2018)**

Bro. Olindo was born in Padua on 31 March 1928. He was just turned twenty-seven when he felt he should become a missionary Brother and in March 1949 he entered the Florence novitiate where he took first vows on 9 September 1951. In 1952 he was sent to South Sudan assigned to the house and spent time at Lokoro, Kator, Lirya, Kadule and again at Lirya. On 9 September 1957 he made his final vows at Okaru. Like the other missionaries, he was expelled from Sudan in 1964 and returned to Italy. He was sent to the Crema community where he was in charge of administration until mid-1968.

In July of that year, he began his Uganda adventure which was to last fifty years, in charge of construction and the maintenance of the houses. His first appointment was to Rwanyena and this was followed by many others: Kigumba, Aduku, Minakulu, Kalongo, Alenga, Aliwang, again Aduku and Kigumba, then Morulem, Kanawat, Kangole and lastly Matany where he died on 31 July 2018.

On hearing of his death, Bro. Guerrino Baldo decided to write a testimony, part of which follows: "In 1971, in October, he came to pick me up at Entebbe airport and took me to Kigezi, my first mission. Bro. Olindo taught me how to live with the Bakiga, who they were, their habits and customs. In him I saw someone who loved those people. With great enthusiasm he taught me how to build a new mission, how to make trusses and roofs, install plumbing in the houses and the mechanics of vehicles. Whatever he had learned from other Brothers he taught me as well, with great passion. He used to say: if we want to make our mark, we Brothers must teach the Africans of the parish what we are able to do, with great patience and love for them".

### **Fr. Gianmario Vimercati (16.09.1946 – 23.08.2018)**

"I have never owned anything and I own nothing now except my personal things; I am happy to be poor and to have been born poor. Our Lord could not have done more for me by giving me the greatest gift of

all, the gift of life and also the gift of his priesthood. I thank God for parents who, despite their material poverty, taught me the first steps in the Christian faith and to hope for a better life, life eternal. If God should call me to himself here in the mission, let my body rest here among my people whom I have sought to serve and to love all these years; If instead I am called by God while in Italy, I would prefer, if it is not too much trouble, to be laid to rest in the cemetery of Velate, the town which welcomed me as a young man and helped me to grow in faith, the place where I discovered the call to the missionary priesthood". Fr. Gianmario wrote these words in a letter to his friends on 20 June 1987 from Moyale (Kenya). This availability and tact, together with a degree of shyness, accompanied him all his life.

On 22 June 1964, already seventeen, he wrote from Velate Milanese asking to enter the seminary of the Comboni Missionaries. He joined the Venegono novitiate and, on 17 May 1975, he took temporary vows. He was then sent to Elstree, in England, for the scholasticate and made his final vows at Edgware, London, on 28 April 1978. He was ordained priest on 16 September 1978 in the parish church of the Sacred Heart in Brescia, then in the care of the Combonis. He was appointed to work in Italy and went to Pesaro as vocations promoter. He also spent two years in Sulmona as bursar and formator.

In 1979 he was assigned to the province of Kenya where he stayed for seventeen years, first at Naivasha and then at Sololo, Moyale and Kacheliba. In 1993 he took part in the renewal Course in Rome.

In 2000 he returned to Italy suffering from a heart condition and stayed in Brescia until 2005, engaged in ministry and, in the final months of that year, as superior of the community. He was then sent to Rebbio to assist in looking after elderly confreres, a post which he filled with his usual availability and sensitivity until the end of 2013. In 2014, due to a worsening of his heart condition, he stayed at the Centre for sick and elderly confreres where he died on 23 August 2018. Those who visited him during those years – especially Fr. David Glenday and Fr. Francesco Chemello, companions of his in Elstree – were struck by how serenely he accepted his illness.

From among the many testimonies we received, we give here a small part of that of Lorot Salem, a Kenyan High Court lawyer and member of the legal Council of the National Assembly of Kenya who, like others, was assisted in his studies by Fr. Vimercati.

“The life of Fr. Gianmario at Kacheliba irradiated the light of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He was polite, compassionate and humble and in all his relations he was a diligent servant of God. He did not speak much but through his silence and his actions he was able to give me many important lessons in Christianity. He would share with us his experiences and gave us hope.

When he left Kacheliba to go to Italy we felt very sad and we prayed very much that Fr. Gianmario could one day return. I have kept my Baptism certificate that Fr. Gianmario signed personally. I have many beautiful memories of a man, a priest, who came into our lives, unselfishly serving in our midst. If he is ever to read these words of mine, we want to say: ‘asante sana’ (many thanks)”.

### **Fr. José Carlos Mendes da Costa (24.01.1947 – 04.09.2018)**

He was born on 24 January 1947 at Nogueira do Cravo, in the diocese of Coimbra, in Portugal, in the countryside and into a large family, five boys and three girls; only he and his younger brother were able to continue their studies and go to Coimbra Secondary School.

