

# Familia Comboniana

---

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

---

785

May 2020

## GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

### Perpetual Professions

Sc. Malema Bati Maurice (CN)	Kisangani (RDC)	25/04/2020
Sc. Mponda João Mponda (MO)	Beira (MO)	26/04/2020

### Holy Redeemer Guild

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

### Prayer intentions

**May** – That those in positions of responsibility may entrust themselves to Our Lady in order to perceive the presence and wisdom of God in their decisions and actions and so serve with greater joy and effectiveness. *Lord hear us.*

**June** – That, with our gaze fixed on the Heart of Jesus we may see His face in all we meet, especially in the poorest and most abandoned. *Lord hear us.*

## The Comboni Missionaries and the COVID-19 pandemic

### Asia

Right from the start of this year, our work in China and in bordering countries was brought to a standstill. Also in the Philippines we are confined to our houses until May. The poor people have no work and no food. Only in Taiwan, though with some restrictions, it is possible for our two parishes to function to a degree. In Macau, we are restarting by holding some small meetings. Since it is not possible to go out, we accompany those who suffer with our prayers.

## **Central America**

The first case occurred in Costa Rica on 6<sup>th</sup> March and with it the virus was no longer just a problem of “other countries”. It has not been possible for us to go out because of the measures imposed by the governments of the three countries that make up the Province. The people have not been allowed to take part in religious functions so the services are now being transmitted via internet and people are happy to hear the Word of God every day. The virus has forced us to stay in our communities and pray for those in need.

## **Colombia**

The Delegate, Fr. Antonio Villarino, was travelling back to Colombia after the meeting in Rome when he was obliged to stay in Madrid. None of our confreres in Colombia are ill with the virus but they all have to stay in our houses. Fr. Nascimbene and the other confreres have started to organise assistance for the poor.

## **Congo**

The Coronavirus was first identified in Kinshasa on 10 March. Two weeks later, a state of emergency was declared: schools and churches, bars, hotels and restaurants were closed, with banks allowed to open during certain hours and national and international flights suspended. Normal social life has almost collapsed. In Kinshasa, our communities have to remain indoors. Each community organises times for fraternal life and prayer, observing the precautionary measures. The other communities of the Province have not been affected by the Coronavirus. All Fr. Provincial's visits and all other meetings in the regions of Kinshasa and Kisangani have been postponed. We were much saddened by the news of the death of Fr. Bepi Simoni, who worked in the Congo. We celebrated, without the participation of anyone from outside, the perpetual profession of the Sc. Maurice Malema. Fr. Provincial sent us all an Easter message by video, encouraging us to live in hope and solidarity.

## **Curia**

We have had no cases of the virus in our Rome communities. We all keep to the safety measures. The three communities always celebrate separately and that of the Comboni Year is coming to the end of the Course, having had to cancel some conferences by external facilitators. The students have been able to keep in touch with their teachers by internet and they hope to be able to sit for their exams

and diplomas. In The General Curia we have some confreres who, on returning from other regions of Italy, have been kept in precautionary quarantine, including the Superior of the community, Fr. Celestino Prevedello, who had gone to Padua for treatment and also Fr. Michele Tondi, who had gone to his home town for his mother's funeral. Two confreres have been waiting a long time to be able to leave for their circumscriptions to which they were assigned.

## **DSP**

Due to movement prohibition and social distancing, the confreres involved in pastoral are out of work. Some have tried to create virtual connections using the social media (telephone, e-mail, internet) to help the faithful and friends to make the journey towards Easter. The average age of the confreres in this province is very high so we need to protect ourselves properly: for example, in Ellwangen community, some of the more elderly confreres have been isolated from the others. On 16 April, Fr. Karl Wetzel had to celebrate his ninetieth birthday with just the nurses and the eldest confreres for company. This crisis helps us to reflect and reconsider our mission and plan new ways to make a new start.

## **Ecuador**

Starting in mid-March, the government of Ecuador has taken drastic measures to prevent the spread of the virus, allowing only basic services to function. By 20 April, the number of cases had risen to over twenty thousand with more than a thousand deaths. The most affected province is that of Guayaquil where the health and funeral services have been overwhelmed. A photograph of victims abandoned in the streets has been seen all over the world on the social media. The military forces had to intervene to remedy the situation. Very many poor people are disadvantaged by the national prohibition of movement; for them, staying closed in their little houses is uncomfortable, almost impossible. Not everyone can access the health service or medicine. The virus seems to have taken many people unawares in the provinces, in Quito, the capital and in popular touristic areas like the Galapagos Islands and among the indigenous peoples of the Amazonian provinces. In addition to the pandemic, we have also experienced a serious accident that caused the rupture of the pipelines, causing the leaking oil to pour into the Coca and Napo Rivers, resulting in an ecological and environmental disaster. This has worsened the already serious economic emergency in Ecuador. Since

the places of worship are closed, the Church has organised the social media to accompany people in daily life and is trying to assist the needy through the services of Caritas.

