

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

792

January 2021



WE WISH YOU ALL
A HAPPY NEW YEAR

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL NOTES

Consulta December 2020

1. Appointments

Fr. Hategek'Imana Sylvester is appointed bursar of the Nairobi scholasticate as from 1 January 2021.

Fr. Opargiw John Baptist Keraryo is appointed formator at the Pietermaritzburg, RSA, scholasticate as from 1 January 2021.

Fr. Alberto de Oliveira Silva is appointed a member of the team at the Centre for Ongoing Formation, Rome, as from 1 January 2021.

Bro. Dimanche Godfrey Abel is appointed superior of the CIF of Bogota, Colombia, as from 1 January 2021.

Fr. Gian Battista Moroni is appointed Father Master, *ad interim*, of the novice Giuseppe Mantegazza in the community of Lecce, Italy, as from 1 January 2021.

Fr. Chmiel Sebastian Jerzy is appointed Assistant General Treasurer in Rome, as from 1 January 2021

Appointments to Studium Combonianum

The GC has appointed the following to the work of Studium Combonianum:

1. Councillors: *Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins, Fr. De Iaco Cosimo, Fr. Prandina Piergiorgio and Fr. Boscaini Aurelio.*

2. Members of the Scientific Committee: *Bro. Parise Alberto, Fr. Weber Franz, Sr. Maria Vidale, Fr. Naranjo Alcaide Jorge Carlos, Fr. Castello Danilo, Fr. Furioli Antonio, Bro. Cruz Reyes Joel, Bro. Dzinekou Yawovi Jonas, Fr. Mumbere Musanga Joseph, Fr. Aguilar Sánchez Víctor Manuel, Fr. Villarino Rodríguez Antonio, Fr. José Joaquim Luis Pedro, Fr. Fernando Domingues, Fr. Mbutia Simon Mwaura, Fr. Scattolin Giuseppe, Fr. Giupponi Benedetto, Fr. González Fernández Fidel, Bro. Degan Alberto, Fr. Tbaldo Mariano, Fr. Ndjadi Ndjate Léonard and Fr. Kanyike Edward Mayanja.*

The GC wishes to thank all the confreres who have served for years as councillors and members of the scientific committee.

2. Renewal Course

Due to the situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficulty for some to obtain visas for Italy, the Renewal Course in Rome due to run from January to May 2021 has been cancelled. Should any of the intended participants who can come to Italy wish to undertake a personal journey for some months, the Ongoing Formation Centre would offer them this possibility. Those who wish to do so may contact Fr. Fermo Bernasconi.

3. Comboni Year

All circumscription superiors are reminded that the Comboni Year of Ongoing Formation will be held this year, 2021. They should see who ought to attend from their circumscriptions and contact Fr. Fermo Bernasconi for whatever arrangements must be made and to know when they should come to Italy to study the language.

4. Finance

The general assembly of bursars began in videoconference; the circumscription bursars were then asked to respond to questionnaires. Their replies must be sent in before the end of January 2021. The GC invites the circumscription councils, together with their bursars, to give due attention to the management of sickness in their circumscriptions and the pension systems of the various countries where we are present. These matters are extremely important and require discernment on the part of the circumscription to avoid serious difficulties in the future.

5. Comboni Social Forum

The GC thanks the Comboni Family Commission entrusted with the preparation of the Form on social ministeriality for the webinar which took place on 4 and 5 December last year. It is our hope that the second webinar, to be held on 5 and 6 March 2021, may be equally successful in its organisation and participation. The meeting due to be held in Rome from 3-7 July 2021, still depends upon the development of the pandemic. The decision to hold it or not will therefore be made later on.

6. Journeying towards the Chapter

As we journey towards the Chapter, we should try to hold the elections as soon as possible, including those of the substitutes. The GC will write to the circumscription superiors to help them prepare

their reports to the Chapter. In February 2021, the GC will appoint the Pre-Capitular Commission and write to the delegates. It is planned to hold a meeting between the working group and the Chapter facilitator. Finally, the GC reminds everyone to reply to the Questionnaire.

7. Forum for sharing on the Chapter

The GC reminds us that there exists an open forum for sharing personal opinions that may help Chapter reflections. For this purpose, an email address has been created: *capitolo2021@comboni.org*. The material gathered will later be presented to the pre-Capitular commission.

8. Curia: The community of the Curia mourns the loss of its superior, Fr. Celestino Prevedello, swept away by the Covid-19 virus. Messages sent to the superior of the Rome community will be managed, for the time being, by Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins, together with the vice-superior, Fr. Torquato Paolucci.

9. Sharing goods

The GC thanks all the circumscriptions which, during the course of 2020, made extraordinary contributions to meet the needs of the General Administration of the Institute. Special thanks go to the NAP for their usual generous extraordinary contribution. Thank you.