On finishing secondary school, José Carlos went to Lisbon. He was an intelligent and intuitive boy who dreamed of a better future and succeeded in joining the civil service. In the parish of Arroios where he lived, he undertook a journey in the faith and it was there that the Lord opened up for him new and unexpected horizons. The moment of grace came when he met a missionary in the parish who enthused young José Carlos and made him think of the missionary life.

On 1 September 1968 he arrived in Moncada, Spain, to join the group of Portuguese and Spanish novices who were starting their novitiate that year. After his first profession on 15 August 1970, he stayed another year in Moncada to complete his philosophical studies and, on 1 July 1971, he was sent to the Comboni seminary in Maia to assist in formation as prefect and to do his theological studies at Oporto (with the Capuchins, in Ameal, then frequented by other Comboni prefects in Maia). He was an active young man, lively, with a passion for life and the missionary vocation, who divided his time between accompanying the seminarians and his lessons in theology, and his missionary animation and vocations promotion work among the youth. He was sent to the scholasticate in Rome to study theology from 1 July 1973 to 30 June 1975 He asked to remain there to com-

plete his studies, free from the pressure of work. There he made his perpetual profession on 13 May 1974, and was ordained priest on 11 March 1975. He then returned to Portugal to work for *Além-Mar* magazine. In Lisbon, Fr. José Carlos enrolled in the Superior School of Journalism (ISLA) and again took up his work with the magazine and missionary animation.

In December 1981 he was appointed to Kenya where he remained until 1 July 1990. He was assigned to the most isolated mission at Moyale, on the border with Ethiopia. At that time, the Combonis had two missions in that area with two communities: Moyale and Sololo, where they ran a small hospital to improve the health of the Borana population. The missionary work centred on Islamised populations and the apostolate was demanding and difficult.

In March 1988 he was appointed to Makindu in the diocese of Machakos, among the Kamba. It was an environment that had well-established Christian communities, a context that helped him to grow in his dedication to the Christian communities: sacramental life, the formation of catechumens, the accompaniment of individuals, the youth and the communities. His work was interrupted in 1990 when he was sent to Portugal as administrator of the magazines.

His missionary life began again when he was appointed to Mozambique in 1997. At Mueria, where he was assigned, he again began to combine his organisational talents with more specifically missionary attention to the journey of faith of individuals and communities. In July 2007, he was again appointed to Portugal to administer the magazines. He returned with his usual interest but this time he found it hard to fit in: things were changing faster and he felt unprepared, due also to the beginnings of health problems.

During the journey from Lisbon to Coimbra he showed the first symptoms of a heart attack which left him weakened. Though lovingly assisted by his nephew, he nevertheless had to leave the work of administration and move to the community of Vila Nova de Famalicão.

It was then that a new stage of his mission began, marked by suffering caused by a tumour which suddenly undermined his health. Despite everything, he maintained his serenity, his sense of communion with the Lord, the confreres of the community and province and his friendship with all, up to the moment he passed away on 4 September 2018. (*Fr. Manuel Augusto Lopes Ferreira, mccj*)

### **Fr. Juan Benjumea Ramos (29.03.1938-21.09.2018)**

Juan Benjumea Ramos was born on 29 March 1938 at Paradas, a small town of whitewashed houses in the countryside of Seville, in the south of Spain. There were seven children in his humble, Christian family who lived by working in the fields and Juan, before he was ten years old, had to leave school to lend a hand. He also began from a tender age to work as an apprentice carpenter.

His passion for bullfighting also began very early: while only ten years old he began to practice in the small arenas of the nearby holdings – belonging to Conde de la Maza and José Benítez Cubero – where bulls were reared. He was quite good, so much so that he began to think of becoming a torero, since this would also help his family economically.

So it was that the years of his youth were marked by work and bullfighting, though he never neglected his Christian faith, attending Mass and going frequently to confession. There was one particular moment in his journey of faith in 1961 when he took part in the “cursillos” in Los Negrals (Madrid). He was 23 years old. “I remember how I felt I had been gored and thrown to the ground and from that moment I placed myself at the disposal of the One who threw me: Jesus himself”, he wrote in his diary. That was the start of an internal combat between his two vocations: torero and committed Christian. He continued to frequent various Christian communities in Madrid and Seville while continuing his activity as a torero, even reaching the most important arena in the world, Las Ventas in Madrid, on the evening of 7 August 1965. However, his performance was not one of his best and, despite the confidence many had in him he decided to abandon the bullring because, as he would write in his diary, he realised that in that world “he would never find what he was looking for: freedom to serve God alone”.