### **Eritrea**

According to the Ministry of Health, the first COVID-19 case in Eritrea was registered on 21 March; to date, there have been about forty cases but thirteen of these have already recovered. This is a sign of hope. Right from the start, preventive instructions were announced, limiting movements and gatherings. In our communities, we have let our employees stay at home and we are doing their work ourselves. This is a whole new experience. Many workers here are employed on a daily basis and so have no income. This is creating a situation of hunger in many families. Some are organising collections of food for the poor. We had to send our students home. The work of the delegation has been halted as we do not have the technological means of communication; we even have no telephone line at the seat of the delegation. All of us have had to celebrate Easter in their own houses. Like the first Christian community at the time of the apostles, we are united in prayer.

### **Ethiopia**

Towards mid-March we began social distancing to avoid contact and to stay at home. Provincial meetings have been postponed and some confreres have had to change their plans. The proposal of various churches and religious groups to hold a month of fasting was well received by the majority (it almost coincided with lent and Ramadan) and many celebrations have been followed on TV. There are little more than a hundred homes with people suffering from the Coronavirus, but the government has declared a state of emergency to protect the citizens. Movement is restricted but checks are few and far between.

### **Italy**

For the past three months the Province of Italy has been seriously affected by the Coronavirus. Milano has lost several confreres, though not all because of the virus. Among them was Fr. Giuseppe Simoni. A couple of confreres are still in isolation as a precaution. In Lucca, Fr. Giovanni Vedovato and Fr. Luciano Perina are still in hospital and the community is in quarantine. In Gozzano, Fr. Claudio Crimi is in quarantine in a clinic. In Castel d'Azzano, serum tests resulted in

some confreres being placed in isolation as a precaution even though they are not unwell. The other communities are observing the preventive measures to avoid infection, but life goes on.

### **Kenya**

The first case in Kenya came to light on 13 March. Almost immediately, the government imposed drastic measures, including the closure of the schools and the prohibition of all civil and religious gatherings. They even imposed a night-time curfew. Four regions have cases of infection: Nairobi, Kwale, Kilifi and Mombasa and they have been declared 'red zones'. Many people live from day to day and are now out of work and without food. The health service is not equipped for this calamity and only a few of the sick have swab tests. To date there have been 320 cases, with 14 deaths and 89 recoveries.

### **London Province**

The situation in the LP is much the same as that in Italy. The churches are all closed and movement is restricted to what is essential. This means we are not doing any Mission Appeals or promotion meetings, ministry or other activities, with the exception of funerals (just prayers at the cemetery or crematorium with just a few people present). The communities where the majority are elderly are quite concerned. The others are using the time to continue with activities in the pipeline (such as replying to the questions on ministeriality and the revision of the Rule of Life). There is also some concern about future finances since communities usually support themselves with their pastoral and mission promotion work. A considerable number of families are in difficulty and are even short of food. There are many initiatives of assistance and solidarity being taken by volunteer groups. We are receiving a great lesson in fraternity that overcomes barriers and cultural and ideological differences.

### **Mexico**

The virus appeared in Mexico at the beginning of March and the number of cases is growing all the time. On 31 March we lost our confrere Fr. Luis Carranza who contracted pneumonia, though his virus test proved negative. We are now isolated and cannot go out. Our workers are staying away and the rhythm of daily life made us discover the hidden qualities as they place themselves at the service of the others. Easter was celebrated in silence, without visiting the

missions. There have been more than ten thousand cases in the country and around a thousand deaths.

### **Poland**

All the confreres of our small group are safe and well. Thank God.

### **Spain**

We began the quarantine without the least idea of what would happen later and we held the provincial council meeting by video link. On 25 March, we were shocked by the death, due to a heart attack, of Fr. Gabino Otero in Santiago and we were unable to celebrate his funeral. Four days later, the virus took away Fr. Gonzalo Dasilva from us in Madrid. For the time being, his ashes rest in our chapel and will accompany us in our celebrations until we can place them in the family cemetery in Vigo. The day after Fr. Gonzalo died, Fr. Jaime Calvera was rushed to hospital where he is being treated for the virus. None of the other members of the Madrid community have been infected, even though they were not very well. All the other Combonis in Spain have adopted the preventive measures imposed by the government and are well. We were showered with messages of solidarity from many confreres and friends encouraging us to trust in the mercy of God.

### **South Africa**

The total lockdown for everyone began on 26 March and is due to end early in May. The number of virus cases is very low but, in the shanty towns, millions of people have to share toilets and running water; many cases will never be registered. The public money embezzled by different governments could have been used to build better homes and provide work for the poor people.

### **Togo-Ghana-Benin**

All three of our nations have been hit by the virus but the number of deaths is still very low. Borders, schools and churches have been closed and all public celebrations forbidden. We are witnessing close collaboration among religious groups of all denominations in implementing preventive measures. The social media are busy spreading information about the seriousness of the situation; the people continue to crowd the means of public transport, bars and the shops that are open. Many believe in traditional remedies. There is still much to be done and our hospitals are not equipped to face this

pandemic. The members of our communities are confined to their houses.