Ordinations to the priesthood

Fr. Biseka Guerlain J. (CN)	Kinshasa (RDC)	05/12/2020
Fr. Moindi Polycarp Ntabo (KE)	Nairobi (KE)	08/12/2020
Fr. Ng'ang'a Joseph Githua (KE)	Nairobi (KE)	08/12/2020
Fr. Boosuuro Maaso-E. Pius (T)	Aneho (TG)	12/12/2020
Fr. Dansou Ayawovi A. A. Achille (T)	Aneho (TG)	12/12/2020
Fr. Dossavi Sitou M. (Charlemagne) (T)	Aneho (TG)	12/12/2020
Fr. Amuzu Kofi (Abraham) (T)	Aneho (TG)	12/12/2020
Fr. Badou Ifédoun Ephrem Judicaël (T)	Dassa-Zoumé (BEN)	12/12/2020

Holy Redeemer Guild

January	01 – 15 A	16 – 31 BR
February	01 – 15 C	16 – 28 EGSD

Prayer intentions

January – That our faith in Christ may move us all to be united in alleviating the hardship caused by the pandemic, especially among the poorest. *Lord hear us.*

February – That by our gestures of love and forgiveness we may succeed in bringing everyone to encounter Christ. *Lord hear us.*

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC SITUATIONS IN THE PROVINCES

Brazil

The situation in November

Unfortunately, the pandemic has caused sorrow and mourning in the Comboni Family in Brazil. In September, Fr. Carlos Bascarán (79) and Sr. Amine Abrahão (78), died within days of each other due to the virus.

We are grateful for the gift of good health in the rest of the Province and for the rapid recovery of the confreres of the community of Santa Rita and others, where some confreres were infected.

The virus is still widely spread across the country and its development cannot be predicted, including the serious danger brought by the second wave, aggravated by the lack of directives and restrictions during the recent electoral campaign.

The Provincial Council has recommended that all confreres, especially those most vulnerable, observe great caution and attention.

December updates

Brazil is still the country with the highest number of coronavirus deaths in the world after the United States. It is no coincidence that the administrations of both presidents of these countries systematically denied the danger brought by the pandemic and failed to implement prevention policies, giving priority to electoral campaigns and the maintenance of the pace of business so as not to harm the local economy.

In Brazil, as we ended the month of November, the number of deaths had reached 173.000. The highest casualties were in the big cities of the south-east: Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the main cities of Amazonia, especially Manaus and the more isolated internal regions

where indigenous communities suffered most. The loss of indigenous chiefs and spiritual guides cannot be over-estimated, considering the wisdom and moral authority they represent, the death of each one of them may be compared to the destruction of a library.

DSP

The crisis caused by the coronavirus affects the whole world and we of the DSP feel united with the provinces that have lost confreres due to the virus. Here in the DSP, thank God, none of our confreres has so far been infected by the virus. Some confreres have had to go into isolation having been in contact with an employee or someone they met during their ministry who tested positive. Others were not able to receive treatment or have operations since the hospitals give priority to Covid patients and postpone operations.

However, since the average age in our province is 75, and since some younger confreres have pre-existing medical conditions which make them part of the “at-risk” group, all the confreres have greatly reduced their contacts outside the communities. Ellwangen, which is also home to elderly and sick confreres, was closed right from the start of the crisis and is not accessible. The mood among the confreres differs from person to person. Some no longer wish to socialise while others complain about the restrictions and would prefer to run greater risks to be close to the people. Some of the more elderly, who previously were able to provide pastoral assistance in individual minor chapels, are now inactive. The Provincial assembly, which we held online, has shown that we can keep in touch and share at the Provincial level, even beyond the national boundaries of Austria, Germany and Italy.

At the moment, unlike at the start of the crisis, and despite all the restrictions, our Fathers are still able to carry on working in the various ministries and Masses are allowed under certain conditions. We hope that the people may observe the restrictions during the Christmas season and improve the situation.

Ethiopia

Only recently have the Covid-19 tests shown some positive results in the Province: the Sc. Biruk had a positive result on 13 November 2020 as he prepared to travel the next day to Casavatore; yesterday he had a negative result and will have to be tested again before leaving. We have heard from Nairobi that our Scholastics Ababayehu and Habtu, and Fr. Abraham Hailu, in Nairobi to complete his studies, were also found to be positive.

Some confreres who had contacts with infected people have had to be tested as well as some CLM returning from Europe; some of them have had to observe a period of isolation.

These and other events such as the death of some confreres in Uganda and our concern at the Provincial House for Fr. Seyum, have led us to observe great care and prudence. The major difficulties have been the postponement of arrivals and departures, not only of those due to take their holidays but also of the new scholastics who had to stay in Uganda until the end of August, after their first profession.

There is much uncertainty regarding initiatives and events to the extent that the Province has cancelled the April Assembly and a meeting planned for 27 October, for the celebration of Comboni Day.

However, none of this prevented us from taking part in the retreat in August and some other meetings including the one held on 29 September for the appointment of Fr. Juan González Núñez as Apostolic Administrator of the Vicariate of Hawassa.

In the Gumuz missions in the north-west, work has proceeded as usual including the perpetual vows of Gurmessa and his ordination to the diaconate in Gilgel Beles; his ordination to the priesthood is due to take place at his home parish between 20 and 25 January 2021.

The repeated attacks in the Gumuz area which led to the evacuation on 21 October of the mission of Gublak and to the war in Tigray that broke out on 4 November are not related to the coronavirus but unfortunately occurred during the same period.

And now what plans does God have in mind for this Mission of his?

