

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

791

December 2020



HAPPY CHRISTMAS

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

New Comboni bishop!

On 18 November 2020, the Holy Father appointed the Comboni missionary Fr. Matthew Remijio Adam Gbitiku, Bishop of the Diocese di Wau (South Sudan).

Mons. Matthew Remijio Adam Gbitiku was born on 5 May 1972, in Mboro (Wau diocese). He attended the Minor Seminary of Bussere in Wau (1984-1986) and secondary school in Wengiball (1986-1989). After the Comboni postulancy, he studied philosophy at St Paul's Mayre Inter-diocesan Seminary in Khartoum (Sudan) and did the novitiate in Kampala, Uganda (1997-1999). He gained a Bachelor's Degree in Theology at the *Instituto Superior de Estudios Teologicos Juan XXIII- ISET* in Lima (Peru). He was ordained priest on 3 October 2004.

After ordination, he occupied the following posts: parish curate at Masalma, in Omdurman (Khartoum), parish priest, spiritual director of the Legion of Mary of the Archdiocese of Khartoum and consultor of the Gruppo Rongo association (2004-2008). From 2008 to 2010, he studied for a Licentiate in Spiritual Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome. He was also director of priestly vocations and a member of the vocations group of the Archdiocese of Khartoum (2010-2012), spiritual director of Mayre Inter-diocesan Seminary of St Paul in Khartoum (2012-2013), Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Khartoum (2013-2017) and, from 2017 until now, Vice-Rector and bursar of the Comboni International Theologate in Nairobi, Kenya.

Perpetual Professions

Sc. Nieto Castro José de Jesús (M) Metlatónoc (MEX) 25/10/2020
Sc. Sitwaminya Fiston Mughanyiri (CN) El Carmen (EC) 15/11/2020

Priestly ordinations

Fr. Wedipo Paixão Silva (BR) São Mateus (BR) 31/10/2020
Fr. Orishaba Elias (UG) Makiro (UG) 31/10/2020
Fr. Ouandora Seigneur Malthus (RCA) Mbaïki (RCA) 14/11/2020

Holy Redeemer Guild

December 01 – 15 PE 16 – 31 U
January 01 – 15 A 16 – 31 BR

Prayer intentions

December – That the celebration of the birth of the Son of God, who fully assumed the human condition, may increase in society understanding, respect and the inclusion of diversity. *Lord hear us.*

January – That our faith in Christ may move us all to be united and to alleviate the impact of the pandemic, especially among the poorest. *Lord hear us.*

ASIA

Covid-19 and the Delegation

Our Delegation of Asia has not been immune to the virus but has not been the most affected as it was expected when it all started in Wuhan, Mainland China. In Taipei the Government authorities were quick to implement measures to prevent a major spread and they were rather successful. Though our services in the parish were affected, our confreres are all well. Fr. Adam managed even to have his home leave and has recently returned to Taipei. After the normal 14 days of Quarantine, he is now back in the community and doing his service.

In Macau, the measures imposed were also effective limiting the restrictions now to those very basic precautions of social distancing and wearing of masks. However, border crossing to China is very limited and the airport continues to have very limited flights. No confrere of ours has been infected in Macau and Fr. Victor Mejia who was stranded in Mexico since early March has, finally, been able to reach Macau and is now undergoing the mandatory quarantine. However, our works in China are all suspended and no visas are being issued to allow us in.

In Vietnam, none of the confreres or students have been infected. There have been short periods of lockdown but the government measures were also efficacious in controlling the spread. Now, life there has resumed to some good degree of normality.

The Philippines, especially the National Capital Region, is currently experiencing the eighth straight month of community quarantine (with varying degrees of lock-down according to times and places) and there is no end in sight, yet. This prolonged regimen of closure of businesses and restriction of movement has caused a sharp increase in unemployment, poverty, corruption, mental health problems and a general deterioration of the quality of social life. Our activities have

been greatly affected but we thank God our confreres and students are safe and sound.

Looking at the world, we still have much for which to be grateful to the Lord!

BRASIL

Mexico and Brazil, with a passion for the mission

On 31 October 2020, at the closure of the missionary month, Comboni Deacon Wedipo Paixão Silva was ordained priest.

The celebration was led by Mons. Paulo Bosi Dal'Ó, Bishop of the Diocese of São Mateus, in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo where Wedipo was born and grew in his vocation.

It was in this region that the Comboni Missionaries began their presence in Brazil with an inserted group in Maranhão, in 1952. A prophetic figure, who alone represents the history of the consolidation of the diocese of São Mateus, is Mons. Aldo Gerna, also a Comboni. Now aged 90, Mons. Gerna decided to take part in the ordination saying "I cannot fail to be present on an occasion like this when a son of our country is consecrating himself to the mission".

