

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

773

April 2019



HAPPY EASTER

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL NOTES – Consulta, March-April 2019

1. Appointments

Fr. Medina Martínez Guillermo de Jesus has been appointed a member of the Council for Finance, for three year, as from 1 January, 2019.

Fr. Paolo Latorre is confirmed as a member of the Council for Finance for a further three years starting on 1 February 2019.

Fr. Manuel Ferreira Horta is confirmed as technical counsellor for the auditing of the accounts of the Council for Finance for a further three years starting on 15 March 2019.

Fr. Manuel Augusto Lopes Ferreira is appointed Director of Studium Combonianum as from 1 May 2019.

Fr. De Iaco Cosimo is appointed Procurator General as from 1 July 2019.

2. Consultations and elections

The GC invites all confreres to accompany with a deep spirit of discernment the process of consultations for the appointment of Circumscription superiors. This requires of each confrere a commitment to personal and community prayer, and sincere consultations and dialogue among confreres.

The service of animating, coordinating and organising our life in our circumscriptions demands that those called to this service have intellectual and organisational ability, and above all a profound life of faith, a strong feeling of belonging to our Institute and to the mission, as well as a capacity for healthy human relations with the confreres, the ability to listen, empathy and decision-making for the common good.

3. October 2019: Extraordinary Mission Month

The centenary of the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* provided Pope Francis with a starting point from which to proclaim the month of October 2019 an Extraordinary Mission Month. The Pope would like this month to «reawaken more fully awareness of the *ad gentes* mission and to renew with fresh zeal the missionary transformation of life and pastoral policies » (Letter to Card. Filoni). Furthermore, the Extraordinary Mission Month will coincide with the Special Synod for Amazonia

to be celebrated in Rome and in whose preparations some of our confreres are actively participating. We are certain that each circumscription will celebrate this month in the best possible way, even though this year is dedicated to interculturality and the circumscriptions have planned various activities on that theme.

To celebrate this Month, the General Secretariat for the Mission has suggested two activities for all circumscriptions: 1) to send in one or two interviews (in the form of short videos of three or four minutes in which an answer is given to the question: *Why is the ad gentes mission still necessary in the context where you live?* and 2) write some reflections and/or experiences of life lived in the *ad gentes* mission. These contributions will be published on our websites. We trust the circumscription superiors and the secretaries for the mission will encourage the confreres to put these proposals into effect.

4. Solidarity with the victims of Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe

The news bulletins have told the story of the tragic loss of hundreds of lives and how thousands of families have lost their homes, property and harvests due to the cyclone and floods along the Zambezi River. Some Comboni communities are located in places where the violent rains have caused most victims. The headquarters of our Beira community and that of the Comboni Sisters have been seriously damaged. On 20 March, Pope Francis drew the attention of the international community to the tragedy: "In the last few days, great floods have spread mourning and devastation in various regions of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. I express my sorrow and my closeness to those dear peoples. I entrust the many victims and their families to the mercy of God and I implore comfort and support for thus who have been struck by this calamity".

The GC appreciates the initiatives taken by some provinces to give financial help to the victims and sets aside a significant sum that will be given to the provinces of Mozambique and Malawi-Zambia, which will see that it is used to help the people affected by this tragedy. The invitation to take concrete initiatives of solidarity is extended to all the circumscriptions of the Institute. The General Economate is prepared to facilitate the transfer of funds collected.

By letting us know the amount of aid collected before the end of April, the provinces of Mozambique and Malawi-Zambia will be better able to plan and organise the help they can give.

5. Rule of Life

As had been planned, the restricted commission (two secretaries and the coordinator) for the Revision of the Rule of Life met in Rome from 4 to 8 March. Fr. Markus Körber, one of the secretaries, was unable to attend for health reasons; Fr. Benito De March attended in his place.

The commission was in a position to report that most of the circumscriptions have sent remarks and suggestions for eventual corrections to the RL. It also received some personal proposals sent by confreres. Many remarks were discussed and rewritten in the form of alternative texts by the commission. Up to the date established (15 May), we will continue to receive the work of the circumscriptions that, for various reasons, have not yet submitted their proposals.

The coordinator of the central commission, Fr. Víctor-Hugo Castillo Matarrita, handed over to the General Council all the work done during these days. Together, they accepted the proposal to involve, at this point in the process, the general secretaries so that, each in his own sector, may work on the basic elements that ought to be included in the texts of the RL. This work is expected to be sent to the commission no later than 15 May.

