

# Familia Comboniana

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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794

March 2021

## GENERAL NOTES

### Consulta held in February 2021

#### 1. Appointment of the new General Secretary

The GC appoints *Bro. Giusti Daniele Giovanni*, mccj, as the new General Secretary as of 1 April 2021. The GC sincerely thanks Fr. Umberto Pescantini, mccj, for his long years of generous service as Secretary General.

#### 2. Legal Representative

The GC has appointed *Bro. Giusti Daniele Giovanni*, mccj, as Legal Representative of Daniel Comboni International College (District of the Curia, Rome-Paris).

The GC has decided to separate the office of treasurer general from that of legal representative despite the fact that RL 163.2 indicates that normally the legal representative is the provincial or general treasurer. In fact, one of the more recent Church documents, CIVCSVA, "The Economy at the Service of the Charism and Mission" n 65, suggests that, wherever possible, it is best to separate the service of provincial or general administration from the office of the legal representative.

#### 3. Assignment of confreres

The pandemic is restricting the life of a great number of people and institutions, including our own. Many confreres are unable to obtain visas to travel to their new destinations. The GC will take this into account when making assignments.

#### 4. Meeting of Circumscription Bursars

The residential meeting of the circumscription bursars planned for April has been postponed but the telematic continental meetings will go ahead as already programmed.

## 5. Webinar of the Forum on Social Ministeriality of the members of the entire Comboni Family

The webinar will be held on 5 and 6 March telematically. It will concentrate on the situation of social ministry mapping. We encourage all to take part in it.

### Perpetual professions

Sc. Nyinga David Dunga (CN)	Pangoa (PE)	08/01/2021
Sc. Chichole Paul Makokha (KE)	Lokichar (KE)	16/01/2021
Sc. Muhindo Gratien M. (CN)	Kinshasa (RDC)	31/01/2021

### Ordinations to the priesthood

Fr. Mponda João Mponda (MO)		30/01/2021
Fr. Ngbo Fufunga Justin (CN)	Bondo (RDC)	07/02/2021
Fr. Nkumileke Macaire Mbo (CN)	Kinshasa (RDC)	27/02/2021

### Holy Redeemer Guild

March	01 – 07 CO	08 – 15 E	16 – 31 DSP
April	01 – 15 CN	16 – 30 EC	

### Prayer intentions

**March** – That the ministry of the Comboni Family may strengthen “gender justice” and especially the protection of women and girls. *Lord hear us.*

**April** – That the Secular Comboni Missionaries may always live in the paschal dynamic of death and resurrection in the certainty that the Spirit will continue to guide them on their journey. *Lord hear us.*

### Publications

**Guido Oliana**, *Omelie ai Seminaristi su Gesù Cristo “Via, Verità e Vita”*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2021. This book is a collection of homilies preached by the author at Juba Major Seminary (South Sudan). They seek to clarify how the Word of God becomes life in the personal context of each one of us. They sometimes reiterate what had been explained in class and the dramatic situation of South Sudan. They express a Trinitarian dimension. The *theological dimension* concentrates on the primacy of the action of the Father. The *spiritual dimension* instead, emphasizes the action of the Holy Spirit which makes man capable of penetrating the meaning of the Word. And the *Christological dimension* shows how to put the Word into practice in life in the light of the incarnation of Christ.

## VIA ZOOM

### **Meeting of Combonis involved in communications**

With the XIX General Chapter in mind, some Combonis involved in missionary communications at the Institute level have felt the need to commence between themselves a process of reflection on the theme of communications and missionary passion lived in the development of this ministry.

As a result, on 4 February, they met via Zoom, from 16.00 to 17.30 (Rome time), to give the confreres of the various continents the possibility of participating. There were 20 participants, including some Chapter delegates.

The meeting marked the start of a journey of discernment aimed at bringing the theme of missionary and Comboni communication today firstly to the Precapitular Commission and then to the Chapter itself.