He lived for two years in Madrid, working as a carpenter and blacksmith after which he moved to Seville: he had come to know of the magazine *Mundo Negro*, and came into contact with the Comboni Missionaries. Soon afterwards, he was offered the possibility of beginning his formation as a Brother candidate. In September of 1968 he went to the house of Moncada (Valencia). At first he easily adapted to the life of the postulancy but, as the months passed, he began to feel somewhat dissatisfied and decided to leave. Fr. Giovanni Bressani,

who saw in him a clear vocation, left the door open for him if he ever wanted to return.

Juan again settled in Madrid where, with two friends, he opened a workshop for oil painting and water colouring. Meanwhile, he continued his spiritual search and kept in touch with the Combonis in Moncada until, in September 1970, he resumed his formation. In March 1972 he took his first vows and as a first appointment, was sent to Santiago de Compostela where work was beginning on the minor seminary and where his professional experience was of great help. Those years were filled with hard work and missionary animation in all of Galizia; however, they did not succeed in removing his vocational doubts. Tempted by the ideals of poverty and total self-giving, in October 1975 he wanted to join the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld, but obedience to his spiritual director and his provincial superior, Fr. Enrico Farè, prevented him. He was, in fact, appointed to the Comboni province of Ecuador and left by boat that same month on a journey that took nineteen days.

He was first assigned to Esmeraldas where he carried out various works and then to El Carmen. In that parish, on 15 July 1978, Juan took perpetual vows. Besides his work as a Brother, building and repairing what he could, Juan also gave spiritual leadership to the communities. Some people asked for confession which made Juan think of the possibility of becoming a priest. He informed his superiors of this desire of his in 1982. He was allowed to resume his studies where he left off while very young but failed in his attempt to enter the university for adults in Granada. He therefore returned to Quito and when the international scholasticate was opened in Lima, he joined the first group of Comboni students at the John XXIII Higher Institute in the capital. He succeeded in completing his studies in 1989 and, on 6 January 1990, he was ordained priest by Mons. Enrico Bartolucci in the cathedral of Esmeraldas. A week later, at the age of fifty-one, he already found himself in his new appointment: the parish of San Lorenzo. He worked very hard there for five years serving the mission until late in 1994 when he was recalled to Spain to work in missionary animation. On 25 July 1998 he was allowed to return to Ecuador, assigned to the mission of Borbón.

He returned to Spain at the end of 2015 showing the first symptoms of the illness that would result in his death. He died on 21 September

2018 at Moncada, in the same month and in the same community that had received him as a postulant fifty years previously.

**Fr. Efrem Agostini (07.03.1923 – 07.10.2018)**

Until 7 October Fr. Efrem Agostini was one of the 45 Combonis over 90 years of age. After some days of slow but serene agony, he passed away at Castel d’Azzano (Verona), during the night between Saturday and Sunday (6 and 7 October), closely attended by his brother Fr. Germano Agostini, also a Comboni. His funeral was celebrated on the morning of the ninth. As Divine Providence would have it, visiting the house at the moment of his passing was Fr. José Manuel Garcia, a Mexican Comboni who had lived with Fr. Efrem at La Paz (Bassa California) and presided at his funeral.

At the start of the Mass, Fr. Renzo Piazza spoke of the final moments of Fr. Efrem: “Saturday evening (6 October), before going to bed, I went to visit Fr. Efrem to say a final prayer. It was clear from his weak breathing that Sister Death was imminent. I asked the Lord: ‘Let him live until tomorrow, Rosary Sunday, so that he can celebrate the 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his religious consecration ...’ Soon afterwards he breathed his last: it was fifteen minutes past midnight and he could celebrate his anniversary in the company of Our Lord”.

Fr. Efrem was born at Fai della Paganella on 7 March 1923. He belonged to a special family of six children, three of whom were priests. Igino became a diocesan priest with Efrem and Germano becoming Combonis.

While very young he went to the Comboni apostolic school in Trent where he frequented the first three years of secondary school; he did the remaining years in Brescia. He completed his novitiate in Venegono where he made his first profession on 7 October 1942. As a scholastic, he stayed in Rebbio and Verona where he took perpetual vows on 7 October 1947 and was ordained priest on 6 June 1948.

Taking a step back in time, we read what Fr. Efrem himself wrote in 2013, remembering the beginnings of his vocation and the following years. “Even from childhood I desired to belong wholly to God and I asked him to realise this desire of becoming totally His. It then happened that the Combonis came to my town, Fai della Paganella. I came to know them and thought to myself: Lord, I would like to be like them and love like them!

I became a Comboni priest and my desire to leave for Africa grew ever greater. But God had other plans. In fact they sent me to Padua as bursar for a few months – so they said – and instead I stayed there for twelve years! At last Fr. Todesco said to me: 'Very well Agostini, now you can leave for Africa; you deserve it!' Everything was ready including my passport and visa for Uganda but right then Father General called me saying: 'Dear Fr. Efrem, they urgently need five missionaries in Mexico... I would ask this sacrifice of you'.