The celebration was held at the parish of San Luca, within the city, in a zone of rural settlements where, 35 years ago, many families took over the land on which to live. Land, Shelter and Work is the motto which, for many years, has been made concrete by the constant and active presence of the Church, always at the side of the landless families.

No more than two hundred people attended the ordination due to the restrictions required by the Covid-19 pandemic. Five thousand people followed the transmission on the social media and many more prayer using Radio Kairos, the diocesan station that broadcasts to the entire northern region of Espírito Santo.

The Comboni family accompanied Wedipo in this most important moment of his life, with the participation of two Comboni priests and two Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM) who had come from Mexico. There were also groups of lay men and women from Curitiba and Sao Paolo, cities in which Wedipo lived during some of the stages of his formation.

He celebrated his first Mass in the community of San Benedetto, in the settlement of agrarian reform "Vale da Vitória". This is a place where people are organised, struggling and dreaming, and have made a radical option to work as small farmers. It was in this small

community where, six years ago, Fr. Wedipo lost his mother, killed in a car crash.

Wedipo's celebration was in respectful and grateful homage to his mother and his faith community who always believed in his vocation and supported him. Life is stronger than death: "It was in this church that I professed my faith in the resurrection, before the bodily remains of my mother, and I now renew my faith in the God of life who never abandoned me", Fr. Wedipo said in his homily.

Fr. Wedipo will also celebrate Mass in the communities of the diocese which still has a strong Comboni spirit and will then go to Rondonia where some of his family have moved and will then return to his mission in Mexico where he will work in vocations ministry and with the youth who, like him, are full of passion for the mission.

May God bless the life and the journey of Fr. Wedipo and continue to bless our missionary family with sound vocations that are committed to the Kingdom!

DSP

Covid-19 – The situation in our Province

We are grateful that, up to now, none of our confreres has been infected with the coronavirus. Nevertheless, many confreres are concerned due to the growing number of cases in Austria, Germany and South Tyrol /Italy, especially since the majority of our confreres are at risk. We wish especially to express our solidarity with the provinces of Italy and Uganda which have lost confreres due to the pandemic in recent weeks and months and to assure you of our prayers.

Feast of St Daniel Comboni

We had planned to have a conference by Dr. Roman Siebenrock, professor of theology at the Jesuit faculty of Innsbruck, for the feast of St Daniel Comboni. He had chosen the theme: "*Trust in life – for God lives it with us*". Unfortunately, the event was cancelled due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19. We therefore celebrated the feast in a simple manner in our communities.

The Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM) had organised a work meeting at the provincial house in Nuremberg that same weekend. It was an opportunity to celebrate a solemn Mass with them in honour of St Daniel Comboni. As well as the CLM, our neighbouring Sisters of St

Paul also attended. Since the start of the pandemic, they have been attending morning Mass in our chapel almost every day.

Provincial Assembly

The provincial Assembly had been scheduled for June 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was postponed until November but, for the same reason, it was not possible to celebrate it in the traditional way so a “hybrid form” was chosen. Important themes such as ministeriality and criteria for the election of delegates to the General Chapter were simultaneously discussed in each local community, while the reports of the provincial superior and treasurer were presented to all the communities and discussed using the Zoom platform. Even though the not-so-young confreres were not used to online communication, it was a positive experience for all. In this way, all the confreres of the province were able to “come together” at least for an exchange of ideas and views.

One weighty point was the somewhat substantial and necessary modifications to the house of Ellwangen. The drainpipes are leaking and must be changed and the lift has to be brought up to date in line with present-day requirements. The provincial council wanted to have the views of all the confreres on the need to restructure the rooms of the sick and elderly on the third floor. Fire prevention, insulation, the plumbing and bathrooms are no longer up to legal standards. As an alternative solution, it was proposed to restructure the adjoining building, now being rented by the city council of Ellwangen.

Considering the fall in numbers of DSP confreres, the majority were in favour of a less invasive structure so that the provincial council may take whatever steps are necessary.

There was then a broad discussion as to whether in future we will be able to take care of the sick and elderly confreres since their assistance and organisation are now almost exclusively in the hands of employees.

A group of confreres considered it important that our elderly and sick confreres be cared for in our house but others remarked that it would be less of a financial burden if we were to entrust confreres in need of continual assistance to nursing homes run by the state or religious orders. Finally, a proposal was presented: to look after our confreres who are more or less self-sufficient in our centre and to find places for those in need of 24-hour care in the facilities of Saint Anne, very close to our house.

ETHIOPIA

Let us pray for peace and much more

The provincial council asks all the confreres to pray for Fr. Seyum who is seriously ill, for peace, especially in Benishangul-Gumuz (where the mission among the Gumuz had to be evacuated on 21 October; temporarily, we hope), and also for the rest of the country.