“In the context of ministeriality, we wish to give its value to this specific pastoral – the missionaries emphasised. Missionary animation has contributed a great deal to the Institute in terms of economic resources for 150 years, but today we are in a deep crisis. We must value the enormous informative potential we have in the Institute: including informal communication done by confreres using humble means and with no specific training”.

Looking at each of the Comboni circumscriptions, in the historical context in which they live, we can clearly see the effort to promote courageous innovative developments in the field of communications.

It was recalled that some Institutes have already worked in a specific way to elaborate a vademecum or directory of communications. Considering the Comboni reality, it is a matter of bringing out the proper identity of our communication, of integrating the traditional means of communication (magazines, newspapers, books, etc.) with the new digital means and having the courage to launch together new forms of collaboration and communication, of missionary sensitization and creativity so as to have a greater impact on the life of the people in the places where we are present.

## IN PACE CHRISTI

### **Fr. Luigi Girardi (17.02.1925-12.11.2020)**

Fr. Luigi spent almost all his life as a spiritual director: he was a quiet sort of person easily approachable and willing to listen.

Born in S. Michele Extra, Verona on 17 February 1925, his father was Giuseppe Girardi and his mother's maiden name was Anna Aldegheri. Luigi attended high school in the Comboni seminaries of Padua and Brescia and joined the Venegono novitiate in 1942, during the Second World War. He took his first vows on the feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1944. He was in Rebbio for the first two years of the scholasticate and in Verona the second two. He then went to Carraia for a year and did the last year in Venegono. He took perpetual vows on 23 September 1949 and was ordained priest in Milan on 3 June 1950 by Card. Ildefonso Schuster.

After a year in Sunningdale studying English, Luigi was assigned to the mission of Sudan. Before going there, he had to study Arabic for a year in Zahle, Lebanon. He finally reached Okaru, in Bahr el Gebel (South Sudan) in 1952 and was appointed spiritual director of the seminarians. While there, he learned the Lotuko and Bahri local languages.

After carrying out this service for twelve years, Fr. Luigi was recalled to Italy and, from 1964 to 1970, was the spiritual director of the Comboni postulants in Padua and then in Asti. In 1970, he moved to Barcelona as a formator of Brother postulants. In 1972, he returned to Italy where, for one year, he served in various communities, dedicating himself to priestly ministry in Milano, Verona and Lucca. In 1981, he had the joy of returning to Africa where he was again spiritual director of the young aspirants to religious life in Kenya, first in Kiserian, then in Tartar and also in Rongai, serving the institutes founded by Fr. Giovanni Marengoni. In 1990, he went to help out in Gilgil. From 1993 to 1999, he was to be found in Nairobi as a member of the community of the provincial house but, in 1999, he again became a spiritual director for two years at Rongai and then moved to the Comboni scholasticate in Nairobi in the same capacity. In 2006, being quite elderly, he returned to Italy for medical treatment and was assigned the following year to the community of the Casavatore scholasticate as spiritual director of the Comboni scholastics.

He rendered this service for seven years and then retired to Verona to prepare himself for his encounter with the Lord who called him to himself as a coronavirus victim on 12 November 2020. For a number of years, Fr. Luigi had to cope with being almost totally blind: he always

needed a magnifying glass or a computer screen with huge lettering to read his breviary or the missal. He never once complained about this or made it a burden for others.

### **Fr. Adriano Galeazzo (31.10.1934 – 14.11.2020)**

Fr. Adriano Galeazzo was born in Voltabarozzo (now part of Padua) on 31 October 1934 into a family rich in faith. He grew up and was formed in the parish youth groups, especially in a fine group of GIAC, the Catholic Acton Youth. On the first Friday of the month, he would join the groups of the Apostleship of Prayer. Listening to the reflections that were proposed, young Adriano's heart beat faster and especially at the mention of the missions. He told his mother, Teresa, of this and she, being a woman of great faith and industriousness, brought him to his senses and answered: "First you have to do your studies!" He studied at the Barbarigo Episcopal College, taking a diploma in accountancy. It was during those years of study that, accompanied by his spiritual guide Rev. Mario Versuraro, that his missionary vocation developed and he afterwards entered the seminary of the Comboni Missionaries. He did the novitiate in Gozzano and took first vows on 9 September 1958. He went to Venegono for the scholasticate and made his perpetual profession on 9 September 1961. He was ordained priest on 7 April 1962, in Milano, by the Cardinal Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI. The following day, he celebrated his first Mass in Voltabarozzo. Since he had administrative inclinations, the superiors sent him to Venegono Superiore to the theological scholasticate as bursar and assistant in parish pastoral work.