With respect to the meeting due to be held from 10 to 15 June, the central commission hope to have at its disposal a draft containing all the proposals suggested. It is meant to be a working document for the commission which, in turn, will pass it on to the Comboni consultants.

6. The importance of discernment carried out together on the suitability of our Scholastics/Brothers in initial formation

The General Council has observed that there is an increasing number of cases where there is tension and serious differences between Circumscription Superiors and Formators in discerning the suitability of Scholastics/Brothers in initial formation. This problem is accentuated by the lack of continual reciprocal communication between those involved, with the result that the Formators reveal serious problems in the journey of the candidates only at the end of the scholasticate/CIF. In some cases, the discernment of Circumscription Superiors and Formators produces opposing conclusions. To remedy this situation, the General Council all the confreres involved to:

- Put into practice what is laid down in our *Ratio Fundamentalis* No. 490 which speaks of the importance of *discernment made together* by major superiors and formators; of a frequent and regular exchange of

information regarding the formation journey of the candidates; of the *duty of formators to point out in good time to the competent authorities any serious difficulty whatever of the candidates* so that they can be faced up to in good time in a spirit of dialogue and open and clear discernment; of the *importance to be attributed to the evaluations and suggestions of the formators*.

- Avoid interference and disagreements that create harmful tensions in the formation environment.

The General Council has closely followed some Scholastics/Brothers who had to interrupt their formation journey due to personal failings. The Institute suffers because of this and therefore the GC also insists on the *co responsibility* of all the confreres to promote the good and the formation journey of our candidates in initial formation and to protect the good name of our communities and our Institute before the Church, society and local authorities.

7. Vademecum

During the Consulta of October 2018, the GC approved the “*Vademecum for the management of certain situations involving the members of the Institute*”. This instrument has been translated into the various official languages of the Institute and is available to all, though it is especially useful for Circumscription Superiors who have to deal with the canonical situations regarding members of the Institute. This *Vademecum* was formerly a part of the Directory of the General Council and came under the title of “particular situations of confreres”. The GC has decided to separate it from the rest of the Directory first of all because these norms apply to all of us and not only the General Administration, and, secondly, to provide the provincials with a practical instrument to help them take the necessary steps in the situations that occur. The GC requests that all should know these norms follow them and apply them in justice and charity.

8. Code of Conduct

The approval of the updated version of the Code is expected to be given in June, after the General Council has seen the results of the meetings of the Holy Father with the presidents of all the Episcopal conferences in the world and with some members of religious institutes.

9. Comboni Year

On 19 September next, the XIX edition of the Comboni year of Ongoing Formation (CYOF) will open. Fourteen confreres have been enrolled of whom eight do not speak Italian; for this reason they will come to Rome three months early to study the language. A total of 314 confreres took have taken part in previous editions. This initiative in ongoing formation is a product of the decision of the 1991 General Chapter, confirmed by the 1997 Chapter and defined by the 2003 Chapter as '*an integral part of the journey of formation of all Comboni Missionaries*' (No. 62.2) after 10-15 years of missionary service. The CYOF provides each participant with a privileged opportunity to review his personal experience of mission by means of a deeper encounter with God, with himself, with St. Daniel Comboni and with the confreres, for renewed missionary service.

10. Novitiate finalists and their assignment

This year there are 31 finalist novices in our novitiates: 13 in Cotonou, 8 in Lusaka, 6 in Xochimilco and 4 in Nampula, including two Brother candidates. First professions are planned for 4 May in Cotonou (Benin) and in Lusaka (Zambia), for 11 May in Xochimilco (Mexico) and for 25 May in Nampula (Mozambique).

In dialogue with the formators, the Circumscription Superiors and the general Secretary for Formation, the General Council has assigned them to their scholasticates/CIF: 2 to Cape Coast, 3 to Casavatore, 6 to Kinshasa, 2 to Lima, 7 to Nairobi, 5 to Pietermaritzburg, 4 to São Paulo, 1 to the CBC in Nairobi and 1 to the Bogotá CIF. 25 of them are from Africa, 5 from America and 1 from Asia. The Institute joyfully welcomes these candidates given to us by the Lord and accompanies them with its prayers.