## **Uganda**

We are still waiting for news from the communities. In Uganda the number of cases is very low but a proposal was made to have an hour of adoration every day to pray the Lord for an end to the pandemic.

## ITALY

### **ACSE Association**

The website of the association (*acsemigranti*) has been completely revamped. It now shows the activities of the association. Publications are also presented (see especially the text of the Italian language courses edited by ACSE teachers), the projects being run and a great deal of information taken from magazines, newspapers and agencies.

Unfortunately, on account of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ACSE activities and services have been reduced. The Italian language courses, employment advice and legal assistance continue on-line. The distribution of food also continues, though in a reduced form. Regrettably, many migrants are afraid to move as not all of them have their papers in order. ACSE hopes to keep the mobile dental surgery open at least two days a week: it is in great demand.

## MOZAMBICO

### **Perpetual Vows in the time of the Virus**

The Mozambican scholastic Mponda João Mponda, 34, expressed his definitive yes to God by taking perpetual vows on 26 April, the third Sunday of Easter, in the chapel of the Comboni community in Beira, his native city, in Mozambique.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, which led to a state of national emergency being declared by the Mozambican government, with strict measures of confinement and social distancing, the ceremony was held in a sober environment: only the confreres of the Beira community and those of Muxúgwè, where Mponda is doing his missionary service, and some close family members, were present.

The Eucharistic celebration was led by Fr. Leonello Bettini, the Delegate of the Provincial Superior, Fr. António Manuel Bogaio Constantino, now in Maputo. João Mponda himself animated the liturgy, playing the guitar and leading the hymns at the Mass.

After he pronounced his vows according to the formula, Mponda received from the hands of Fr. Leonello a Bible and a Cross, symbols showing that, on the path of the life of a missionary, the Word of God and the theology of the Cross – which means proclaiming and witnessing to Jesus who gave his life and is Risen – must never be absent.

At the end of the Mass, Fr. Leonello thanked God for the gift of the vocation of this young man which gives an increase in vigour to the missionary action of the Church and the Institute. He also remarked that, taking perpetual vows in a time of such great fears and suffering such as those the country of Mozambique and the whole world is going through, is providential, because it helps us to perceive and understand better the charism of St. Daniel Comboni, who understood the signs of his times and committed himself right to the end to the suffering, the poor and the abandoned.

On his part, Mponda expressed his thanks for everything he had received from God, his family and the Comboni Missionaries, and for the trust the Institute placed in him.

## MEETING OF COMBONI BROTHERS IN EUROPE

### **Online meeting of Comboni Brothers in Europe**

On the afternoon of 28 April, 20 Brothers based in Europe met “virtually” using the social network. Participating were Brothers of the provinces of Italy, Portugal, Spain, Poland, Germany (DSP), the District of the Curia and also the formators of the Brothers’ Centres (CIF) of Bogota (Colombia), Bro. Alberto Degan, and of Nairobi (Kenya), Bro. Matthias-Elie Adossi Koffissan Adekplovi. Fr. Fabio Baldan, Provincial Superior of the Province of Italy, was also present at the start of the meeting.

After greeting the participants and a moment of prayer, the points of the agenda were introduced: the present situation of the Brothers in Europe, presented by Bro. Alberto Lamana, Assistant General, the process of Brothers’ Vocational Promotion, the process of the CIF and proposals for the Assembly for Formation planned to be held this year in Maia (Portugal), on a date yet to be established.

During the fraternal dialogue, some points were shared such as the presence of the Brothers in the proposals and in vocational teams. Even though they have commitments within the Comboni communities, the Brothers must be “outgoing”, to the places and locations of sharing with youth; they must be willing to know and use

the new means of social communication, to make known their vocation in the magazines and websites of the Institute, a vocation that is born of an experience of God and in response to the “needs of the Kingdom”.

The meeting was a nice experience and the brothers expressed their happiness at having met and shared some time together, thanks to the Internet.

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Fr. Giuseppe Simoni (09.11.1947 – 21.03.2020)**

Fr. Giuseppe Simoni, known to all as Bepi, was born on 9 November 1947, at Cadidavid, the province of Verona. After primary school in his home town, he attended secondary school in Carraia (Lucca) where he happened to meet other young people attracted to missionary life.

He was brought up in a very united and devout Christian family that was sensitive to the missions of Africa. Bepi decided to become a Comboni missionary. He entered the novitiate in Florence in 1967 and, despite the post-Conciliar crisis that also questioned the Comboni novitiate, he succeeded in persevering to the end and, on 9 September 1969, he made his first religious profession. Even then, his novitiate companions appreciated his serenity, goodness and simplicity.

After the novitiate, he began his theological studies, first at Pesaro (1969-71), a period in which he attended the courses at the diocesan seminary of Fano and, at the same time, accompanied a group of young Comboni seminarians. He spent from 1971 to 1973 in Paris – a year at St. Sulpice and a year at the ISSR (Superior Institute of Religious Sciences). In order to concretise his studies, his superiors proposed he have a period of missionary experience in Zaire.