It may be useful to receive the message sent to the members of the Council for Religious by a Vincentian priest of Addis Ababa, bearing in mind that one of the provincials resident in Addis Ababa was arrested for a short time. "Dear Brothers and Sisters, the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you. We have been through painful times in our country these last two weeks. Our Confreres and Sisters in the regional state of Tigray have been living in a state of war which we hope will end soon. I have no words to express how painful it is for all of us, but especially for all our brothers and sisters who have family and friends in the region of Tigray. The lack of communication has rendered matters even worse. Every day, we were hoping to see the end of the, but the attacks continued. This should not be happening in a poor country with a hundred million inhabitants.

Let us pray that God may be the shield that protects the innocent and the poor and our families in the war zone. Peace to everyone."
(Fr. Sisto Agostini, provincial superior)

IN PACE CHRISTI

Fr. Christopher Besigye (12.02.1958 – 12.09.2020)

Fr. Christopher was born in Ndajja, in Uganda, on 12 February 1958. He entered the novitiate at Tartar (KE), took first vows on 27 April 1985 and, after the scholasticate in Kampala, he made his perpetual profession at on 9 April 1988. He was ordained priest on 22 January 1989.

Fr. Umberto Pescantini recalls: "Christopher was a member of one of the first small groups of postulants which I was happy to receive at Alokolum (Gulu, Uganda). He always seemed to me to be quite shy but with sufficient resources to become a good missionary. Immediately after his ordination, he was sent to Paris to study French and, before the end of that year he was already in Afanya in Togo studying the local language. In mid-1990, he was curate at the mission of Vogan and in 1994 superior of the community of Aklakou. In 1999, he completed his work in Togo serving the parish of

Adidogomé. From October of that year to June 2000, he took part in the Comboni year of Ongoing Formation at Germiston in South Africa. I think he was rather surprised when, at the end of the Comboni Year, the superiors appointed him formator at the Nairobi scholasticate. He succeeded in carrying out this task with generosity for some years. However, his health was not good and the superiors had to find someone to take his place.

He was assigned to the NAP on 1 January 2005. He first stayed at the provincial house in Cincinnati and was then assigned to the community of Kitchener in Canada. He was a warm person, friendly and appreciated both by the people and the confreres. Since his mother was sick, he asked to be close to her and, in 2006, he was transferred to Uganda. He was first appointed to the parish of Kyamuhunga where he stayed for eleven years and then moved to Rushere”.

Rushere is about 250 km from Kampala, the capital, and is located in the south-east of the country towards Tanzania and Rwanda. No matter where he went – some of his benefactors told us – he carried with him those priorities that distinguished his work and the first of these was to improve the life of the children. In both these missions, Fr. Christopher, being responsible for such projects, sought help – and found it – to build water cisterns. In particular, in 2018, he managed to build two of them: one was for Kikoni primary school and the other for that of St. Peter. In Rushere, while responsible for a pastoral area three times the size of the previous one, he held a number of meetings with those in charge of the schools of the area and with the parents of the children attending those schools. Again, the problem of clean water came up. Very often, children would get sick and could not attend school which meant they were behind with their lessons to the detriment of the schooling. Fr. Christopher had immediately identified the more urgent situations but, in his letter of thanks for the financial help received, he added: “We still have 14 primary schools that have no clean water. It is my hope that you will be generous enough to continue to help our children”.

During those same years, Fr. Christopher also served the Ugandan province as provincial secretary of evangelisation. His short life of service to the mission was cut short by a tumour.

Fr. Aldo Chisté (28.07.1930 – 20.10.2020)

On 20 October, just a few days after recovering from a heart attack caused by cardiac insufficiency that brought him to hospital, Fr. Aldo

Chistè was called by the Father to receive his eternal embrace and his reward for a long life dedicated to the Mission. He was ninety years old and was in Waterval, his very first mission in South Africa where he had first arrived in 1967. It was also his last, according to the plan of God.

Fr. Aldo was born on 28 July 1930, at Dro, a Trentino town, into a large family of ten children, seven boys and three girls, the children of Giuseppe Chistè and Marsilia Poli. He took first vows at the age of 21, studied theology and philosophy at Verona and Venegono and was ordained priest in 1958. He spent most of his life in Africa.

His first mission was in Sudan where he was sent immediately after his ordination. Having stayed in London long enough to learn English and Arabic in Khartoum, Fr. Aldo found himself in that mission so dear to Comboni and to all Comboni Missionaries. He stayed there only a few years, from 1961 to 1964, when he was expelled together with the other confreres working in the country. He spent two years in Pesaro in missionary animation and, in April 1967, he was again in Africa, this time in South Africa, at the mission of Waterval. He arrived in Durban aboard the ship Africa together with another missionary, Bro. Mario Adani; a few months later Fr. Andrea De Maldé arrived and the community was complete. With their arrival, the Comboni presence of the Italian branch began in South Africa (FSCJ). The confreres of the German branch had already started their presence there many years earlier in 1924, due to an expulsion from Sudan.