11. JPIC in Formation

The 2018 Comboni Social Forum proposed to bring the theme of JPIC into formation. The General Secretary for Formation and the General Secretary for the Mission met to consider how to implement this project. The orientation is to create material for use in the houses of formation. It is therefore only right that the formators and those responsible for JPIC in each Circumscription give their contribution to the elaboration of this material. Fr. Daniele Moschetti, Bro. Alberto Parise and Fr. Fernando Zolli make up the commission that will prepare the first draft. They will present a proposal for themes which will then be shared with a view to enriching it. The GC sees the importance of this

theme which responds to a clear Chapter orientation to continue and to deepen the Comboni mission in the field of JPIC.

11. Journeys and commitments of the GC

Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse G.

28 April – 1 May: Residential seminar in Ariccia (SEDOS)
5 – 19 May: Spiritual retreat for the NAP confreres

Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins

16 April – 8 May: Visit to RSA
17 – 29 May: in Portugal

Fr. Pietro Ciuciulla

7 – 11 April: in Lebanon
15 – 24 April: in Sicily
27 April – 8 May: in Togo-Ghana-Bénin
11 – 20 May: a Nairobi

Fr. Alcides Costa

8 – 21 May: visit to Mexico
29 June – 10 August: in Lima and Brazil

Bro. Alberto Lamana Cónsola

29 April – 2 May: in Pesaro for the meeting of the Brothers
20 – 25 May: in Layibi (U) for the APDESAM Brothers Assembly
27 – 31 May: in Maia (P) for a Mass Media meeting

Ordinations to the priesthood

Fr. Luna Sánchez Jonathan Alejandro (PE) Lima (PE) 16/03/2019

Holy redeemer Guild

April	01 – 15 CN	16 – 30 EC
May	01 – 15 ET	16 – 31 I

Prayer intentions

April – That the celebration of the passion and resurrection of Jesus may heal and reunite the peoples of all cultures and give them the

strength to overcome the barriers that prevent their peaceful coexistence. *Let us Pray.*

May – That women may be ever more aware of their specific role and talents and participate fully in the life and leadership of the Church. *Let us Pray.*

Publications

Mateus Dziobkowski, *L'opzione preferenziale per i poveri nella luce della vita e testimonianza di Ezechiele Ramin*, a dissertation for a Licentiate in Theology of the Christian Life, a moral theme, at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy, St Louis Section, Naples, in the academic year of 2017-2018. Accompanied by the “challenging” statement of Jesus – Blessed are the poor – which caused me much perplexity”, the ex-scholastic Mateus explains in the Introduction his decision to dedicate his work to the theme of poverty, to the poor people who accompanied him, to the saints and to all who chose to dedicate themselves to the poor with Pope Francis as their guide.

Enzo Santangelo, *A Mulher que mudou a Historia*, Alô Mundo, São Paulo, February 2019. The author presents Our Lady as she tells the story of the various stages in the life of her Family, from the town of Nazareth to the coming of the Holy Spirit and, as the Presentation emphasises, obedient to the norms emanating from the Council, he was careful to avoid both false exaggerations and an excessively restricted approach.

Adriana and Gianfranco Caporossi, Suor Maria Rosa Venturelli, *Un'avventura di solidarietà*, Roma 2019. “our aim – the authors write in the Premise – was to write a history of ACSE and the love which Fr. Renato Bresciani had for Africa and for young people, from the perspective of the collaborators of the past and those responsible for his work today”. Their work, they explained, involved interviews, long telephone calls and extracts from documents, faithfully reproduced in chronological order, together with the feelings and experiences of those who lived alongside Fr. Bresciani during those marvellous years.

Martina Spadoni, *Le bambine soldato accolte dalla St. Monica Girls' Tailoring Centre: studio della resilienza sviluppata*, Università di Bolo-

gna *Alma Mater Studiorum*. This thesis for a degree in nursing sciences and neuropsychiatric and rehabilitation techniques is the “result of a journey undertaken to come to know at first hand the history of these female child soldiers, the victims of the civil war”, after the author met (in Italy) Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe, Headmistress of the school, and “her story of accounts by the children ... whose voices have been left unheard for far too long and which ought to disturb our consciences”.

BRASILE

State of Roraima: contradictions and challenges

Roraima, at the moment, is a place of contrasts and challenges that the unfavourable political context, both national and international, presents to the Comboni mission.

Almost half of the Roraima population is indigenous. The Macuxi, Wapichana, Turepang, Wai Wai, Patamona and Yanomami peoples are very well organised. Various indigenous people are professionally qualified and trained: doctors, nurses, lawyers and many teachers with third-level education.