Bepi left for the mission of Rungu, in northern Zaire. Under the guidance of Fr. Adriano Danzi, he worked in the primary school, the diocesan minor seminary and in parish pastoral ministry. This experience proved positive and he asked to be ordained priest. He was ordained at the parish of Saint Anne, in Isiro, on 6 January 1975.

After his ordination, in response to the needs of his province, he returned to Italy to work in vocations and mission promotion at the Thiene community. Thanks to his missionary experience, Bepi succeeded in conscientizing many young people regarding the mission.

In 1980, he returned to Zaire. He already knew the local language and the environment and he was soon assigned to the seminary at Sacred Heart parish, Rungu.

Two years later, he was sent to Kisangani as formator of the postulants and in charge of the parish of Malkia wa Mashaidi. In his different posts, Bepi liked to step aside and share responsibility with others. He appreciated the work of his collaborators and trusted them.

Both in the community and in pastoral work he was a peacemaker, known for his serenity. He was also very much appreciated as a formator. "We spent two years together – writes Fr. Fermo Bernasconi – serving as formators at the diocesan seminary in Rungu. It was our hope to do something beautiful, even new, to help the young men in their growth and journey of discernment. Searching together and the difficulties we encountered helped us to share extensively: visions, outlook, joys and disappointments. With different backgrounds and the experience of different responsibilities, we were able to face each other, help one another and discuss things together: we did not always have the same vision or make the same choices but he was always willing to understand, explain, to go ahead, accepting proposals and decisions with which could not always in agree".

As parish priest, his homilies were simple and incisive, full of examples and stories to which people listened with attention and pleasure, remembering them for a long time afterwards. Bepi was also a fine example of availability: every time he was asked to go to a new place, he obeyed without complaint.

After a considerable period of service in northern Congo, he was appointed formator at the Kisangani Postulancy, and then at the scholasticates of Paris, from July 1991 to June 1998, and then of Kinshasa, until 30 September 2000. He was afterwards made parish priest at St. Mbagá's, in Kinshasa, until September 2007. After the parish was handed over to the diocese, he was asked to be the *socius* of the novice master at the Cotonou novitiate which he did from 2008 to 2014, and then at the Kimwenza novitiate until 2016.

After completing the Renewal Course, he was appointed to Italy where he was made superior of the Fr. Giuseppe Ambrosoli Centre for the sick and elderly confreres in Milan. Like many other people in the province of Milan, he was struck down by the Covid-19 and, on 21 March 2020 Bepi returned to the home of the Father. (*Fr. Léonard Ndjadi Njate, mcccj*)

### **Fr. Gabino Otero Magán (22.06.1943 – 25.03.2020)**

Fr. Gabino was born at San Jorge de Veá, in the Province of Pontevedra (Spain), near Santiago de Compostela, where he died, the victim of a heart attack, at the age of 76.

He was always a reserved person, shy, reflective and a man of few words but of a great heart. After Middle School, he entered the diocesan seminary of Santiago where he first felt he wanted to be a missionary. In August 1964, he finished his third year of philosophy and wrote to Fr. Juan Aranguren, the then vocations promoter, to tell him of his desire to enter the Comboni Institute the following year because – Gabino wrote in his letter – “Your course has already started and I have nothing ready”; he was referring to the papers necessary to enter the Institute. Consider his surprise when, four days later, he received a reply from Fr. Aranguren: “You need only pack your bags and, when you get to Moncada ... your personal laundry number will be 44”. That is how things worked in those times.

A few days later Gabino was already in the novitiate and was beginning his formation journey. He also did his scholasticate at the house of Moncada and completed his theological studies. Since he had been in the seminary, he had already studied some of the courses and, in less than five years, he was ready for ordination which took place on 6 April 1969.

Immediately after his ordination, he was sent to Sunningdale (England) to study English in view of a future appointment to Anglophone Africa. Though he did feel lonely, he made full use of his time and learned English very well: one of his talents was his excellent command of languages.

His first destination was Uganda, and, in 1971, reached the parish of Kasaala.

In 1977 he rotated to Spain where he spent a year at the minor seminary of Saldaña (Palencia), as spiritual director and then went to the community of Santiago de Compostela, to work in mission promotion. Before leaving once again for Africa in 1982, there was some confusion. First he was appointed to Kenya, then to Uganda and, a few days later, again to Kenya, which was in fact the mission he preferred since he saw there greater scope for evangelisation”. It was the beginning of a period of ten years full of missionary work in parishes, in the service of direct evangelisation. His first appointment was to the parish of Kariobangi (Nairobi), which included the famous shanty town of Korogocho. He was later sent to the region of the Pokot. It was in the parish of Kacheliba that he met his friend Tomás

Herreros who remembers him for his versatility with languages and his deep knowledge of theology, two characteristics that rendered him especially suitable for the training of catechists.