In those years immediately following the Second Vatican Council, the first steps in the renewal of Institutes were being taken and there was also a desire to unify the two branches of the Comboni Institute, divided in 1923. The opening of an FSCJ presence in Waterval marked the start of rapprochement and collaboration since both were working in the same diocese of Lydenburg.

From the time of his arrival in South Africa up to his death, Fr. Aldo always worked in that country, except for five years in Trent, Italy, from 1983 to 1988, in missionary animation. For this reason, for almost fifty years spent in South Africa, he was able to work in specific fields. He worked both in the rural and urban zones, in the archdioceses of Johannesburg and Pretoria and especially in the Diocese of Witbank. He worked among various tribes, learning the local languages and was involved in various pastoral initiatives.

During those many years, Fr. Aldo shared with the people of South Africa times of great suffering but also of great joy. Those were important and decisive times in the history of the people and this

made him into a missionary who knew the history of the country and of the Church, as well as the history of our presence. He experienced the suffering of the people during the apartheid era. He took the side of the people struggling for peace and the abolition of injustice. He prayed for and awaited “the new times” that came to pass only after many years of tension, blood-letting and death. Together with the African people, he lived the hope of a new South Africa, with the freeing of Nelson Mandela in 1991 and the general elections of 1994, with universal suffrage. Together with the people, he took the first steps in a free country that devoted all its energy and resources to the realisation of the dream of freedom and peace in the rainbow country.

We may underline three aspects of Fr. Aldo’s work during those years: knowledge of the local languages, especially Northern Sotho and Shangane (xi Tsonga), and his commitment to the formation of the laity and the promotion of the person.

In the formation of pastoral agents and in view of in-depth evangelisation capable of transforming the culture of the people and radically changing their way of thinking according to the Gospel, Fr. Aldo sought the means to prepare catechetical and pastoral supplements that he distributed not only while he was director of the Glen Cowie Catechetical Centre(1973-1980), but also afterwards, when he was parish priest or curate in the rural zone of Waterval and Acornhoek, in the urban outskirts of Pretoria, at Mamelodi and Soshanguve, and in the periphery of Johannesburg in Soweto.

Fr. Aldo was always somewhat independent, convinced of his views and only rarely changing his mind. At times, this had unpleasant consequences and brought him into conflict with the authorities and the confreres. He was firmly convinced of the need to promote the person and development projects; he therefore helped many people economically, especially needy young people, so that they could have a better future.

Fr. Aldo lived a life of commitment and passion for the Gospel and the mission. He loved the people with whom he lived for many years and became a South African citizen. He gave himself unceasingly for the Kingdom. The Lord of life and the mission welcomed him into heaven to enjoy that peace and that fullness of life he always desired in this world. May he now intercede for the people of South Africa, for the Church and for the Comboni missionaries working in that country. May you rest in peace, Fr. Aldo! (*Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins*)

Fr. José De Jesús Aranda Nava (11.08.1952 – 04.11.2020)

Fr José de Jesús Aranda Nava was born on 11 August 1952, at Salvatierra, Guanajuato (Mexico). He was known among the Mexicans as “el Tío” (the Uncle) since, while he was still in the seminary, a nephew of his entered who called him “Uncle” and so everyone at the seminary began to call him “The Uncle”, something he approved of.

He took his first vows of religion on 23 April 1977. He studied theology in Rome from 1977 to 1981, and made his perpetual profession on 10 October 1980. He was ordained priest on 19 September 1981.

He was a polite person, sociable, too – and made many friends everywhere – he was an optimist and outgoing.

As a man of faith, he loved Jesus Christ and St Daniel Comboni and so was happy to be called Jesu; on the day of his profession, he took the name of Daniel. He had a great devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. He firmly believed in his missionary vocation and was happy to be a Comboni missionary.

As a missionary, he had a passion for the mission and South Sudan which he served and accompanied in the most difficult times of the war.

He lived his missionary life in two provinces: Mexico and South Sudan. For the greater part of his life, he was a formator and also worked pastorally and in mission promotion. Many Comboni missionaries from South Sudan remember him with gratitude as their formator during the postulancy.

His dream always was to be a missionary in the land and among the people loved by Daniel Comboni. This dream was realised when, in 1984, he was sent to South Sudan.

He served the people of that country during the war of independence and also during the war that has just ended. He spent the final years of his life in a refugee camp in Uganda together with the entire parish community displaced by the war.