Italy

The situation in November

Unfortunately, the province is going through a very difficult time due to Covid-19. During the second wave, the virus has appeared in various communities (Florence, Castel Volturno, and Venegono) without doing much harm. However, when, despite all precautions, the contagion struck the community of Castel d'Azzano, many of the elder confreres were unable to survive the complications due to the virus, causing a regrettable ongoing series of deaths. At the moment, the PC is working on this serious emergency situation providing support to those confreres directly involved. Once the situation has returned to normal, the PC, together with the CANAM, will give a detailed report on what happened. For now, it is important to face up to the situation with patience and faith. Unfortunately, the death toll among the confreres at the end of the year amounted to fifteen.

Kenya

Covid-19 has brought chaos to the entire world. The lifestyle we were all used to was suddenly brought to an end. Thousands of people have become victims of the invisible enemy called the Coronavirus. The world is now trying to rectify the economic damage inflicted by this contagion. Kenya has not been spared.

On 19 December 2020, official statistics showed that Kenya had tested 1,003,493 people with 94,151 positive results. There were still 16,959 active cases, 75,559 recoveries and 1,633 deaths. These results were based on tests administered selectively and it is at present difficult to estimate the exact dimensions of the infection in Kenya where the population is around 53 million. Here, a test costs about 44 Euro. The great majority of people cannot afford this with the result that those who have minor symptoms do not even try to find out if they were infected.

It is no exaggeration to say that, at present, we do not know if we are in the first, second or third wave. At any rate, we have followed the guidelines and protocols issued by the competent authorities. For the people of Kenya, the situation is one of tiredness and fear but also of hope.

After many months, the briefings by the health authorities in the media have become boring and news to be ignored. This state of "lethargy" has worn out our confreres. The worst affected are our formation communities: the postulancy, the scholasticate and the CIF. It has been a torment for them: just imagine these young people confined to their houses for months.

Our fears became more acute in October when, in the nearby province of Uganda, a number of confreres whom we know contracted the virus and some of them died. That brought home to us the fact that the virus is both real and close. We had to encourage each other to be more strict. At one point, in the scholasticate, there were 31 positive cases. The challenge was not so much the sickness as to organise life together and maintain a spirit of optimism. We thank God that the period of isolation is over and they are now free of the virus. Those admitted to hospital have also been discharged.

All in all, in Kenya, the virus attack has not been too severe, thanks also to the immediate response of the government with containment measures such as road-blocks, a curfew, sanitizing and the obligatory use of face coverings. To boot, the vaccine has increased our

optimism. We do not know when the vaccines will arrive in Africa but they are certainly a cause for hope.

We have been deeply affected by the economic consequences of Covid-19. We feel called to be close to the people and keep them company. Many of our missions are asking us for help. With the help of God and human solidarity, we shall certainly pull through. (*Fr. Radol Austine Odhiambo*)

Portugal

In Portugal, to date (late November) we have had only one confrere infected who belongs to the Maia community and no infections among the people working in the houses of the Province.

The infected confrere realised his condition immediately, contacted his doctor and observed strict self-isolation in his room, even before being tested. When the positive result was given, the community immediately activated "Contingency Plan MCCJ-PT", previously prepared by the Province and rigorously followed the instructions of the health department. The house was closed, with no service personnel. The office was also closed and liturgical celebrations with people present were suspended (the Liturgy of the Hours and Mass). Meals were prepared by one of the confreres and taken individually at different times etc. two weeks later, the confrere had recovered and life returned to normal.

In the Province, journeys between communities are limited to those that are strictly necessary as are contacts between confreres and their families. All meetings are now held using Zoom. All events with the public have been either cancelled or held online. The Provincial Assembly in September followed a dual mode: the younger members were physically present while the elderly participated via Zoom.

In the communities, despite some tense moments, the environment has gradually become more relaxed and peaceful. (*Fr. Fernando Domingues, mccj*)

South Africa

In this Province, more than ten confreres and scholastics have contracted Covid-19; some of these have not been tested. We are thankful that most of them show either very light or no symptoms. Our Provincial Assembly was first rescheduled and then cancelled. A good number of confreres have cancelled their plans to travel for medical treatment, holidays and even for ordination to the priesthood, while others have been unable to return to South Africa.

The country is now officially going through the second wave of the pandemic, with eight thousand cases a day. The Church is struggling financially as a result of months without Eucharistic celebrations or with a maximum of 50 people, now raised to 250 inside and 500 in the open air (obviously according to the size of the space available). In general, the parishes are in difficulty since they receive little or nothing from collections. The greatest challenge the church has to face is to bring people back to Mass attendance.

At the end of July, South Africa was in fifth place in the world for confirmed cases of Covid-19. Five months later, even though the country is still in a state of emergency, we are at level 1 where almost all restrictions have been revoked. The need to use of face-masks, sanitize hands and surfaces and social distancing are still reiterated. The number of registered deaths – 21,500 – is relatively low in comparison with other countries, even though these figures are questioned (during this period, there were 40,000 "natural deaths" than in other years). There is a high rate of recovery, said to be over 90%, and the total number of cases is now more than 785,000. In some parts of the country, however, a large part of the population do not follow the recommended practices. South Africa is still among the top 20 countries in the world for registered cases.

An economic aid package has been announced of R500Bn (32 billion dollars) to help individuals and companies, guarantee a supply of medical equipment, medicine and food where necessary.

WEBINAR

Journeying towards the Social Ministry Forum

To prepare for the Comboni Family Forum, already postponed twice due to the pandemic and now planned for 3 to 7 July 2021, in Rome, a webinar, an important stage, was held on 4 and 5 of last December. This is to be followed by another one scheduled for 5-6 March 2021, to gather together the fruits of the journey made, deepen the content and begin to set out operative lines for a mission that is ever more attentive to the expectations of the poor and open to paradigm change (CA 2015, 12).