In 1992 he had to return to Spain where he remained until 1998, working as part of the Mundo Negro team to which he gave a strong impulse, greatly increasing the catalogue of available publications. He himself wrote two books, a Swahili grammar and a Swahili-Spanish dictionary which showed his linguistic knowledge and the importance he always gave to the African languages, especially Swahili, the most important Bantu language in Africa. He also worked on the translation of the writings of Comboni into Spanish, a methodical and silent task to which he devoted a great deal of time and made it possible to publish the Spanish edition of the Writings in 1996.

In 1998 Fr. Gabino began a second period in Kenya lasting eight years. He went first to the Comboni postulancy at Ongata Rongai, working pastorally rather than in formation, and then returned among the Pokot, this time at the parish of Kapenguria.

In 2007 he returned for good to Spain to be the director of the Madrid African Museum. While in this post, Fr. Gabino, presenting Africa to the visitors, often spoke of the Pokot and especially of the time he spent in Korogocho shanty town, an experience that deeply affected him; he also liked to show the real Africa, far removed from the stereotypes.

In 2015 Fr. Gabino returned to his native soil of Galizia, at Santiago de Compostela, which was his last community. He continued to help with translations and other services, as well as visiting the Christian communities of Galizia as a mission promoter. He died as he lived, silently and without disturbing anyone. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, only Fr. Juan Antonio Fraile was able to attend his funeral. His remains rest in the family tomb, alongside his parents, in the parish of Santa. María de Frades, at Concello de la Estrada (Pontevedra). (*Fr. Pedro Andrés Miguel, mccj*)

### **Fr. Luis Carranza Cervantes (10.07.1948 – 31.03.2020)**

Fr. Luis was born on 10 July 1948 at Los Reyes, Michoacán (Mexico). Before finishing primary school, he entered the Comboni seminary at Sahuayo, where he began his priestly and missionary formation and attended school. In 1968 he entered the novitiate at Tepepan where he made his first religious profession on 8 December 1970. He was then sent to Elstree in England for the scholasticate and

to study theology. At the end of that period he made his perpetual profession on 8 Dec. 1974 and was ordained priest on 17-05-1975.

Immediately after his ordination he was appointed to the minor seminary at San Francisco del Rincón, Gto., where he served as formator of the young aspirants and as superior of the community. This experience lasted until 1981. In 1982 he was sent to South Africa where he worked in pastoral ministry and was also rector of the diocesan seminary of Luchau. His ties with the mission in South Africa lasted all his life. He spent the best years of his life there, gaining much satisfaction but also faced many challenges and difficulties.

On his return to Mexico in 1989, he was again appointed to formation, this time with the duty of accompanying a large group of postulants at Xochimilco. Fr. Luis had a strong character but also a great heart and a capacity for empathy that helped him to establish lasting friendships. Regarding the young men he was accompanying, he enjoyed fraternal and familiar relations with them: he trusted them and motivated them and so helped them to mature responsibly and acquire important values.

In 1993 Fr. Luis agreed to help the province in the pastoral work being carried out in Valle del Chalco, an enormous parish in the outskirts of Mexico City which had been entrusted to the Combonis just a few years earlier. It was a very demanding service that required a considerable spirit of sacrifice but Fr. Luis had always been completely available to accept whatever service was asked of him.

In 1996 he returned to south Africa where he dedicated himself to ministry in various parishes. He was also a member of the provincial council and was also elected vice provincial. After a period of holidays in Mexico and some Sabbatical months spent in the United States, in 2004 he returned to Mexico and the community of the postulancy, to help with candidate formation and, in 2005, he served for a short period in South Africa at Waterval as parish priests. In 2006 he was appointed to the NAP where he served for five years, firstly in mission promotion at La Grange Park and then in ministry in the parishes of Holy Cross and Saint Cecilia in Los Angeles, California.

In 2013 he returned to Mexico where he served for some years in mission promotion and as superior of the provincial house. In 2017 he went to Rome for the renewal Course which he followed with great interest and enthusiasm. On his return to his province, he happily went to Metlatónoc, another difficult mission, at the service of the Mixtecos. He later moved to the community of Cochoapa.

On 16 March 2020, he went to Mexico City to accompany a group of pilgrims from the diocese Tlapa going to the sanctuary of Our lady of Guadalupe. In the morning he took part in the celebration and in the afternoon he came to the provincial house where he was due to take part in the spiritual exercises being held there.

He was happy and content and was already thinking of returning to the mission where, a few days later, the many celebrations of Holy Week would require his presence. On Wednesday 18, he said he was not feeling well but thought he must have caught a cold as head slept with the window open. This was the start of what, after various medical examinations and tests, was diagnosed as pneumonia caused by the H1N1 flu virus. After some days in hospital, Fr. Luis was intubated to help his breathing but without any improvement. On Monday 30 March he stopped breathing and was revived; on 31 March, at 18.50, we were informed that Fr. Luis had just passed away.