On St Daniel Comboni day, he wrote in Facebook: “Feast of St Daniel Comboni: 10 October 2020. The holiness of Comboni is lived in communion with suffering humanity. St Daniel lived his holiness in solidarity with those who were suffering and mistreated. In the course of our history, the sons and daughters of St Daniel Comboni have sought to follow the way of holiness, sharing the daily life of their suffering brothers and sisters. We have great figures who exemplify making common cause with the people: Fr. Giuseppe Ambrosoli, Fr.

Ezechiele Ramin and many others. Today, we are also called to share in holiness the life of the many people who are faced with the crisis of the coronavirus pandemic with all its consequences. Let us be in communion with the migrants and refugees, with the people in zones of conflict and war. Let us bear in our hearts the burden of the sufferings of the Church and the sad situations of nature and creation. Pray for peace and brotherhood among our people of South Sudan”.

He died on 4 November 2020, at Lacor Hospital in Gulu (Uganda), where he was admitted as a coronavirus patient. (*Fernando Mal GatKuoth*)

Fr. Aleardo De Berti Jr. (18.08.1921 – 08.11.2020)

Fr. Aleardo was born in Roverchiara (Verona province) on 18 August 1921. He made his first profession at the age of 20, on 7 October 1941 and was ordained priest on 31 May 1947. He himself told the story of his vocation on the occasion of the 73rd anniversary of his ordination (2020).

“I come from a large Christian family in which I was the twelfth child. I greatly admired my mother for her love of the Eucharist: a mother of a large family who found time to go to Mass every morning. Fr. Romeo De Berti was my second cousin. He too joined the seminary at Trent and became a missionary. I became a Comboni almost by inertia as there was a Comboni atmosphere in my family: Fr. Aleardo senior, my first cousin and my sister, a Comboni Sister. My sister made the decision for me. She told me to write to Padova which I did and never looked back.

I spent my 73 years of priesthood in three continents. The first continent was that of North America where I spent a total of 16 years, partly in the United States and partly in Canada, as parish priest of an English-speaking parish in a French-speaking city. I was the first Comboni to enter Canada. I was for some years in Cincinnati with the American seminarians. I got on well there as I found people who were open and sincere.

I spent five years in England as novice master for five years and one year in Scotland: I may boast that at least one novice succeeded who became Superior General, Fr David Glenday.

When I was in England, I made the option, at the age of fifty, to go to Africa. Fr. Agostoni agreed and willingly sent me to Gulu where they immediately put me in the diocesan seminary”. It was from there, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination, that he wrote: “My pastoral and missionary work was largely confined to one

sector: the seminary youth in America, the youth in general in Canada, the novices in England and now the seminarians in Africa. I sincerely loved the youth: I have no regrets. I was well rewarded. I enjoyed and still enjoy my years spent with young people. They kept me young and kept alive my ability to love. Certainly, I ought to improve my method with them but it is also certain that they want to find in us priests a friend to talk to, who can share an experience, who always encourages and is never surprised at their weaknesses”.

In 1988, Fr. Aleardo returned for good to Italy for reasons of health and has been in Verona ever since. There would be much to say about his human, spiritual and missionary figure. Let us emphasise just a few aspects: he had a great love for the Heart of Jesus and the Comboni traditions and wanted to maintain an authentic and “tangible” personal relationship with the Lord: while others stayed in the sitting-room to read the newspapers, he would sit in his wheelchair in front of the tabernacle. Reserved and respectful towards the confreres, he still had friends in America and Canada who still wrote to him and sent him donations; his was a life of poverty confined to essentials. He would always ask for his small permissions.

Fr. Aleardo left us calmly and quietly on 8 November, in the silence of the night at the ripe old age of 99 years, lied to the full and right to the end. On the morning of 10 November 2020, we celebrated his funeral while the Covid epidemic held sway. We, his confreres, were kept in isolation in our rooms. Fr. Fabio Baldan, the provincial superior, celebrated the funeral Mass at the Verona Mother House, which we followed via the web. In the afternoon, the hearse removed his mortal remains, accompanied by a small representation of family members. The hearse circled the house so that the confreres could say their goodbyes from their windows and stopped opposite the room of the superior of the community, Fr. Renzo Piazza, who emerged to bless the coffin which was then taken to Borgo Virgilio (MN) to be interred in the family tomb. (*Fr. Manuel João Pereira Correia, mcccj*)

Bro. Elio Croce (03.04.1946 – 11.11.2020)

Elio, born in Moena (Trent) on 3 April 1946, entered the Florence novitiate where he made his first profession on 9 September 1966. He was then immediately sent to Pordenone for professional training and then for a year to Sunningdale to study English. He took final vows on 9 September 1974. Meanwhile, he had been appointed to Uganda in 1971 where he spent his whole missionary life. When his death was

announced, we received many impressive testimonies. Dominique Corti knew him since her childhood.