On 4 December, two laypeople were invited: Luca Moscatelli, a Biblical scholar and theologian Stella Morra who, on the basis of their research and their roles in the academic community, both pastoral

and ecclesial, masterfully indicated the starting-point and the goal to be reached in social ministry.

According to Luca Moscatelli, it is necessary to start from those who are “outside”, from the world as a theological place where the presence of the Spirit of Jesus who is at work may be perceived. It is from outside that the surprises come and from where salvation comes. The mission has always emphasised the importance of “*going towards*”, emphasising the “we”; perhaps it is also necessary to underline the “*starting from*” “them”: from the existential peripheries, as Pope Francis would say; from the poorest and most abandoned, we of the Comboni Family tradition would say.

Theologian Stella Morra explained that in the encounter with the other it is important to articulate well the trilogy: faith, culture and Church. In the task of evangelisation, it is actually necessary to take the culture to heart as the Magisterium teaches us (EG 115 and GS 53).

In social ministry, Stella Morra emphasised that the missionary may run the risk of being inexact, of being weak or exaggerating but also remarked that we cannot and must not run the risk of Gnosticism, of Pelagianism or of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the evangelising mission. One may risk offering mercy without conditions, but we cannot risk opposing the complete freedom of the love by which God enters the life of every person. (*Fr. Fernando Zolli, mccj*)

ASIA

World Mission receives two awards

World Mission magazine has won the prize for the best article with the article *Defending the Most Defenceless* by Tony Magliano and has received special recognition for the feature written by Archbishop Gilbert Garcera, entitled *Transmitting the Faith to the Youth*, at the Catholic Mass Media Awards (CMMA) on 19 December 2020, in Manila.

With the theme "So that you may tell your children and your children's children (Exodus 10,2); Life becomes history", the ceremony was this year held online due to the prohibition of large gatherings to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

In recent years, the Comboni publications have won various prizes and recognition for their articles in various categories.

The CMMA (Catholic Mass Media Award) was founded in 1978 by the late Cardinal Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime L. Sin, to honour "those who serve God through the mass media".

CONGO

Ordination to the priesthood

For several weeks, the Christians of the parish of Our Lady of Good Help in Bibwa joyfully awaited the pastoral visit of Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kinshasa, which took place on Saturday 6 December 2020. On this occasion, our confrere Guerlain Biseka Joachim was ordained priest and Fr. Elio Farronato celebrated, together with the parish community, his Golden Jubilee of Ordination.

The Mass, with His Eminence the Cardinal presiding, was attended by the Christians of the parish of Our Lady of Good Help and those of nearby parishes. The Cardinal invited Fr. Guerlain to be the answer to the sufferings of the people, especially the Congolese, and to follow the model of Saint Daniel Comboni who was willing to leave his native Italy and to give his life for the African peoples who still lived in suffering and in slavery. He also told him not to be afraid of the heavy burden laid on him by Our Lord, but to place his trust in Him.

Fr. Léonard Ndjadi, Provincial Superior of the Congo, thanked Fr. Guerlain for having accepted to give his life to God in the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus and for his perseverance throughout the fourteen years of his formation from candidacy to ordination. He then introduced two Comboni Sister postulants who are preparing to go to their novitiate in Namugongo, in Uganda, a Lay Comboni from Kisangani, a Brother and five Comboni priests, including Fr. Guerlain Biseka, who are preparing to go to new missions in Africa, Europe and Latin America. During the occasion, Fr. Leonard announced the sending of Fr. Guerlain to the mission of Peru. In conclusion, he asked the Cardinal to bless these missionaries and he asked the faithful to pray for them that their mission may be fruitful. (*Bro. Lwanga Kakule*)

DSP

Sixty years of perpetual profession

Bro. Kuno Stösser celebrated the diamond jubilee (sixtieth anniversary) of his perpetual profession on 8 December 2020, in the community of Ellwangen. Bro. Kuno belongs to the Peruvian province and is now spending part of his holidays with relatives in the Black

Forest region and the rest in Ellwangen community. Due to the Coronavirus restrictions, only two confreres from Nuremberg who worked in Peru for many years and wished to keep him company on this memorable day, joined the community to celebrate Bro. Kuno's Diamond Jubilee with him. Fr. Josef Pfanner, who also worked in Peru, presided at the Eucharistic celebration and summed up the long missionary life of Bro. Kuno who worked in the vineyard of the Lord for 68 years.

In 1954, after his religious and professional formation, he left for Peru and began his work at the new parish of Mirones/Lima, which had been entrusted to the German-speaking branch just a few years previously. There was much work to be done on the church and the house. In 1958, he was transferred to Tarma, the new prelate entrusted to the Combonis. There, too, a lot of work needed to be done on the parish house and especially on the church during the many pre-conciliar celebrations.

After a short time, Bro. Kuno had to take charge of construction work in the dioceses of Tarma and Huánuco. He had no experience in this field but his good basic formation and his interest in all sorts of work made him become a good builder. His first task was to build the seminary in Tarma. This was followed by a formation centre for catechists and the parish house in Huassawuassi. He finally crowned his work with the construction of the sanctuary of Muruhuay. In 1973, he was charged with building the cathedral at Huánuco designed by a Swiss architect.