On the night of 31 March a vigil was held in the chapel of the novitiate of Xochimilco: it was attended by his brothers, his in-laws, some of his nieces and nephews and those in quarantine at the provincial house due to the Coronavirus. (*Fr. Enrique S. González*).

### **Fr. Raffaele Cefalo (28.05.1935 – 10.04.2020)**

Fr. Raffaele was born at Fontanarosa, in the province and diocese of Avellino, on 28 May 1935. Having entered the novitiate in Gozzano, he then was sent to Sunningdale where he took first vows on 9 September 1953 and began the scholasticate. Later, while still a scholastic, he went to Venegono and there took final vows on 9 September 1959 and was ordained priest on 2 April 1960.

Two months later he was assigned to Nabilatuk, in Uganda, as parish priest. He remained there until the middle of 1964 and then, also as parish priest, he was sent to Amudat, where he served for three years. He then went to Moroto till the end of 1973.

Fr. Giancarlo Guiducci writes: "I again found Fr. Raffaele in Karamoja in September of 1969, when I went to the mission for the first time. I was appointed to Matany and Fr. Raffaele gave me his first piece of advice: stay here in Moroto for a few days; at least you can get used to the environment of Africa. That year, he had built the cathedral in Moroto. For some years we were 'neighbours' in Karamoja. Then I went to Amudat, a mission he had started a few years before. In Amudat people remembered Fr. Raffaele. They liked and esteemed him. A young Moslem man boasted that he had been to religious lessons with Fr. Raffaele, and was the first in his class.

Since a possible expulsion from Uganda was feared, Fr. Raffaele tried to find a Ugandan priest who could become Vicar of the diocese of Moroto. It was he who insisted that a Ugandan be chosen to succeed Bishop Mazzoldi”.

In 1974, Fr. Raffaele was elected provincial superior of Kenya and, in 1975, he went to Italy for the General Chapter, first in Rome and then in Ellwangen. In 1976 he was re-elected. In 1978, after a period of holidays in Italy, he went to the NAP to do Mission Appeals. He was later assigned to Naples as superior.

In 1981 he was sent to Nairobi as the Delegate of Father General for South Sudan, where the General Council intended to open a new circumscription. For that period, we follow what Fr. Francesco Chemello writes in his book *A long Love Story*: “Fr. Raffaele Cefalo was staying at the Comboni provincial house in Kenya preparing to enter South Sudan by mandate of the Superior General, Fr. Salvatore Calvia: to prepare the way for a possible new circumscription in South Sudan. The most important thing at the time was to obtain permission to enter South Sudan. He was advised to obtain it in Nairobi because, they said, it would be easier there than in Khartoum. As it turned out, after he explained that they would be involved in education and the construction of schools, they received the necessary permits in a matter of days. Fr. Calvia and his Council had entrusted this task to Fr. Cefalo who realised that there were no detailed explanation for this task. He asked the General Superior to clarify what was expected of him. Having bought a Toyota Land Cruiser and all the necessary supplies, Fr. Cefalo set out on his journey from Nairobi to Juba together with Fr. Cesare Mazzolari and Bro. Mario Rossignoli. They arrived in Juba on 1 June 1981. On 8 June, in the presence of his Councillors, Fr. Pietro Ravasio and Fr. Joseph (Vice-Representative), the first meeting of the Representative Council was held (that was the term used at that time). Actually, when Fr. Cefalo arrived as the representative of the Superior General, the South had been separated from Khartoum ‘ad experimentum’. Fr. Cefalo wasted no time in Juba but tried to gain a better understanding of the situation in South Sudan, especially with regard to personnel. In March 1983 Fr. Cefalo was elected Superior of the delegation of South Sudan. At the end of his mandate, Fr. Salvatore Calvia expressed his deep gratitude for all Fr. Cefalo had done in the first three years of the new circumscription and for the enthusiasm and courage with which he tackled the complex situation of the time. After his well-deserved holidays, Fr. Cefalo was assigned to Rumbek to help in the schools run by the

Comboni Missionaries. In January 1986, the Provincial Council decided to move him to Rumbek for reasons of security. On 27 March 1987, in fact, Mons. Pellerino and Fr. Cefalo were imprisoned by the SPLA and taken to Boma, on the border with Ethiopia where they were released on 15 August “.

Immediately afterwards, Fr. Guiducci continues, “Fr. Raffaele returned to Italy, to Rome before going again to Kenya. His second stay in Kenya was dedicated exclusively to the apostolate.. He spent a short while at Kabicich among the Pokot, the same ethnic groups as that of Amudat, and then among the Turkana. He rebuilt the church at Lokori. Then, from 2003 to 2016 he was at Nakwamekwi, also among the Turkana. The Turkana language is similar, if not identical, to that of the Karimojong. Fr. Raffaele had a strong, authoritarian character. Travelling by car, he himself always had to drive as he did not trust anyone else. For this reason he did not please everyone. Nevertheless, he helped many people, including myself, providing forty-five thousand dollars to build a school for girls at Kacheliba. He told me in confidence that his character led him to criticise too much. This was why he had to leave Turkana. In 2017, now old and physically weakened by various ailments, he returned for good to Italy, still wanting something to do. He did his work until he was confined to a wheelchair. I never saw him in that condition and I find it hard to imagine him so, having known him as a warrior, single-minded in the service of the Kingdom of God”.