“Who is Elio Croce? In Northern Uganda, everyone knows him. Elio, Brother Elio, the Comboni Brother from Moena, who, in 1971, left his mountains his steep slopes of his native Trentino to transplant himself under the Equatorial sun, in the elephant grass of the Ugandan savannah. Moena (1,184m) and Gulu (1,100m) are at the same altitude but there could not be more different panoramas and there could never be two places with of such different appearance and customs. Nevertheless, I, who was born and grew up in Africa, in the heart of an African hospital, with my nurse Liberata who would take me to her house to share a meal of millet, my teacher Apollonia and my companions who speak to me in Acholi, the flying ants cooked after the rains to be eaten as a snack, cannot even begin to imagine among the many exceptionally great missionaries I have met, one who was as well integrated into the Ugandan countryside and its people as Brother Elio.

Elio is, in simple terms, a myth. In more than forty-five years in Africa, first as the technician in charge of Kitgum hospital, then, starting in 1985 at Lacor hospital, Elio shared all the business of the Acholi people. For them and with them he built hospital pavilions, dug wells, set up technical and agricultural activities. He shared with the Acholi the tremendous decades of guerrilla warfare. He buried their dead, travelling endless distances across the savannah with his four-wheel drive, painted white but now red due to the palpable and pervasive red dust that covers and infiltrates everything in Uganda. Every journey begins with the Sign of the Cross a Hail Mary and making sure there is on board a shovel with ropes and planks to get the vehicle out of mud-holes, as well as some tow and soap to stop any unexpected holes in the tank. Elio's old Toyota was, from time to time, the technical rescue vehicle (like when he was informed by a local Radio and went to rescue a new-born child who had been thrown into a cesspool), an ambulance to take the wounded or sick (in times of peace as well as during the war or during the outbreak of Ebola), a hearse to help people take their beloved dead from the hospital to the village to be buried close to their huts as a protection for the living, and also as a lively minibus for the St Jude children, or an occasional taxi that collected women carrying containers of water or old women with tired and dusty feet and their heavy bundle on their heads.

Attracted, urged on and sustained by faith in Divine Providence that was tenacious, sound, and the unshakable nourishment of a life

completely given, Elio, like a Tridentine rock climber, ascends, foothold after foothold, the mountain of his African adventure, amidst the many difficulties and countless tragedies, a thousand acts of heroism during those tumultuous years, both terrible and inspiring. A glance upwards towards the summit, another around him and at his roped companions, and the ascent continues.

Elio reached Lacor in 1985 having been insistently asked for by my father who needed his talent as a builder and maintenance person to enlarge the buildings of his hospital that had to meet the enormous needs of the population.

There was an immediate understanding between my father, my mother and Elio, so great was their similarity as persons totally dedicated to the people! Each one needed the others and they could all count on each other. Together, they shared enthusiasm and new challenges. To mention but a few: the new surgical department, financed by Italian Cooperation, the large polio clinic financed by the Italian Bishops' Conference with "eight-per-thousand", the new paediatric facility financed by the US government, the large installations for water treatment and power, the 16 km of underground cables and pipes partly due to the help given by Bolzano Province and Austrian Catholic organisations. My father raised the funds; Elio made the plans, built the structures and maintained them while my mother did the surgery. Together they faced incursions by guerrillas into the hospital and even fired some shots into the air (including my mother who had done some years of military service in Canada) to confuse the guerrillas who were trying to break into the house of the Ugandan Sisters. Together they faced the massacres perpetrated by those people in the neighbouring villages. Elio would go off with his ambulance to collect the wounded, if there were any, and take them to Lacor where my mother and father treated their wounds. It often happened that there was nothing else to do but give a Christian burial to the dead bodies, often horribly mutilated.

His kingdom is the building sites and the workshops for woodwork or mechanical constructions and the maintenance of the electric medical equipment. During those war years, there were no supplies to be found and everything had to be homemade. Bro Elio was up to the task. He knew how to do things and to teach others but he also demanded that things should be well done. In this way he helped things to improve locally. Many were trained at his school, learning a trade and the attitude that work must be seen as an art. Needs must stimulate the search for solutions and not lower standards. Many

small activities emerged from this stimulus. Those who work for him work well, learning and so set themselves free, knowing that, where necessary, they could count on Brother Elio. Many went to school with his economic help. Then, in the nineties he did something typical of him: he had helped Bernadetta, an Acholi widow who had looked after a number of war and AIDS orphans. When she died, he simply took on the work she left behind. It was Providence that brought her to his door and he would not reuse his help. Elio never once avoided a commitment. Divine Providence did not lose the opportunity to cause the 'soft spot' of this man that Trent had given to Uganda to be put to good use. The result was the St Jude Orphanage, the Consolation Home for children mentally and physically challenged and the Farm. Not even those who happened to pass through Lacor in the last thirty years could do so unaffected by meeting Bro Elio. His simple and concrete way of doing things, sometimes sweetly rough, uncalculatingly, with no frills and his baggage of lived African dedication emanating from this man in dusty sandals, challenges and recruits (often for life) anyone approaching him. It is impossible to remain indifferent; there is the inevitable encounter with his options and a feeling of being allied to them even where views diverge.