In 1966, the time came for him to leave for the mission. After spending some months in London to brush up his English, he left for Ethiopia-Eritrea and joined the community of the mission of Asmara. It was a time of great activity: as a teacher, the bursar, spiritual assistant to the Comboni Sisters community and engaged in pastoral activity in the parishes of the mission. His contacts with his home parish were frequent. His parish was already organising times for prayer and collections for his mission. His ministry in Asmara lasted eight years until his superiors sent him to the Comboni mission of Awassa among the Sidamo, in the south of Ethiopia. Fr. Adriano joined in the intense work of evangelisation and development begun in that place less than ten years previously. He learned the local language and immersed himself in the pastoral activities with the catechists. He forged bonds of friendship with them and the local people that lasted many years, even after he had returned to Italy.

The superiors asked Fr. Adriano to carry out his ministry in Addis Ababa, in the heart of the Horn of Africa, at the provincial house where he also had administrative duties as procurator. He continued his “missionary itinerary” in Ethiopia being transferred to the mission of Tullo, about 10 kilometres from Awassa. He stayed there for about four years, ministering at the local hospital. Fr. Adriano spoke of his next period of mission at the parish of Fullasa, also in the Sidamo region, as the next years of his life: there was no electricity there and the missionaries lived simple lives, preaching the Gospel love of Jesus.

In 2002, Fr. Adriano left Ethiopia for health reasons and continued his pastoral service in the communities of Trent, Thiene (where he was one of the last Combonis present at the closure of the house in 2007), Padua and Verona. The one desire of his heart was still the mission, a subject that occupied his thoughts and was often mentioned in many of his meticulously-prepared homilies he delivered in his parish church of Voltabarozzo. Naturally, since Voltabarozzo was always “his” parish, his family and friends. He often celebrated Holy Mass there. Younger people would enquire who that elderly priest was, the one with the white hair and beard, so careful and precise as he celebrated the Eucharist, bent over the altar.

In 2015, Fr. Adriano was transferred to Castel d’Azzano where he passed away on 14 November 2020 due to the coronavirus.

### **Fr. Giulio Celadon (09.01.1935 – 16.11.2020)**

Fr. Giulio was born on 9 January 1935 in Minerbe, in Verona province, into a family marked by work and faith. He did his novitiate in Florence where he took first vows on 9 September 1956, the feast of St Peter Claver. After studying theology in Venegono Inferiore, he took final vows on 9 September 1959 and was ordained priest on 2 April 1960.

His first post was that of formator in the minor seminary of Pellegrina (in Verona province). On 1 July 1961, he was assigned to the community of Pordenone to work in vocations promotion and missionary animation in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Three years later, the way to the mission opened up and he was sent to Mexico and the mission of San José del Cabo, as curate.

“He was 29 years old when he first came to Mexican California – writes Fr. Rafael G. Ponce in his testimony – never imagining he would spend 47 years in Latin America (Mexico, Ecuador and Colombia) sharing his work equally between vocations promotion, missionary animation and pastoral work among the poor people. In all those years, he never changed his style of evangelical simplicity, with his reserved smile; even

though he was one who did not attract attention, he was a man of deep and convinced faith which was at the root of his Comboni missionary and priestly vocation. I knew him when I was a young seminarian and I used to wonder why he always wore the same suit; I later discovered he had chosen to live in radical poverty and had just two suits of clothes of the same colour. This characteristic was in complete harmony with his way of doing vocational promotion: it was totally centred on Christ and on putting the Gospel into practice”.