All the indigenous populations, like us, Comboni Missionaries, are very concerned at the declarations and the first actions of the federal government of Brazil. The president has declared that *not even a square centimetre of land will be given to the indigenous community or those of African descent*.

Our Comboni community assists a region already recognised as indigenous territory, as well as a second unrecognised area which is coveted by many *fazendeiros* who have settled nearby.

We are committed – and this is part of our pastoral – together with the indigenous pastoral of Roraima, to the defence and the rights of the indigenous people and the protection of their lands.

In recent days there has been an increase in violence at the borders with Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil. The organisations and the social movements in Boa Vista are following with concern what is happening and are getting themselves organised in preparation for different scenarios. What concerns us most is the decision of the Lima Group to further increase the commercial embargo measures taken against Venezuela.

Meanwhile, in recent months, the flow of migrants across the border with Brazil has continued. Most of them wait a long time in Boa Vista.

We have begun to collaborate in assisting the Venezuelans in the reception centres of the city, and also in assisting the indigenous Waraos; however, these reception centres are now being administered by the army and we can no longer work in them.

Caritas is doing wonderful work among the migrants: the project "Journeys of Solidarity" facilitates the flow of migrants towards the interior of Brazil, with the help of various dioceses and parishes of the country which are prepared to welcome Venezuelans for an insertion period of 2-4 months. This is an important sign of solidarity and hope.

The Comboni community offers spiritual and health assistance and is ready to help in emergencies. We have made our house available and we have built two small rooms and a bathroom which have already been used to receive some Venezuelans for a short period.

CONGO

Visit by Fr. Tesfaye and Bro. Lamana

Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General, and Bro. Alberto Lamana, General Assistant, undertook what we may call "marathon" to visit the immense Comboni Province in a vast country, the Democratic Republic of Congo where the Combonis first started to work in 1963. The visit was carried out in two stages.

The first, from 29 January to 16 February, began in the eastern part of the country, the scene of all sorts of abuses and violence, with continually increasing insecurity. Fr. Tesfaye and Bro. Alberto visited the confreres in Butembo where the Brothers' postulancy and pre-postulancy is located. They then took part in the provincial Assembly which is held every two years, in Kisangani which is also the seat of the postulancy for candidates to the priesthood. Fr. Tesfaye presided at the opening Mass at the new postulancy chapel, visited the community and engaged in dialogue with the confreres and the Comboni lay missionaries. On Sunday, 10 February, he celebrated the Mass in the Comboni-run parish of *Malkia wa Mashaidi*.

The second stage of the visit took place from 26 February to 8 March, in the region of Kinshasa. On his arrival, Fr. Tesfaye was met by the provincial superior Fr. Joseph Mumbere. There are four communities in Kinshasa. The provincial house is also the seat of the

magazine *Afriquespoir*. Having met each confrere, Father General visited the community of Bibwa along with the parish of Notre Dame du Bon Secours and, on 1 March, the community of Kimwenza and the parish of Divine Mercy, entrusted to the care of the Comboni missionaries since 2015, the year of its erection. On Monday, 4 March, Fr. Tesfaye visited the scholasticate of Bienheureux Isidore Bakanja, in the commune of Kintambo. During the concluding Mass, he conferred the ministries of lector and acolyte on some of the scholastics.

ITALIA

ACSE jubilee

Initiatives for the Jubilee are continuing. On 28 February a meeting was held in the Chapter Hall of the Comboni Missionaries in Via Lilio, Rome, where, in 1969, the Chapter officially decided on a commitment in favour of immigrants.

The theme of the encounter was “Health care for immigrants today”. As many as six relators took part, all doctors involved with immigrants. Pride of place was given to Doctor Giuseppe Teofili, director of the ACSE dentistry studio.

On 25 March, in the large church of St. Ignatius of Loyola, also in Rome, a shared meeting was held on the theme “A welcome that regenerates”. The speakers were Fr. Alex Zanotelli and Domenico Lucano, Mayor of Riace. Mons. Paolo Lojudice, auxiliary Bishop of Rome, and Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Immigrants, of the Italian Episcopal Conference, opened the meeting. The moderator for the event was Fr. Venanzio Milani, President of ACSE.

JPIC Workshop in Pesaro

The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) of the Italian province has held a workshop, from 18 to 20 March 2019, in Pesaro, on the theme “Seeking instruments for the analysis of the situation and the orientation of the encyclical *Laudato si'* towards an ecological conversion”.