With the same sort of versatility, he interrupts his work of supervising work at a building site to go to the operating theatre where the Ugandan doctors who succeeded Lucille are trying to remove a rake stuck in the neck of a patient. They need his flexible grinder to cut the teeth of the rake and then remove them surgically. Bro Elio comes and does the job expertly but not without first taking a photo to add to his collection. He then leaves the doctors to do their work. This is how things are done, naturally and with simplicity, not ignoring the funny side of things but becoming personally involved and taking part sincerely and in depth in the pain of those coming to the hospital. Leaving the operating theatre, he returns to his building as Elio is mainly a builder. He was a builder of buildings but also a builder of charity, and a builder of justice. In the final analysis, a builder of peace.

Fr. John Martin Troy (27.02.1937 – 20.11.2020)

At the young age of twelve, Fr. Troy left his native town of Birmingham in the Midlands and went north to Yorkshire where he entered our Minor Seminary at St. Peter Claver College in Stillington.

He proved to be an inquisitive and bright pupil, characteristics that accompanied him throughout his life. Like most of the Radical

Members of the London Province he was destined to be a “Jack of all trades!” turning his hands to varied ministries.

Fr. John was the son of a Welsh father and English mother, both with Irish roots. The family consisted of five sisters and two brothers.

He continued his studies and religious formation at Sunningdale and then went on to Rome completing his theological studies at the College of Propaganda Fide.

He was ordained on April 7th, 1962 at the Lateran Basilica in Rome with two other Comboni Missionaries. Present for the wonderful occasion, travelling from England, were his parents and members of his family. On that day thirty-eight new priests were ordained in various places in Italy whilst four had been ordained in the U.S.A. on March 17th, making a total of forty-two Ordinations for that year.

After Ordination Fr. John was assigned to the London Province and took over the running of the Mission Office and edited the Verona Fathers’ Mission Magazine for several years, whilst residing at Dawson Place. In 1966 he set off for Uganda to begin the first period of a total of three stays in that country. Working as a Parish Priest at times and editing Leadership Magazine cause him great joy. He loved Africa and her peoples and would always refer to these years as the happiest of his life. In between stints in Uganda he worked from Mirfield as Vocation Director and in 1981 after a period in the Parish of Rickmansworth he was appointed Provincial Superior of the London Province. During his time as Provincial he was responsible for opening a presence of the Comboni Missionaries in Ireland in 1985. Previous attempts, due to the reluctance of the Irish Hierarchy to allow yet another Missionary Order open a house in Ireland, had failed. Many students went to learn English at the ‘Divine Word School of English’ in Maynooth on the outskirts of Dublin. Another historic moment during his time as Provincial was the closing of the Junior Seminary in Mirfield in 1984 thus ending a presence there of twenty-five years.

Fr. John was called to Rome to the Office of General Secretariat and was very much involved in translation work. He was responsible for the English edition of the ‘Writings’ of St. Daniel Comboni which were published in 2005. He was gifted with a prodigious capacity for languages and perhaps due to his cultural roots had mastered the basics of Welsh and Irish Gaelic. His command of Italian was excellent and his knowledge of Logbara, Alur and Kiswahili stood him in good stead for his work amongst the peoples of West Nile in North-West Uganda.

After Rome, Fr. John returned to the London Province and spent different periods assisting in the Mission Office of Leeds and as the Priest-in-Charge at the Sacred Heart Church in Sunningdale where he is fondly remembered for his kindly service and devout liturgies. Gifted with a strong constitution and an interest in sports, particularly cricket and Formula One, helped him to be a convivial figure in the Community. The celebration of his Priestly Golden Jubilee in 2012 at Sunningdale was a joyful occasion when together with his sisters, brother, Confrères and friends he was able to give thanks to God for such a wonderful grace.

Sadly, with the onset of Alzheimer's Disease, he was transferred to Castel d'Azzano in 2018 where he passed away peacefully affected by COVID-19 on the morning of November 20th, 2020.

The Funeral Mass was presided by Fr. Teresino Serra, Superior of the Motherhouse in Verona, with Fr. Fabio Baldan, the Provincial of Italy, and several other Confrères concelebrating. In his homily Fr. Teresino spoke movingly of Fr. John as, "a real gentleman, a joyful person and a faithful missionary, ... a great and holy servant to the Mission of Africa and the Congregation".