Mexico was the love of his heart. After a short time, he was sent to the seminary in San Francisco del Rincón, as vocations promoter. He dedicated all his energy to his task up to 1 July 1972 when he was called to Guadalajara as formator in the Comboni seminary. In 1978, his superiors asked him to go to another country and he was sent to Esmeraldas in Ecuador, on the Pacific coast, to serve the parish of Quinindé as curate. The area was in a phase of full social and economic expansion due to the phenomenon of internal migration. With fertile land and abundant forests, it was occupied by groups of people from the various regions of the country, especially the provinces of Pichincha, Manabi and Loja. It was not easy to reach the villages scattered among the forests and along the rivers, or the colonised areas. However, Fr. Giulio was always peaceful and content, generous and available; he did not spare himself and the rural sector received good spiritual care.

In 1982, obedience required that he serve as parish priest in the largest city of Ecuador, Guayaquil, which was also a destination for migrants moving from the countryside to the poor quarters in the periphery. Fr. Giulio was charged with promoting the parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in an area “invaded” by so many people who had nowhere to build their homes. It was a moving sight to see poor people setting up a few poles and making a roof and walls of plastic sheeting or bamboo canes, or even some old corrugated iron sheets and making that their home. The problems began with the rainy season when the whole area became a swamp. Many people had to live in flooded homes on some planks hanging from the roof, walking through the water on bricks or stones. Even Fr. Giulio, the living in the Comboni house in Guasmo, a building that also served as a chapel, often had to wear shorts and wade through the pools. With his permanent welcoming smile, he managed to attract people and form a parish community that was active, lively and ready to help. The secret of his success in catechesis was his insistence on the Word of God as a light on the path of daily life.

E would often return late in the evening and have a meal of whatever food was available. He enjoyed his food and never lost his appetite! He was helpful in the community, did the shopping and was also the community bursar.

From 1988 to 1989, he was curate in Esmeraldas, at the parish of San José Obrero and from 1990 to 1993 he was curate in Quinindé. In 1994, he was in Guayaquil, in the headquarters of the Afro-Ecuadorian Centre, where he worked in ministry and missionary animation up to 1998 when he was assigned to the missionary animation centre at Cali, in Colombia.

For some time, he was also in charge of the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, next to the Comboni house. In June 2004, he superiors sent him to Aguachica, in the diocese of Ocaña, in Meta Region where the Combonis had recently opened a parish. The social situation of that vast agricultural area was complicated by the presence of the FARC guerrillas who were competing for the control of the territory with paramilitary groups, making life hard for the small farmers and cattle-raisers, as well as for the few industries present. The situation was marked by killings and massacres of peasants, illegal acts and military forces. The work of evangelisation in the midst of such violence was indeed complicated and required sound nerves, prudence and prophecy.

In 2005, Fr. Giulio was called to the postulancy at Medellín, charged with animating a local Church that was rich in priestly and religious vocations but generally inward-looking.

In 2008, he was sent to the provincial seat in Bogotá, for the same ministry. Then, up to 2010, he was based in Cali where he served in pastoral work and missionary animation.

Unfortunately, his strength was failing. Going along with the decision of the Comboni group to leave the city centre, he went to the so-called “red quarter”, due to its poverty and violence dominated by gangs of people involved in illegal drugs.

Every day, Fr. Giulio would take his place in the small square in front of the church, ready to talk to any of the passers-by and listen to them telling him their troubles and mourn for their beloved dead. He had a word of comfort and faith for all of. This was a precious service given by one who had “the odour of the sheep”, as Pope Francis would say. The unhealthy environment gradually weakened his fragile lungs and he did all he could on the spot to look after his health. Reluctantly, in 2012, he had to resign himself to the fact that he needed to return to Italy for good.