In 1979, as the Peru delegate, Bro. Kuno took part in the reunification Chapter in Rome. He was then transferred to the DSP and assigned to the community of Bamberg. However, he was soon recalled to Peru as the new bishop of Huanuco, Mons. Anton Kühner, MCCJ, had many projects for him: to build the bishop's house, the church and a presbytery for the Montfort Missionaries.

In 1984, he moved to Lima to build a house for the Comboni postulancy. From then on, he remained at the Provincial House in Monterrico and even today, despite his ninety years, renders much-appreciated service such as welcoming guests and many people seeking material help, as well as seeing to the telephone. In the New Year, he hopes to return to Peru. We too hope he succeeds in this and wish him many more years in his second fatherland.

We send him our best wishes and our gratitude for his example as a religious missionary and for the great service he carried out over sixty years for the good of the confreres and of the mission.

ITALY

ACSE: an interesting initiative and other activities

The company Ospedaliera-Universitaria Policlinico Umberto I, in partnership with INAIL and the University La Sapienza, has devised a project called PROTECT, which has as its aim to protect the health of refugees and migrants by using *head and neck screening* that examines the face, eyes, nose, mouth, ears and throat.

To carry out the project in Lazio, as many as 53 associations and organisations have offered their services. One of these is ACSE. Since May of last year to December 2020, (apart from the period of lockdown) a total of around 2,100 operations were performed on the same number of people. Of these, as many as 700 were performed at the ACSE centre. In second place is the *Medihospes Staderini* with 130/150 operations and, in third place, *Il Mondo Migliore* with just over 100.

ACSE meetings are held twice a month with five or six doctors and around thirty migrants attending. The service is of high quality and very much appreciated.

Together with this, other ACSE services continue to operate in different forms, despite the pandemic and thanks to the praiseworthy work of volunteers and associates. *The Dentistry Clinic* manages to serve about twenty people every week. When things were normal, there were almost twice as many treatments. The doctors and their assistants are to be praised and encouraged for their commitment. The clinic uses two new armchairs.

Italian and English lessons are taught online, except for two Italian classes that are attended in person, the proper measures being taken. About a hundred students attend them. Informatic lessons will start in January: about fifteen people have already registered. They will be able to use the modernised hall now equipped with computers and other new instruments, provided by Migrantes of the Italian Conference of Bishops. The workshop for tailoring and sewing is also attended in person. The job-seekers' and legal assistance desks, together with a service for university students operate online. We have about thirty scholarships to hand out. The food distribution which is carried out on Thursdays has seen a remarkable increase in users of almost 30%. This shows that, unfortunately, poverty and people's needs are on the increase. Up to now, we have been able to give

something to everyone, thanks to the Food Bank, the Guanellian Sisters and also the Pope's Almoner, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski. Further information on the activities and the situation of ACSE is available by logging on to the renewed and expanded website: www.Acsemigranti.org. (*Fr. Venanzio Milani*)

KENYA

Ordinations to the priesthood

Despite the pandemic, the Combonis in Kenya participated in the priestly ordination of Fr. Polycarp Moindi and Fr. Joseph Ng'ang'a, at the parish of Saint Teresa, Kiangunu, in the archdiocese of Nairobi. A good number of the faithful were also present alongside the Comboni Family, priests and religious. Cardinal Njue, Archbishop of Nairobi, presided at the Mass and ordained our two confreres.

In his usual happy and humorous manner, the Cardinal exhorted the neo-ordinands never to look back and to live a life of prayer and commitment as missionaries. He then addressed some words of gratitude and encouragement to the parents of the two new priests.

Fr. Austine Radol, Provincial Superior, echoing the sentiments of the Cardinal, asked the parents, relatives, friends and parishes of the newly-ordained to continue to support them. He also announced that Fr. Polycarp has been assigned to the Province of Togo-Ghana-Benin while Fr. Joseph will go to Ecuador. (*Fr. Andrew Bwalya*)

RCA

News

The Province is going through a worrying time.

On 27 December the presidential elections were held in an inflamed atmosphere after some rebel groups and other unknown forces tried to prevent them from being held. There were clashes in different parts of the country such as Yaloke, Bossangoa, Kagabandoro and Bouzoum. A large group of rebels occupied Boda and the army, police and armed police fled towards Mbaiki and Bangui. Up to now, the rebels have not harmed the people of Boda but confined themselves to looting the prefecture and commissariat.

In the first days of January 2021, the city of Bangassou fell into the hands of a group of rebels (mercenaries and people from Niger).

In Bangui. The situation is peaceful but rumour has it that the rebels may come here as well to sow disorder and prevent the elections being held. (*Fr. Everaldo de Souza Alves mcc*)

TOGO-GHANA-BENIN

2020: a year of abundant vocations for TGB

On 12 December 2020, at the cathedral of Aneho (Togo), a fine Mass was celebrated during which ten new priests were ordained, six of whom were diocesan and four were Comboni Missionaries: Fr. Abraham Amuzu, Fr. Achille Dansou, Fr. Charlemagne Dossavi and Fr. Pius Boosuuro. The ceremony began at 9 am in the presence of a large congregation of the faithful and priests, taking into account the measures to be taken because of Covid-19.