Eleven Comboni communities were represented by about twenty missionaries working in this sector. The work was facilitated by Francuccio Gesualdi, director of the “A new Model of Development Centre”, who, on the morning of the first day, outlined the key points for an understanding of the two crises in our world of today: a political-

economic crisis and that regarding ecology. In the evening, Fr. Alex Zanotelli presented his sapiential reading of the signs of the times.

On the evening of 19 March, Fr. Filippo Ivardi, who had recently returned from Chad, shared his ideas on the importance of dialogue and the involvement of young Christians and Moslems in Abeché, in initiatives that promote the common good of the people in the villages.

Fr. Daniele Moschetti emphasised the importance of insertion in conflict situations such as that of South Sudan and of concern for people who are wounded, even psychologically and need support and a fresh start.

In conclusion, Fr. Claudio Zendron brought out the traumatic experience of the people of Venezuela.

On the morning of 20 March, taking as his starting point the encyclical *Laudato si'*, Fr. Domenico Guarino helped the participants to understand the importance of ecological conversion.

The participants greatly appreciated the workshop. For the confreres who had come recently to the province, it was an opportunity to reach a better understanding of the complexities of the reality to be taken into consideration for the mission in Italy. The participation of two postulants from the Padua community was also greatly appreciated.

MOZAMBICO

Opening of the academic year at Matola Postulancy

On 9 March the 2019 academic year was opened at the Matola Comboni postulancy. The provincial superior, Fr. António Manuel Bogaio Constantino, presided at the opening Mass, concelebrated by the confreres of the southern zone. Fr. Constantino, after listening to the requests to join the postulancy by 13 young men, welcomed them. They will now join the 15 postulants who are starting their second year.

In his homily, the provincial appealed to the postulants and all present to trust always in God, the One who satisfies us in the aridity of our lives and renews our strength; he also remarked that the call to missionary life comes from Jesus himself.

As a visible gesture of admission to the postulancy, he presented each of the new postulants with a copy of the "Educative Charter" and a Rosary with which to pray to Our Lady for vocational perseverance.

At the offertory, members of the faithful from the various parishes of Matola presented gifts of foodstuffs to meet the needs of the community of missionaries. Among those present were some former Comboni seminarians, the “Friends of Comboni” group, the “Comboni Group” from the community of Saint Josephine Bakhita and various invited guests. Before the Mass, all those present had a meeting with the formators.

After the Eucharistic celebration, the festivities continued in the garden of the seminary where all shared in a meal while entertained with music and dancing.

The present state of affairs

Cyclone Idai, with its winds of up to 220 Kph and torrential rains left behind it, in the city of Beira and its surroundings, a scene of destruction never before seen in the history of Mozambique. In a matter of hours, the city was reduced to a nightmare: ruined buildings everywhere, with hospitals and churches destroyed, trees blown down and electricity and telephone lines put out of action.

In the city of Chiveve, a blackout affected 95% of the buildings; only the local airport was spared and it became a refuge for the local people and others from abroad who came to help. The outskirts of Munhava, Muchatazina, Vaz, Chota and Ndunda, were hit by floods as well as the destruction of houses.

The only connecting road was cut by the fury of the rivers Pungue, Búzi, Muda and their tributaries which burst their banks causing havoc in the districts of Dondo, Búzi, Nhamatanda and Chibabava in the province of Sofala. Beira, too, was cut off when a dam collapsed at Dondo, causing the destruction of Estrada No. 6, a new road only recently reopened and the only means of reaching other cities. The inhabitants of Beira were left completely isolated for more than a week. Essential foodstuffs were becoming scarce and it kept on raining.

In its efforts to help, the international community decided to transfer to Beira the people of the surrounding districts; reception centres were set up for them in various places throughout the city.

The figures regarding the affected areas are still uncertain. It is known that 3,140 schoolrooms usually attended by 90,756 pupils were destroyed as well as 19,730 houses. Fatalities in the area are more than 500. The number of homeless people is not yet known.

As regards the Combonis, in Beira we work in the suburban area of Chota, where more than 70,000 people live. 270 families had their homes destroyed and 170 are urgently in need of food and essential items. Our immediate concern is to assist these families in their needs.

Secondly, we will help them to rebuild their homes, a small school and a parish youth centre: the former one was built with poor material and was completely destroyed by the cyclone. It is our wish that this centre may give hope to children, adolescents and young people. It must be a sound structure and built to last. We also want to initiate a health and nutrition education programme for mothers.