Once he settled down, he had no intention of living like a retired person. Appointed to the community of Milan, he worked in missionary animation. In 2015, his health again became precarious and he had to agree to withdraw, as an elderly and sick confrere, to Verona and then to Castel d'Azzano where he spent his time in prayer and listening to the Word. It was there that he was stricken by then coronavirus that caused his death on 16 November 2020.

During one of my visits, when I asked him for the secret of his serenity, he answered: "Trust in the Lord and keep smiling". He is now in the company of St Daniel Comboni and the many people he met on the missionary journey of his life in Italy, Mexico, Ecuador and Colombia. Passion for the mission was his strength, rooted in the Heart of Jesus and in love for the least in whom he served Jesus himself. (*Fr. Raffaello Savoia, mccj*)

### **Fr. Luigi Capelli (19.04.1944 – 17.11.2020)**

"Twenty confreres of this community have been swept away by covid-19 – writes Fr. Manuel João Pereira. – Fr. Luigi was the youngest of this group (76) and the 'eldest' in length of stay in this caring community of Verona (since 1994); he was the best known and most popular and his death was very much felt, especially among our employees; especially since this figure shows once again how God works through the least, using our qualities, our limits and our poverty.

Fr. Luigi was not a 'man of great talents' but he was outstanding for his joviality, which he showed by his good humour, his understanding, his will to live, his childlike playful and adventurous spirit, his spontaneity and simplicity, his cordial, generous and peaceful attitude and his good company. He was a real artist of life who knew how to bring particular colours to every moment. God gave him to us for the joy of all".

Fr. Eugenio Petrogalli, who spent years in community with Fr. Luigi in the mission, says: "I spent some wonderful, joyful and sometimes extravagant years with him in Abor and Liati (Ghana)... I remember how, on the day we arrived in Liati, we went to the church together. He knelt before the tabernacle with outstretched arms and prayed aloud: "Jesus, take me as I am and make me what you want me to be, but slowly, please... ". Since there were just the two of us, I knelt beside him and said: 'Luigi, can you hear my confession', to which he replied: 'What are you doing? Get up. Do you want to be a worse sinner than me!?'".

We now follow the account of Fr. Girolamo Miante. "I met Fr. Luigi at the scholasticate in Issy les Moulineaux. He had come to France to

study French. He had already spent quite a while in London learning English: he was appointed to the Province of Togo-Ghana-Benin and it was important for his missionary work. That was in 1976; Fr. Luigi was a joyful sort of person, happy in his vocation. It cannot have been easy passing from English to French. Apart from the course at *Alliance Française*, a kind elderly lady was helping him with his homework and would say to him every day: 'mon père, les accents!' (Father, the accents!); he could not manage all those accented words, so much so that, one day when he had done his homework, he added a whole line of accents, suggested that the lady place them herself where they were required!

Luigi did the novitiate in Gozzano where he took first vows on 9 September 1966, and did the scholasticate in Venegono Superiore and in Rebbio, where he made his final profession on 9 September 1969.

After he was ordained on 19 March 1970, he spent some years in vocations promotion in Italy at Asti and Thiene, the minor seminaries for the formation of boys willing to take part in a vocational journey. Those were fruitful years and, with his lively and joyful character, he succeeded in sharing his enthusiasm with the boys he met.

Once appointed to Togo-Ghana-Benin, he served in Ghana from 1977 to 1993. It was the happiest period of Luigi's life. Things were in the initial stages with two communities at Abor, 40 km from Aflao on the border with Togo, and at Liatì, in the mountains: those were the two missions where Luigi worked as a zealous missionary, always among the people, in the villages and chapels, following the progress of the small communities, the catechumenate, the youth and the elderly. He managed to speak the local language, a tonic language with a lot of accents (Fr. Luigi's friends!), scurrying along the middy or dusty roads full of potholes, always happy and accompanied by a very good friend, his shotgun!