I was so angry at first... but let God's will be done. I did not know a word of Spanish and my teachers were the children: I learned the language spending time with them. I did not know where to start in the mission but I was certain of one thing: in order to do anything I had to love those people because I had given up everything for love. I began with those who were suffering, visiting the sick and their families and the poor.

Little by little the people won my heart and lo and behold Mexico and Lower California became my Africa! The land I loved. And with its people I grew and learned to love just as I desired as a child".

In 2018 Fr. Efrem had celebrated his 70 seventy years as a priest, spent partly in Italy in missionary animation (16 years), and 43 in Mexico where he had been sent in July 1973. He spent his final ten years in the houses of rest in Arco, the Verona Mother House and Castel d'Azzano, serene, smiling, loving the singing and the company of the confreres.

### **Fr. Vincenzo Turri (05.10.1933 – 12.10.2018)**

Fr. Vincenzo was born at Lagosanto (Ferrara) on 5 October 1933. In 1945 he entered the diocesan seminary of Comacchio and in 1950 he joined the Comboni Institute in Verona. He was ordained deacon by Cardinal Montini, later to become Pope Saint Paul VI. In 1959, on 14 March, he was ordained priest by Mons. Giovanni Mocellini, Bishop of Comacchio, in the town of Mezzogoro where his uncle Mons. Giuseppe Turri was the parish priest. On 15 March at Lagosanto he celebrated his first Mass. In 1962 he left as a missionary for Baja California and in 1970, in Mexico, he began his work in missionary animation; after some years he devoted himself to some of the most marginalised communities of Indios.

From 1982 to 2014 he served in missionary animation in Central America: Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador, promoting

missionary encounters in the parishes, courses for the formation of the young, inter-parish congresses, writing and disseminating books and missionary magazines and producing radio programmes.

He spent his final years at the A. Fiorini Centre in Castel D'Azzano (Verona) where he died on the evening of Friday 12 October at the age of 85 years. He had been suffering for some time from a tumour in his left ear and his condition had worsened in the previous week, spreading to other organs of his body.

Here is how Fr. Vincenzo describes his vocation in a personal letter of his: "I have never succeeded in finding the origin of my vocation: right from boyhood I felt attracted to the priestly life; I felt that only that would make me happy. My parents and teachers greatly encouraged me. I liked going to catechism, to the gatherings and fests celebrated in my parish. I felt happy when the priests gave me something to do. With great enthusiasm I would read the Bible they gave me for my first Holy Communion. It had many pictures that I was happy to show everyone. While I was an adolescent, I remember one day seeing in large figures the number of Christians and non-Christians in the world: there was an enormous difference and I was deeply affected. I could hear a voice inside me telling me to reduce that difference by making Jesus known. I read with great interest the magazines that the Comboni Missionaries were sending me. They helped me to discover more and more the peoples and races of the world and to love all human beings, taking no account of their differences. More than anything else, I liked to take an interest in refugees, abandoned children and the poor ... I felt the desire to share their life to help improve their condition. To me, the mission in other continents was an irresistible attraction: that was my path".

Fr. Vincenzo was a good man, meek and lovable. This gained him many friends who remembered him and enquired about him. He had a generous soul, on fire with the Spirit of Jesus and communicated his soul to those he met. He made missionary animation his reason for living, in Mexico, in Costa Rica, in Guatemala and in Salvador. He collaborated in founding Centres of Missionary Animation so that the Christians of those churches could feel the responsibility and the joy of collaborating with their poorest brothers and sisters.

Fr. Vincenzo's missionary experience filled him with joy and contagious enthusiasm and he wrote: "I have savoured the joy of being a Missionary precisely by sharing the poverty and suffering, the insecur-

rity, the cross and the martyrdom of those peoples who are at the very limits of every human situation. My mission: to be with them so as to grow together with them as a new Christian community which, in turn, is able to assume and carry on other missionary services beyond its frontiers, in other continents". (*Fr. Renzo Piazza*)

**Let us pray for our beloved dead**

**THE FATHERS:** Julian, of Fr. Lix Costop Agustín (PE), Heriberto, of Fr. Sierra Moreno José Aldo (RSA).

**THE MOTHERS:** Anna, of Fr. Malata Nsofwa (MZ), Elizabeth, of Fr. Mkhari Anthony (MZ).

**THE BROTHERS:** António, of Fr. Ramiro Loureiro da Cruz (P); Pietro, of Fr. Luigi Sala (I); Eduardo of Fr. Homero Gerardo Ramírez Ramírez (PCA).

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS:** Sr. Lucia Giampietro, Sr. Delfina Baldelli.