In his homily, Mons. Isaac Jogues Gaglo, Bishop of the diocese of Aneho, referring to the encyclical of Saint John Paul II. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia Vivit*, emphasised that the ministerial priesthood has its roots and is realised fully in the Eucharist and recommended that the newly-ordained priests celebrate Mass daily, as well as the Liturgy of the Hours and be devoted to our Lady and the saints and celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He then invited them to become servants like Christ and asked the participants to pray fervently for the new priests and all the clergy.

We wish to make it known that, on that same day, in Dassa-Zoumè, towards the north of Benin, a beautiful and moving ceremony was held for the presbyteral ordination of another Comboni, the first of the diocese: Fr. Ephrem Badou.

The ordinations of Fr. Pius Boosuuro, originally from the diocese of Wa (Jiraapa), in the north of Ghana, and of Fr. Ephrem Badou, originally from the diocese of Dassa-Zoume, Benin, are concrete signs for us Comboni missionaries of the efficacy of our witness and above all of our work of missionary animation even in areas of the Province where we are not established.

The Province is happy to have been able to give the Institute and the Church nine new priests.

IN PACE CHRISTI

Fr. Arturo Velázquez González (28.07.1958 – 22.10.2020)

Arturo was born in Apatzingán (Mexico) on 28 July 1958. He began his formation in Mexico, entering the novitiate at Cuernavaca where

he took first vows on 1 September 1980. He was then sent to the Innsbruck scholasticate. In 1986, he was again in Mexico at the Comboni parish of Valle de Chalco. He took perpetual vows on 27 March 1987 and was sent to the minor seminary of San Francisco del Rincón, first as formator and later as local superior. He was ordained priest on 26 September 1987.

He was assigned to South Africa. After some time in Silverton to study the language, he stayed in the parish of Mount Frere up to 1998 when he went to Mexico City to take part in the Comboni year of Ongoing Formation (CYOF). From then on, he remained in Mexico.

In 2004, at the request of the national director of the Pontifical Missionary Works, he was allowed to work full-time for the PMW, for a period of three years, while remaining a member of the Province. In May 2007, he was working in the diocese of Apatzingán (MEX).

In May 2010, he was diagnosed with bone cancer and was permitted to stay at his sister's house where he was taken care of by family members. He died in Zamora on 22 October 2020 and was buried at Apatzingán (Mich. Mexico).

Fr. Giuseppe Puttinato (07.04.1933 – 22.11.2020)

Giuseppe was born in Ceregnano (Rovigo), on 7 April 1933. He did the novitiate in Florence where he took first vows on 9 September 1956, and the scholasticate in Venegono, where he made his final profession exactly two years later on 9 September 1958.

The following year, he was assigned to the Sudan, and Comboni College, Khartoum. From that time onwards, he always worked in educational environments. At the fine old age of seventy and with the support of the then bishop of Khartoum, Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir, and a group of Sudanese Moslems, Beppino took on a huge project: to found the first Catholic University in Sudan, a country then under Islamic Law. Against all odds, he completed the project and in 2001, the first twenty-six students began to study information technology. Today, the Comboni College of Science and Technology (CCST) of Khartoum is a widely recognised university that accepts students regardless of background or religion. Up to the end of August 2020, Fr. Beppino was chaplain to the Catholic students with whom he held a daily prayer meeting.

Fr. J. Richard Kyankaaga, Provincial Superior of Egypt-Sudan, tells us about the last period of his life. "Fr. Beppino became ill early in September. Hospital tests showed the presence of kidney stones. As time passed, his condition constantly worsened but nothing more than

an infection caused by the kidney-stones was found. Towards the end of September, his condition had worsened further and the treatment he was receiving in Sudan was not producing the hoped-for results. It was necessary to take the difficult decision of sending Fr. Beppino to Italy. When we informed him, he was not content, though he did not resist. However, he had us understand that, if it were up to him, he would not have gone to Italy. As the days went by, he too began to realise the seriousness of his situation: twice he fell from his bed during the night. We had to employ nurses to give him 24-hour care. He himself then asked to go to Italy for a better diagnosis of his illness.

The first attempt failed when he was stopped at the airport because his travelling companion did not have all the documents in order. We had to wait a few more days. Finally, Fr Beppino arrived in Italy and underwent two weeks of quarantine at Castel d'Azzano. When it was over, he was no longer the person we knew before.

We then heard he had contracted the coronavirus which worsened his already weak condition due to the sickness the exact nature of which we still do not know.

Fr. Beppino was a hero of our mission in Sudan. He contributed mostly to the field of education. He spent almost all his sixty years of priesthood in Sudan, working in this area of service. He was a man of immense charity. He loved without distinction. There was a place for everyone in his heart. We greatly miss him!"

Bro. Giovanni Girelli (28.03.1939 – 27.11.2020)

Giovanni was born in Castel d'Azzano (Verona Province) on 28 March 1939; at the age of seventeen, he entered the Gozzano novitiate as a brother candidate and took his first vows on 15 September 1958. He was then immediately sent to Thiene as formator in the minor seminary and then, from dal 1960 to 1965, he worked in Troia as the local bursar.

In 1966, he was assigned to Ethiopia (then Eritrea-Ethiopia) where he spent his whole missionary life, working in various communities – Awasa, Dongora, Tullo, Shafinna and Fullasa – with different duties, but especially that of local bursar and in charge of building.