Fr. Luigi loved hunting and never missed a chance to spot some fowl or wild animal to shoot! His room had not many books but there were plenty of cartridges! Among ourselves, we called him 'Padre Bistecca (Father Beefsteak)'. In 1993, his health began to deteriorate and he had to return to Italy. His missionary life continued but in a completely different way as he stayed in the Verona Mother House, Rebbio, again in Verona and finally in Castel d'Azzano. Peaceful but needing care and attention, he lived those many years as a "gratuitous" offering of himself known only to God. Meeting him in the corridors of the Centres for the Sick and Elderly in Verona or Castel d'Azzano, he was always friendly and smiling. Ciao Bistecca! Do you remember Ghana and your

mission? His reply never varied: 'j'ai perdu la mémoire!' (I have lost my memory) but sometimes the odd Ewe word or a brief recollection would seem to flicker in his mind".

### **Fr. Gerardo Arturo Sandoval Fregoso (21.01.1957 – 17.12.2020)**

Fr. Gerardo was born in Mexico City on 21 January 1957 to a family of four children in which he had received profound testimony of Christian life. In 1975, he entered the postulancy at Xochimilco and two years later went on to the novitiate at Cuernavaca where, on 21 April 1979, he made his first profession. He was then sent to the scholasticate of Innsbruck, in Austria, to continue his theology but experienced there certain difficulties in adapting and so his superiors sent him to Rome where he finished his formation and made his perpetual profession on 10 June 1983. He then returned to Mexico and was ordained priest in Mexico City on 3 December of the same year.

Fr. Gerardo was a good and generous person but he always found missionary life difficult due to his poor health and his life of illness and suffering. From 1984 to 1989, he stayed in Mexico City and took a degree in communication sciences: for a period, he was editor of *Aguiluchos* magazine.

In 1989, he was appointed to Mozambique which was then in the throes of a situation of war and violence for which Fr. Gerardo was not prepared. In addition, he was also ill and had to return to Mexico. In 1994, after the renewal Course in Rome, he was again appointed to the mission and sent to Costa Rica but soon afterwards asked to return to Mexico and be incardinated in the Archdiocese of Mexico City where he worked for some years. In 2004, he returned to community and was appointed to pastoral work in Lower California.

In 2005, he again tried going to the mission and was assigned to Colombia. He stayed in Bogota for a while and was then sent to Medellín where he also had some difficulty and returned to Mexico City where he stayed in the provincial house where he received personal accompaniment and worked as procurator.

Since 2013, he had been in the community of Montezuma as bursar and helping in other services such as receiving confreres passing through. At the same time, he assisted spiritually some groups of laypeople to which he provided formation.

In recent years, he had to have an operation on his spine and also suffered from pneumonia. At the beginning of November he experienced some difficulty in breathing and was taken to hospital where he became infected with covid-19 from which he suffered for six

weeks and which caused his death on 17 December 2020. (*P. Enrique Sánchez G., mccj*)

**Bro. Roberto Moser (05.01.1933-17.11.2020)**

Roberto was born in Faida di Pinè, in Trentino, on 5 January 1933. As a Comboni aspirant, he trained for five years and was awarded a cabinet-makers certificate at the Professional Technical School of Pordenone run by the Comboni Brothers Giuseppe Biasin and Alessandro Pelucchi.

He was aged twenty when he entered the Comboni novitiate in Florence and made his first profession on 9 September 1955. His first assignment was to do farm work for a year at the house in Pellegrina and a further year in Via Saldini, Milan.

He was then appointed to South Sudan and in 1958 left for Mupoi where he practised his profession as a carpenter for some years. He spent 1965 and 1966 working on the construction of the house of Moncada, in Spain, and then at Ibiracú, in Brazil. He spent a year at the Mother House in Verona and was then assigned to Ecuador where he looked after the community served by the parish of Viche, in the diocese of Esmeraldas. In 1977, he was recalled to Pordenone, in Italy.

In 1981, the road to Africa again opened before him: assigned to what was then called Zaire, he worked at Isiro and Rungu. In 1994, he returned to Italy and participated in the Renewal Course in Rome the following year, after which he was appointed to the community of Venegono.

In the course of his life, he learned various languages: French, English, Portuguese and Spanish.