Fr. Raffaele died in Milan due to respiratory complications brought on by the Covid-19, on 10 April 2020.

### **Mons. Camillo Ballin (24.06.1944 – 12.04.2020)**

Mons. Camillo Ballin was born at Fontaniva, Padua province, in the diocese of Vicenza, on 24 June 1944. He entered the seminary of Vicenza and later, in 1963, he joined the novitiate of the Comboni Missionaries in Gozzano where, on 9 September 1965, he took temporary vows. Then he went to Venegono and, on 9 September 1968, took perpetual vows.

As to how his vocation came about, we may rely on what he said in a later interview conducted by Mary Sebastian of the parish of “Our Lady of Arabia”, in Ahmadi: “I wanted my life to make others happy. I realised that, as a teacher, I would have been able to make just a few people happy, my students and their families. This made me think of becoming a doctor but the death of a neighbour brought about a deep crisis in me. I said to myself that that family needed to be consoled

and helped but, as a doctor, I would not have been able to do so ... I considered which profession would allow me to be close to people in all circumstances, whether good or bad. So I decided to become a priest. I had known a Comboni priest and was attracted by his mission in Sudan and decided to be a Comboni Missionary. All these thoughts were inspired in me by God who wanted to have me close to him. The priesthood is not really a profession, as I thought when my neighbour died, but a way of belonging: belonging to Jesus”.

Camillo was ordained priest on 30 March 1969, at Castelletto sul Garda, Verona. We return to his account: “My mother died at the age of thirty five. When she was close to dying, she called the Parish Priest and asked him if she could make a vow. When he gave his permission, she said: ‘I offer my life that my three daughters may become Sisters and my son a missionary priest’. She also told my father: ‘get married again and I will take care of our children’.

Independently of each other, one after the other, my three sisters entered religious life. In 1963, I too entered the Comboni. On 30 March 1969, exactly thirty two years after the death of my mother, I was ordained priest at the Mother House of the Institute of my sisters. Two days later, on Tuesday of Holy Week, the Parish Priest called me and said: ‘Now that you are a priest I can tell you a secret I have kept for the past twenty two years’. Then he told me about my mother’s vow and added: ‘I didn’t want to tell you before as I wanted you to become a priests freely, making your own decision’. After my ordination, I insistently asked to be sent to Arabian countries. The superiors were happy with this request as they had wanted to send a young priest to the Arabian countries, but nobody volunteered”.

Fr. Camillo was sent to Damascus, in Syria, and then to Zahle, in Lebanon, to study the Arabic language (1969-1972).

Mons. Camillo – writes Fr. Claudio Lurati in his biographical notes – dedicated his life to that portion of the world that extends from the Persian Gulf to Khartoum, and it was the study of Arabic that marked his long journey many years ago in 1969. From 1972, and for eighteen more years, Fr. Camillo worked in Egypt as parish priest of St. Joseph at Zamalek (Cairo), as provincial superior and teacher. He also used that time to deepen his understanding of the Arabic language and the liturgical tradition of oriental Christendom.

He subsequently spent seven years in Sudan, in the heart of Central Africa and it was there that one of his most appreciated qualities emerged: his ability in the field of academics. He set up the *Catholic Teachers Training Centre*, a university programme recognised by the

government train teachers of the Christian religion in schools. This work still goes on today and has a role that is fundamental for the local Christian community. From those years in Khartoum, there is a photo taken in 1993 when Fr. Camillo acted as interpreter during the encounter between Pope John Paul II and the President of the Republic Omar el-Beshir.

From 1997 to 2000, Fr. Camillo worked on a doctorate which he received from the Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies, on the subject of the *Mahdia and Missionaries*. His research was published in the book "Il Cristo e il Mahdi" (ed. Emi, Bologna 2001).

Fr. Camillo spent the next five years in Cairo as director of *Dar Comboni for Arabic Studies*, a school of Arabic language and culture for personnel planning to work in the Arabian world.

In July 2005, he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Kuwait. This represented for him a further audacious opening towards the discovery of the "Christianity of the Persian Gulf", the reality of the millions of Christians who live and work in the countries of the Persian Gulf and who, with exemplary courage and freshness, live out their faith.

"The fact that he shared his whole missionary life between Sudan and Egypt – writes Fr. Manuel Augusto Lopes Ferreira in his testimony – for many of us incarnated the figure of the Comboni missionary identified with the primogenital mission of the Institute, a presence in Egypt and Sudan".

In 2011, the borders of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of the Gulf were revised. Mons. Ballin moved from Kuwait City to Bahrein and Bahrein, Qatar and Saudi Arabia were also entrusted to his pastoral care. In Bahrein he established very healthy relations with the civil authorities. He was granted a Bahrain citizenship and the land for the construction of a new cathedral. This was a great project to which Mons. Ballin gave much of himself and it is now at an advanced stage. However, he was not to see it completed.