The Funeral Mass was 'live-streamed' from the Chapel dedicated to St. Daniel Comboni in the Motherhouse and so his surviving sisters and brother, his extended Family, Confrères in the London Province and friends from down the years were able to participate albeit from a distance. May he rest in peace. (*Fr. John McGuire Downey, mccc*)

Fr. Carlo Plotegheri (05.05.1936 – 24.11.2020)

The first of eight children, three boys and four girls, Carlo was born on 5 May 1936, of Trent parents, at Port Said in Egypt, in the diocese of Alexandria, his father being a teacher at the Italian school in that city.

Two years later, the Plotegheris moved to Bulgaria to teach at the Italian school in Sofia where Carlo attended primary school. In 1943, he returned to Italy and Carlo continued to attend school at Mezzomonte di Folgaria until the family could settle in Trent where he completed primary school.

He joined the apostolic school in Trent on 5 October 1948. In 1950, he went to Brescia and in May 1954 he went to England as a student and there took first vows on 9 September 1955. He returned to Italy in July 1958 and the following year went to the apostolic school in Pesaro where he was a prefect and studied theology for three years.

He took his final vows on 9 September 1961 and was ordained priest in Trent on 7 April 1962.

In the month of September, he left for England where he taught at the apostolic school in Mirfield while attending university. In 1968, while still a student, he went to Elm Park, taking a bachelor's degree in mathematics.

In August 1968, he left for Khartoum where he was assigned to Comboni College as a teacher. Fr. Carlo, while in the community of Castel D'Azzano, referring to his experience during those years, spoke about various episodes. The following is one of them (*Raccontiamoci* 2019, n. 23) which somewhat sums up all of them.

"I had first-hand experience of the universality of the Gospel message when I was in the mission in Khartoum, in Sudan where the majority of people are Moslem.

During my first nine years as a professor of mathematics and physics, every Wednesday evening I would go to the outskirts, about 20 km from Comboni College and, powering the projector from the car battery, I would use films to explain the Old and New testaments. A Sister would come with me who would give medicine to a number of mothers with sick children. When I first began this work, I was surprised at the number of Moslems who would come and so, fearing to annoy the security people, I spoke with the Sultan (also a Moslem). He reassured me saying: 'I, too, am present at all your films and you never say anything wrong. If anyone bothers you, send them to me!'. On Friday evenings there was a meeting led by a Comboni Sister for about twenty secondary school girls on various themes. She would often ask me to help answer their questions on spiritual themes.

Besides helping in a parish in the outskirts on Sundays, these activities increased my desire to meet with different sorts of people, even though not all were in agreement with me.

At a school in Omdurman, following a request by around thirty of the students, the headmaster gave permission for us to organise the Legion of Mary in the afternoon, after school hours. Unfortunately, this proposal did not meet with the approval of the deputy head, who was a Moslem, and I did not think I should continue with the meetings within the school. Fortunately, the students had understood the importance of those meetings and saw to it that the deputy head would not bother us again and the meetings continued unhindered.

Once a month, we had meetings of our secondary school students together with the girls of the Sisters' secondary school and another girls' school on such themes as peace and mutual respect. Of course,

there was no explicit mention of the catholic religion. But when the security found out about those meetings, they forbade them. I remember well that the group that missed those meetings most were the Moslem boys and girls since we did not consider them to be religious teaching but human and universal values. As Pope Francis says, what the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and warm the hearts of the faithful; approaching and coming together”.

In October 1977, Fr. Carlo moved to the parish of St. Peter and Paul, as parish priest and superior. In 1979, he took his month's holidays among the

In January 1985, he was appointed Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Khartoum, based at the cathedral, while continuing to assist at St. Peter and Paul's.

Fr. Carlo, apart from a year in Rome, another in Bologna as provincial secretary and four in Trent as superior of the Rectory, spent all his missionary life in Sudan, mainly in Port Sudan and Khartoum.

For reasons of health, in 2017 he returned for good to Italy and the community of Castel d'Azzano. He died at Villafranca hospital (Verona) due to the coronavirus on 24 November 2020.

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHERS: Józef of Fr. Szpara Adam Witold (PL), Domingos José, of Fr. Raimundo Rocha dos Santos (BR).

THE MOTHERS: Maria Rosalia, of Fr. Manuel Ceola (T); Aurora, of the Sc. José Manuel Hernández Cruz (M).

THE BROTHER: Henry Kinanga, of Fr. Isaiah Nyakundi (ET).

THE SISTERS: Isabella, of Bro. Giuseppe Lagattolla (I); Juliette of Bro. Tsoklo Zissou Simon (I); Lina of Bro. Virginio Manzana (I).

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS: Sr. Alessandra Fulceri, Sr. Maria Daniela Fulvi.

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