In the area of Chota, around 200 people contracted cholera and this number is expected to rise. A vaccination campaign is soon to be launched. The district is on maximum alert. Malaria is another immediate concern. Two weeks after the cyclone, stagnant water and pools have become places where the eggs of the mosquitoes that carry malaria incubate.

In the area of Muxúngue (the parish is about 350 km from Beira); the worst affected areas are those of Nhahápua, Goonda Madjaka and Gurudja through which the rivers Muda and Búzi flow. The missionaries of the area estimate that more than 120 families, with an average of six children have been affected. At the moment, the civil authorities are providing assistance. (*Fr. Constantino Bogaio, Provincial Superior*)

POLONIA

Meeting of Provincial Superiors of Europe

From 26 to 28 February, the Comboni circumscription superiors of Europe gathered for their annual assembly in the Polish city of Krakow. The meeting was also attended by Fr. Tomasz Marek, representing the Vicar general for Poland and Bro. Alberto Lamana, general assistant.

Among the most important points on the agenda was that of sharing on the present situation in each of the circumscriptions – Poland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the German-speaking province (DSP) and the London Province (LP) –, and a reflection on the re-qualification of the Comboni missionary presence in Europe.

The provincials assessed the situation regarding the following sectors: Formation, Mass Media, Finance, Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM), Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Migrants and the Europe Group for Theological Reflection (GERT). Their work consisted in:

- Analysing the programme for the first European Mission Workshop, due to take place from 1 to 6 July, in Verona, on the theme of interculturality;
- Evaluating the three possibilities presented by the commission for carrying out the so-called Comboni Work of Human Promotion in Europe in social contexts with a large influx of migrants: Camarate (Portugal), Granada (Spain) and Rome (Italy);
- Reviewing the Limone project as a Comboni space for a personal experience of contact with the Founder and the youth vocations pastoral centre, integrated into the journey from Verona to Limone and the importance of keeping it on a European level;
- Approving the proposal for a meeting of young Combonis working in Europe, centred on interculturality, to be held in Nuremberg (Germany) in September;
- Taking note of the situation regarding the website www.combonieurope.org, which is meant to serve as a common platform for the magazines, the web-pages of the provinces and Comboni youth ministry in Europe.

Two moments of special significance were a visit to the shrine of Jasna Gora (Częstochowa), to seek the intercession of the Black Madonna, and a visit to the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau.

SUD SUDAN

Assembly for Comboni Missionaries engaged in the JPIC sector

The heads of the Justice, peace and Integrity of Creation sector (JPIC) in the Anglophone (APDESAM) and Francophone (ASCAF) circumscriptions of Africa came together in an assembly held from 1 to 7 April 2019, at the Good Shepherd Peace Centre, to the south-east of Juba, in South Sudan, to reflect upon “A Catholic response to the question of Justice and Peace in an Africa of continual change”.

Ten of the thirteen circumscriptions sent representatives. Those of the Central African Republic, Eritrea and Mozambique were absent

and excused. Representing the Secretary General for the Mission, Rome, was Fr. Arlindo Pinto. The moderator was Aloys Ojore, a professor at Tangaza University, Nairobi (Kenya).

In concluding the assembly, which was organised by Fr. Louis Okot, provincial superior of South Sudan and head of the APDESAM JPIC sector, in collaboration with the General Secretariat for the, the missionaries drafted a message to all the confreres working in Africa. The message ends with twelve proposals for possible steps to be taken, as Combonis, for effective reconciliation and peace and for greater social and environmental justice in the African continent. It is available on the comboni.org website

IN PACE CHRISTI

Mons. Antonio Menegazzo (13.09.1931 – 20.03.2019)

Antonio was born on 13 September 1931, in Cittadella, in the province of Padua, the fifth of seven children. In 1937 he entered the junior seminary of the Comboni missionaries in Padua and then went to the novitiate in Florence where he took first vows on 9 September 1950. He continued his studies at Rebbio (Como) and in Venegono where he studied philosophy and theology. On 9 September 1956 he took perpetual vows and on 15 June 1957 he was ordained priest in Milan by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI.

Immediately after his ordination he commenced his mission at the parish of Kadugli, first as curate and the following year as parish priest. He also served as superior from 1961 to 1963. He was afterwards sent to El Fasher in Darfur, and, in 1967, to the parish of St. George at En Nahud where he soon became well known among the largely non-Christian people.