The main occupation of Mons. Ballin, Fr. Lurati continues, was to visit the Christian communities living in those countries. I am convinced that, in the whole world, there are very few other ecclesial realities of such linguistic, cultural and liturgical complexity as those found in the Vicariate of Northern Arabia.

"the greatest challenge – he said in the interview – is to form a *single Catholic Church* while respecting the Liturgy of each community. In Kuwait Cathedral, we celebrate in five different rites: Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, Maronite, Coptic and Latin. We must not be five

catholic Churches alongside each other but just one Catholic Church. It is indeed a great challenge”.

It was during the first days of February of his year, during his visit to the communities of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, that the illness marking the last days of Mons. Ballin suddenly came to light. He returned to Italy and was admitted to Gemelli Hospital where his diagnosis left little to the imagination. Between his first and second stays in Gemelli Hospital, he spent almost a month at the Comboni Generalate in Rome. This time of forced inactivity allowed him to realise gradually that the time had come to “hand over everything”. Without a single complaint but silently and serenely he continued his journey, never showing anxiety, not even at the supreme moment.

“I found myself again with him – these are the concluding words of Fr. Manuel Augusto – this time at Gemelli Hospital in Rome, where he was admitted as an emergency. He was accompanied by serenity and trust in God, as well as the desire to return to his Vicariate. Mons. Camillo Ballin was a missionary who forged ahead, always on a knife-edge, in regrettable circumstances, with confidence in God right to the end ... where his Lord was waiting for him on Easter Day, 12 April in the year 2020, the Easter of the Coronavirus”.

### **Fr. Bruno Carollo (09.06.1930 – 26.04.2020)**

Fr. Bruno was born at Carrè, in the province of Vicenza and the diocese of Padua, on 9 June 1930. In 1947 he entered the Comboni novitiate in Florence where, on 9 September 1949, he made his first profession. For his scholasticate, he went first to Rebbio and then, while working in mission promotion, he spent a year in the parish in Troia, in Venegono, at the Rectory in Thiene and again in Venegono, where, on 9 September 1955, he took perpetual vows and, on 15 June 1957, he was ordained priest. After spending two years teaching in Pesaro, he was appointed to Uganda and arrived there in 1959. He devoted forty five years to the people of Uganda, the most productive years of his missionary life.

Fr. Bruno was an enthusiastic and welcoming confrere, with a great love for and interest in the Lango people, their language, traditions and their proverbs. He liked to say “I am an artist and so a bit strange with a warm temperament, a bit delicate, full of creativity and discouragement ... but still in love with this mission land. And so, please be patient and understanding with me - and he said this to Fr. Valero Maciá who had just arrived in Alenga -. If I annoy you, give me some time to calm down; it may not be due to your fault”.

Fr. Bruno worked in many different places: among the Acholi in Kalongo, among the Lango of Minakulu, Aber and in most of the Comboni-run missions of the diocese of Lira: Alito, Aduku, Ngetta and Alenga. One thing that was apparent to everyone was his apostolic zeal: even when he grew old, he would mount his little “Vespa” and go to visit the catechumens in their chapels, celebrating the sacraments in the nearby stations and visiting his friends close to the mission. Only rarely did he fail to help with the pastoral work.

Even today, the majority of the older generation of diocesan priests of the diocese still come to him as the one who was called “Akwat Aber” (the Good Shepherd).

We remember his prolific work in the Lango language (assisted by Fr. Germano Agostini) and his collaborators: books of hymns and prayers, the translation with illustrations of the Missal into Lango (1973), the Psalms and New testament in Lango “Wun Ubedo Jona” (1984), the Old Testament (6 April 2005) and afterwards a complete translation and revision of the Bible into Lango (presented by Mons. G. Franzelli in his letter of 25 December 2005), a practical Grammar of the Lango Language (1991) and Proverbs in Acholi and Lango.

May Fr. Bruno “Akwat Aber”, or “Moreno” (as he liked to sign his Missal illustrations), hear the words of the Good Shepherd in person: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Father”. (*Fr. José Juan Valero Maciá, mccj*)

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

**THE FATHER:** António, of Fr. Jorge M. Pereira Brites (P).

**THE BROTHERS:** Armando, of Fr. Luigi Sergio Chesini (EGSD), Lawrence Lou, of Fr. Philip Zema (T); Hans, of Fr. Hubert Unterberger (DSP).

**THE SISTERS:** Dolores, of Fr. Juan Antonio González Nuñez (ET), Ermelina, of Fr. Egidio Melzani (I).

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS:** Sr. Margit Forster, Sr. Maria de Lurdes Magalhães, Sr. Ida Maria Gurini, Sr. Pia Lucia Piacentini.

---

**MISSIONARI COMBONIANI - VIA LUIGI LILIO 80 - ROMA**

---