He had been a member of the Italian province since 2001 and, while still a member, he spent a couple of years in Congo at the parish of Tokoyo. Then, from 2003 to 2018, he was a member of the community of Trent and spent the last two years of his life first in Verona and then in Castel d'Azzano where he became ill with the coronavirus. He died on 17 November 2020.

**Fr. Riccardo Bolzonella (13.12.1929 – 13.12.2020)**

At the age of sixteen, Riccardo entered the Comboni novitiate in and took temporary vows on 9 September 1947. As a scholastic, he went first to Rebbio and then to Venegono where he took perpetual vows on 9 September 1952 and was ordained priest on 30 May 1953. Before leaving for the mission, he spent some years in Italy as vocations promoter, first in Verona, at the Mother House and then in Pellegrina.

In 1957, he was assigned to South Sudan where he devoted himself to ministry in the parishes of Naandi, Yubu and Mupo. In 1964, he returned to Italy to take part in the Renewal Course. The following year, he was appointed to Uganda and did missionary work there for over thirty years with a break of twelve years (1987-1999) during which he was asked to be the local superior of Mial-Rectory community and then of the community of Verona-Rectory.

“Fr. Riccardo arrived in Uganda in 1965 and did most of his ministry working in the diocese of Lira, serving at the parish of Aliwang and then at Iceme. Lastly, he served as chaplain of the “Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church”, at their Mother House situated in Ngetta, eight km from Lira. That congregation was founded by Mons. Ceaser Asili, the first bishop of the diocese of Lira” – writes Fr. Polycarp Opio, a priest of Lira diocese – “He assisted in the formation of the young women in the postulancy, a time of preparation before entering the novitiate and embracing the religious life. The lessons he prepared were always Biblical and liturgical and he especially saw to their spiritual formation.

As a priest, he was very humble and this was shown in his conduct and his way of doing things, even his composed manner of walking. His humility had a positive effect on many of those he encountered.

He was a missionary who was completely devoted to his priestly service. He showed his commitment by being always punctual in celebrating Mass and carrying out his other pastoral duties. He always encouraged the young postulants to be punctual. Whenever any of them was late, he enjoyed drawing the attention of the others and remarking: “When you become Sisters, don’t do that”. This aspect also helped to ensure that those young women became committed Sisters, especially in their lives of prayer.

Fr. Riccardo was very well organised and this ensured that he could use his time in the best way possible to carry out the duties he had decided on with great care and exactness. It also helped him to be available for extra tasks while still fully serving the persons entrusted to him.

Another characteristic of his was his great charity. He was so devoted to serving the postulants that he also tried to meet their concrete needs, helping them from his meagre resources. He was like a grandfather to them. Through his missionary work, he poured out his great love for the people of the diocese of Lira.

He loved his priesthood and was immediately ready to carry out his priestly duties, celebrating Mass and administering the sacraments.

The outstanding quality of his priestly ministry was the love he showed wherever he went. I am certain that his good example will never be forgotten: Fr. Riccardo will always be remembered because he was a man with a great heart”.

In 2012, he returned to Italy due to health issues and was assigned to Lucca community as the local bursar. In 2015, he moved to Castel d’Azzano where he died on his birthday, 13 December 2020.

### **Fr. Bruno Tinazzi (20.03.1934 – 23.12.2020)**

Fr. Bruno was born in Bosco Chiesanuova, in the Veronese mountains on 20 March 1934. He was almost twenty when he entered the Comboni novitiate in Florence. Two years later, he made his religious profession as Comboni Brother on 25 March 1955. Bro. Bruno was sent to the north of England where he spent several years (in Stillington and Mirfield) to complete his professional formation. On 9 September 1960, he made his final profession.