In 1974 Fr. Antonio was transferred to Port Sudan in the extreme east of the Red Sea region where there was much work to be done among the migrant workers, Eritrean refugees and the prestigious Comboni Secondary S. From 1975 to 1984 he worked at Khartoum cathedral with Mons. Agostino Baroni who wanted a strong and energetic priest for his new archdiocese. The diocese included all North Sudan and had an area of 1,750,000 Km².

In 1976 Fr. Antonio was elected Vicar General and was given the task of visiting the parishes, schools, communities of women religious, hospitals and houses of formation and to meet the religious and secu-

lar priests of the diocese; he was also superior at the cathedral and was elected vice-regional superior.

On the hundredth anniversary of the death of Daniel Comboni (10 October 1981), Mons. Baroni wisely decided to hand over the diocese to a young bishop, native of Sudan. That decision definitively changed the face of the Catholic Church in Sudan. With the appointment of Gabriel Zubeir, the first indigenous bishop of Khartoum, the process of Sudanisation of the Church in North Sudan began. Mons. Zubeir took office on 10 October 1981, with his see at Khartoum. Fr. Antonio helped the new archbishop to administer the immense diocese. With the increasing pastoral work, the archbishop could see the need to divide the diocese geographical so he created a pastoral region centred in the city of Kosti: Fr. Antonio was placed in charge of that region and was given the title of Episcopal Vicar. His mandate was characterised by the spread of the Church and growth in faith.

In 1992 he was appointed Apostolic Administrator of El Obeid by the Holy See and, in 1996, was consecrated Bishop with the title of Mesarfelta. The diocese of El Obeid included three regions: North Kordofan, South Kordofan and Darfur, with an area of around 888,000 Km².

The organisation of such a diocese with its many pastoral needs was not an easy task, even though the region was not altogether new to Mons. Menegazzo who had worked there in 1960 and 1970. He renewed contacts with his former parishioners and established relations with non-Christians. He started many new projects and completed those begun by his predecessor.

It was at a time when the whole country was undergoing severe Islamisation. The missionaries were limited in their movements and their visas were cancelled for no good reason. Priests and men and women religious were kept under control by government personnel. Some influential lay people were arrested because they had remained Christian. The Catholic schools were closed. Even though the Church was not involved in the civil war that took place from 1983 to 2005, it was under attack because of its stance with respect to human rights. With the coming of peace and calm in most of the diocese of El-Obeid, Mons. Menegazzo began the construction of churches.

We remember him for his simplicity and his closeness to the needy in the more difficult moments and the great humanity of his that he showed in his numerous pastoral visits and in his many letters. His

most memorable address was that of Easter 2006 in which Mons. Menegazzo tackled the question of post-war reconciliation, exhorting his faithful to forgiveness and the friendly resolution of problems. The message was sent out in Arabic, English and Dinka and was widely read in churches and used in catechism lessons.

On 15 August 2010, when the new bishop was ordained, Mons. Menegazzo ended his mandate in Sudan and returned to Italy where he settled in his native parish of Cittadella. There he continued to exercise his ministry until his death on 20 March 2019. His funeral took place in the cathedral of the city on Monday 25 March with the Bishop of Padua, Monsignor Claudio Cipolla presiding, accompanied by his predecessor Mons. A. Mattiazzo, an African bishop from Tanzania and more than sixty concelebrating priests of whom fifteen were Combonis, including Superior General Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse and the provincial Superior Fr. Giovanni Munari. The church was packed and among the congregation there were various representatives of the civil authorities and parish associations. His remains were interred in the crypt reserved for diocesan priests in the cemetery of Cittadella.

Mons. Michele Russo (30.01.1945 – 29.03.2019)

“All of us – we read in the message of the General Council for the funeral of Mons. Michele Russo – are witnesses of his love and his passion for the mission. On several occasions he did not hesitate to risk his life for his people, for the Chadians of the diocese of Doba who had become his spiritual sons and daughters and his brothers and sisters in Christ”.

He was born in San Giovanni Rotondo (Foggia) on 30 January 1945. After middle school in Troia (Foggia) and Sulmona (Aquila) and high school in Carraia (Lucca), he did the novitiate in Gozzano (Varese) where he took first vows on 9 September 1966. He went to Venegono Superiore (Varese) for the scholasticate and there took final vows on 9 September 1969. He was ordained priest on 18 March 1970.