In 1966, Fr. Bruno Maccani was called to open a new mission in what was still virgin territory in Ethiopia, among the Sidamo people. Bro. Giovanni was with him. At first, the people were curious about them since they did not know the language and it was therefore very difficult to communicate. Using timber and bricks, they built the first small

school, with three classrooms. That is how they started! The people began to approach them, learned to trust them and began to send their children to the school. The missionaries tried to combine cultural teaching with religious instruction.

Towards the end of 1968, a delegation from Shafinna – we may read about the beginnings of that mission in Bro. Giovanni's description published in *Raccontiamoci* (the newsletter about mission adventures, Castel d'Azzano, n. 21, 2017) – went to the mission of Awassa and asked Fr. Emilio Ceccarini, the head of the mission at the time, to open a school at Kombole, on land already made available by the owners. Then, a short time later, Fr. Ceccarini, together with Fathers Maccani, Lonfernini and Calvi, went to the place and met with the elders of the area. Given the favourable situation and the good dispositions of the people, Fr. Ceccarini agreed to their request but immediately made it clear that there would not only be a school but also a real mission with a church, a dispensary and other services to meet the material and spiritual needs of the people.

Fr. Lorenzo Ceresoli was charged with starting the mission of Shafinna. After a number of formalities, permission was granted to move to the spot at the start of 1970: on 16 February, having loaded the lorry, Bro. Giovanni, with a couple of helpers and preceded by the two Fathers in a pick-up, set out for Shafinna. The journey was awful but they finally arrived at Kombole safe and sound. Their struggles were just beginning: there was little room in the hut so their beds were on top of each other; there was just a table, a small gas stove and a few stools. "We had brought some food with us from Awassa – recounts Bro. Giovanni – and there had to be some coffee. But they had forgotten the sugar! Bro. Magnani, to lighten the mood, remarked that at least we had electricity. Fr Ceresoli had, in fact, bought a battery that was charged by a small generator. We then got to work to set it up but, to our dismay, all the bulbs we had brought had been broken to pieces due to the rough roads! We therefore had to content ourselves with candle light! However, Bro. Magnani would not admit defeat due to these small troubles: we watched him searching in one of the large boxes and take out three intact bottles of dark beer! Joyfully, and giving thanks to God, we drank a toast to honour the opening of the new mission of Shafinna!"

In 2012, Bro. Giovanni returned to Italy for health reasons. He stayed in Brescia until 2015 and then moved to the community of Castel d'Azzano. He died on 27 November 2020, at Negrar hospital (Verona) where he had been admitted due to a Coronavirus infection.

Fr. Mariano Lubich (18.05.1923 – 28.11.2020)

Fr. Mariano was born in Trent on 18 May 1923. He entered the Comboni novitiate at Venegono where he took first vows on 7 October 1941. He did the scholasticate in Verona and spent two years in Rebbio assisting elderly confreres and returned to Verona where he made his perpetual profession on 7 October 1946. “From 1947 to 1950 – he recounts – I taught at the apostolic school in Brescia. From 1950 to 1955, I was in England: I spent one year in London and four in Newcastle upon Tyne where I took a degree in political economy.

I spent the years from the end of 1955 up to 1972 in Uganda, except for two periods of holidays in Italy. From 1955 to 1959, I was in Nyapea as chaplain and teacher at the college run by the Sacred Heart Brothers.

In 1960, after my first holidays, I was sent to Mons. Cesana, then bishop of Gulu, to start the new ‘Comboni College’ in Lira, where I spent 8 years, up to 1968, when I was transferred to Layibi College.

I have spent all my life among books and teaching but, despite this, I think I have done some good to a large number of students who are now emerging in Uganda as leaders of the country”.

“What is it that unites an old missionary to one who is young? – wrote Bro. Jorge Fayad who was in Uganda in the eighties – Passion for films. Fr. Mariano was a real expert and knew many actresses and actors; he shared with me some of his spiritual vision. We used to meet for a chat and I came to understand his personality. This helped me to feel at home at Mbuya. Thank you, Fr. Mariano for your presence in my life and my missionary work”.

In 2012, Fr. Mariano returned to Italy, staying first in Arco and then in Brescia. Since 2016, he lived at the Bro. Alfredo Fiorini Centre in Castel d’Azzano where he passed away on 28 November 2020, a victim of the coronavirus.

Fr. Celestino Prevedello (17.10.1950 – 11.12.2020)

He was born in Venegono Inferiore (Milan) on 17 October 1950, and at the age of 24, he took first vows on 4 May 1974, in Venegono and went to join the scholasticate in Kampala where he stayed until his ordination on 10 June 1978.

After his ordination, he was assigned to Sudan but first spent a few years at Zahle, in Lebanon, studying Arabic. In 1981, he went to Sudan where he was based first at Wad Medani and then at Kosti, until 1987, when he was appointed rector of the Khartoum Diocesan

Seminary until 1997. Many priests and bishops passed through the seminary; among these are the Archbishop of Khartoum Michael Didi and the Bishop of Kosti, Tombe Trille, of whom Fr. Celestino spoke with great esteem and appreciation.

From 1997 to 1999 he was in Padua for missionary animation; he then returned to Sudan as a teacher, pastoral coordinator in the diocese of Khartoum and also secretary of the Sudanese Episcopal Conference.