After five years of ministry in Italy where he spent a year in Naples in missionary animation and four years in Bari in vocations promotion and with the GIM, Fr. Michele was appointed to the Province of Central Africa which included the Central African Republic and Chad.

He spent a year in Paris studying French and, in 1976, left for central Africa. For three years he exercises his ministry as curate at Mon-

goumba; during the next six years he was parish priest and local superior at Doba.

After a Sabbatical year in Italy, he returned to central Africa where, on 1 January 1987, he began his ministry as provincial superior.

When Chad became a delegation, Mons. Russo, who had been consecrated bishop on 21 May 1989, assumed responsibility for the diocese of Doba.

In an interview with Fr. Neno Contran, in the summer of that same year, Mons. Russo said of his diocese: "The diocese of Doba originated from the division of the diocese of Moundou which, with its 54,000 km² (an area equal to Piedmont and Lombardy together) was difficult to visit and to administer. The new diocese of Doba occupied 28,000 km², in the extreme south of Chad. The inhabitants belong to various ethnic groups: Ngambay, Gor, Kabri, etc. Catholics number 96,000... Now the country is at peace. However, the influence of Islam seems increasingly strong everywhere. Our priorities are the formation of catechists and community leaders, that is, of Christians involved in animation, not only in the religious sense but also socially and administratively. It is clear that the future of this Church lies in its Chadian vocations, both male and female". In fact, one of the major problems the bishop had to face was the great lack of personnel dedicated to the apostolate: in the new diocese, he could count only on twenty priests (seven of whom were Chadians), thirteen missionaries and around thirty religious women (seven of whom were indigenous).

In 2011, also during an interview, Mons. Russo declared: "My 35 years of presence in Chad has given me quite a lot of self-confidence: I was formerly rather shy but now I am more sure of myself and, if I have to say something, I have no fear of doing so ... For all too many years there has been an intolerable silence about Africa. It is a very rich continent in which almost all the people live miserably. This is not acceptable and it is impossible not to speak of it!".

It was in fact due to the clear stance he took and his condemnation of the situation of the country that, on 12 October 2012 Mons. Russo was expelled from Chad. During a homily he gave some time previously on the occasion of a patron feast and badly translated into the Gambay language (and broadcast by radio), he had expressed his perplexity regarding the management of profits from oil, and especially at seeing how the local population does not benefit from those profits but continues to live in poverty. According to government authorities,

the reason given for his expulsion was “activities incompatible with his role”.

Father General and his Council immediately expressed their solidarity with Mons. Russo and the population of the diocese of Doba. On 8 January, 2013, he returned to Chad with the permission of the government but, on 30 January he resigned his bishopric for health reasons. He still continued to reside in Chad while coming to Italy for treatment.

Mons. Russo returned for good to Italy in mid-2015. He lived for the rest of his years in the community of Milan where he died on 29 March 2019. His funeral took place in Milan on 1 April and in San Giovanni Rotondo on 2 April 2019.

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHERS: Mariano, of Fr. Rodolfo Hilaje Coaquira (NAP); José, of Fr. Joaquim José Moreira da Silva (ET).

THE MOTHER: Josefina, of Fr. José Alfonso Pérez Aritzmeni (M).

THE BROTHERS: Karl, of Bro. Friedbert Tremmel (KE); José Javier, of Fr. Vicente Luis Reig Bellver (E); Virgílio, of Bro Almeida Borges (P); José Luis, of Fr. Jerónimo Alberto Vieira da Costa (P).

THE SISTERS: Lucia, of Fr. Piergiorgio Prandina (C), María Manuela, of Fr. Daniel Villaverde (E); Maria, of Fr. Elia Ciapetti (I); Carla, of Fr. Davide Ferraboschi (EGSD).

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS: Sr. Anna Rita Santoro, Sr. Redenzialma Beretta, Sr. M. Elena Binetti, Sr. Lia Pia Moro, Sr. María Adela Prieto Calzada, Sr. Rosalucia Vinco, Sr. Regina Assunta Zenere, Sr. Adelaide M. Muhur.

Fr. Adalberto Del Nero, a former Comboni, incardinated in the diocese of Como on 30 November 1996. He worked for some years in Ecuador. He died on 5 April at Morbegno (Sondrio, Italy).

MISSIONARI COMBONIANI VIA LUIGI LILIO 80 - ROMA