At one point, he was asked to become a bishop in South Sudan but Fr. Celestino declined.

In January 2009, he returned to Padua and worked there as formator of postulants until 2018 when he expressed his desire to return to Sudan and he was again assigned to that Province. However, his stay was brief, due to illness and he had to return to Italy. On 1 November 2018, he was assigned to the community of the Curia as superior, where he remained until the end.

Fr. Celestino was a happy sort of person and always smiling: this was his chief characteristic. His smile brought peace and serenity. His was a friendly presence that inspired confidence and showed the joy of life! He created a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere in our community. He spoke to everyone, came to visit us in our rooms, showing concern and care for each of us. The door of his room was always open.

Personally speaking, he was a friend and collaborator, always willing to help and to lend a hand in difficult times. He was a person who put others at their ease.

He was always welcoming towards people from outside and would say to the confreres: "There is always room in our house!"

A second characteristic I wish to speak of is that he had the mission at heart. Of Sudan he would say: *It is the mission of the Heart* (referring to the book by Fr. Vantini who spent his whole life in Sudan). He spoke with great esteem of his companions in the mission, whether still alive or deceased.

He never complained in his sickness. We knew he was not always well. He endured the therapy with great patience, sometimes with a degree of stoicism and always with strength of soul. At his funeral, Fr. Torquato addressed to him an extended reflection from which we have taken these few lines: "I want to tell you that you have been a wonderful gift of God, a sign of His love for me and many others. I must also tell you that you have been a marvellous example. Your love for the mission and our Comboni family, your ability to listen when I shared with you my experience as a missionary in Uganda and as a priest here in Rome and to make me feel understood in my

difficulties, your ability to welcome others, listening and always excusing everyone has been a precious lesson in how to live, unforgettable. How can I ever forget your ever-smiling eyes, your room door that was always open and welcoming, those last mornings when, at five o'clock you would ask me to bring you the "mocaccino" you enjoyed so much, or when you showed me the photos of your beloved Dolomites and your dreams of pleasant walks in the mountains?". (*Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins, mccj*)

Fr. Barbieri Silvano (11.04.1929 – 16.12.2020)

On hearing of his death on the evening of 16 December, I was reminded of that passionate missionary I knew in Mozambique. His passion was evident in all he did, especially in his work of evangelisation and, especially in the last years he spent in Mozambique, in the field of education.

Fr. Silvano was born on 11 April 1929, in Minucciano, Lucca, into a large family of nine children. His father was Giovanni and his mother Maria. At the end of his novitiate in Florence, he took first vows in 1951 and went to study theology first in Verona and then in Venegono. On 31 May 1958, he was ordained priest and, after some months in Portugal learning Portuguese, he left for Mozambique. This would be the land he loved and the people God entrusted to him for his whole life and which filled with joy his missionary work.

Fr. Silvano arrived in Mozambique in 1959 and was assigned to the mission of Carapira, Nampula, the first mission opened by the Combonis in 1948 and which also became the provincial house. It was at that mission that he learned Makwa and studied the customs of the people, especially their rites of initiation, obligatory for boys and girls once they reached puberty: the passage from childhood to adulthood. This he did to understand the people better, their way of thinking and their deepest feelings, and to share their life. From 1973 to 1984, Fr. Silvano worked in Portugal and Italy in various ministries including missionary animation and formation. In 1984, he returned to Mozambique, first to Nacarua and then to Matola, as a formator of postulants. Eventually, he spent the years from 1994-98 in Maputo, in the parish of Benfica, in the outskirts of the capital. It was during that period that I had the joy of knowing him and to share the same mission with him.

In 1999, he left Mozambique due to his unreliable state of health and was assigned first to Italy, then to Portugal and again to Italy, for reasons of health. In 2011 he was assigned to the mother House in

Verona and then, in 2015, when the house had been opened, he moved to Castel d’Azzano.

There is a well-known secret in the life of Fr. Silvano which he revealed to all who met him: his great devotion to our Lady of Fatima. “To speak of Our Lady – he used to say – is in no way difficult; I am always ready!” Furthermore, Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is the patron of Portugal, of Mozambique and also of Carapira mission.

During his final years in Mozambique, I saw that he had a special concern for young people. At the age of 65, he would speak to them with enthusiasm. He also spoke with conviction and energy, leading them to respond positively to his proposals.

Last, but by no means least, I cannot forget his passion for the Gospel. Fr. Silvano resolutely lived this basic dimension of the life of every Christian and even more so of every missionary: his motto: “*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel*”, led him to give himself to the mission in many ways; he leaves behind the mark of a Comboni missionary life lived to the full, there where the Lord sent him.

This was why, when I would go to Castel d’Azzano and he still had all his faculties, even though he was weak physically, he made me see in him the living mission, the people, the celebrations and the joy of life. (*Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE MOTHERS: Anne Marie, od Fr. Saturnin Pognon (TCH); Margaret, od Fr. Achilles Kiwanuka (U); Lucia, of Mons. Odelir José Magri (BR).

THE BROTHERS: Pedro, of Fr. José de la Cruz Hinojosa (M); Tarcisio, of Bro. Luigi Salbego (I).

THE SISTERS: Zita, of Fr. Benito Buzzacarin (I); Ana Maria, of the Sc. José de Jesús Nieto Castro (M).

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTER: Sr. Carla Maria Vinco.

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