Earl in 1962, he arrived in Uganda and was assigned to the region of Karamoja. He served at the communities of Kaabong, Kotido, Kangole and Namalu. In mid-1968, he was recalled to Italy and the Trent community but years later he had already returned to the community of Namalu in Karamoja. Those were the days in which it became possible for some religious to be ordained to the ministerial priesthood. Bruno applied to undertake the studies required for ordination and he was sent to Rome for four years of theology. He was ordained priest on 2 February 1975 and was immediately reappointed to Uganda, for a couple of years spent among the Acholi in Kitgum and then, early in 1977, he was again assigned to Karamoja. It was the time of the overthrow of Amin with the arrival of Tanzanian troops in Uganda. From the Ugandan mission of Karenga, Fr. Bruno moved to that of Katilu, in Kenya, and remained there to proclaim the Gospel among the Turkana. In the year 2000, he moved to Lokichar and in 2006, to Nakwamekwi among the Turkana. After many years of this missionary work, Fr. Bruno was called to the provincial house in Nairobi, to assist the visiting confreres.

Towards the end of 2016, illness forced him to remain in Italy for medical treatment and, after a few years at the Mother House in Verona, he was transferred to the community for sick and elderly confreres at Castel d’Azzano. Unfortunately, Fr. Bruno also became sick with the Covid-19 virus and encountered the Lord who called him to receive the reward of his missionary work on 23 December 2020: in time to go and celebrate Christmas in heaven.

“I had the grace of meeting Fr. Bruno several times in my lifetime – Fr. Umberto Pescantini recounts – first in Uganda and then more meaningful encounters in Kenya, when I was the provincial. He was one who was clearly identified with the mission. Having previously been a Brother, he still had a very practical approach to the mission, planning and completing not only such projects as chapels but also works to meet public needs such as wells, houses, cultivations and assistance for the elderly. He liked to be with people and listen to their stories. He had a meek character and happily took part in community life. Seated outside under the splendid starry skies of Lokichar, we not only enjoyed the sight of the Milky Way and identified passing satellites but we also exchanged the news of the day concerning the missionary work or meetings with catechists. We sometimes said our goodnights with the help of a small drink”.

This is how Fr. Mariano Tibaldo remembers him. “When I went to visit the bishop of Lodwar, Mons. Patrick J. Harrington, in 2007 – I was then provincial in Kenya – Fr. Bruno was based at the mission of Lokichar and was also Vicar General of the diocese. We spoke mostly about the problems of the diocese and the missions run by the Comboni Missionaries. Mons. Harrington thought very highly of the confreres working in the diocese and would have liked to entrust more missions to us but, naturally, he understood he could only dream of such things since all the missionary institutes were going through a personnel crisis. Speaking of Fr. Bruno and praising his work and his availability, he summarised his character in a few words: “He is a real gentleman”. I think this is the most appropriate way to describe who Fr. Bruno was: a sensitive person who was available, humble, considerate of others and the confreres. He communicated with the people in Turkana – facilitated by the fact that, while in Uganda, he had learned Karimojong, a language very close to Turkana – and I liked the fine way he approached the people: he never raised his voice but listened to everyone, ‘wasting time’ building relationships – which is, after all, the most important thing in the mission. It must not be taken for granted that missionaries who have seen all sorts of things, experiencing wars, famines and diseases, should remain ‘gentlemen’.

After we decided to transfer Fr. Bruno to the provincial house in Nairobi where I was the Superior, we shared community life together. I remember how, when he was going shopping, he would ask if there was any particular food I would like or anything else I needed. He was attentive to the needs of others. I shall always be grateful to Fr. Bruno for the welcoming and serene atmosphere he created in the provincial

house. My final period as provincial was very difficult, a time when there were various problems to be faced with no solutions in sight. In the evenings, I felt the need to get away from the worries and enjoy a little peace. Fr. Bruno succeeded in creating that sort of atmosphere, also with the help of Fr. Romeo De Berti and Bro. Fernando Cesaro. We would take time to relax, telling of the adventures of our past lives, especially after supper on the veranda of the provincial house, drinking cups of tea or, if we had any, a glass of grappa. It hardly mattered that the electric light would come and go due to frequent power-cuts. For a missionary, it is a great gift to have confreres who help you to regain your serenity and renew your enthusiasm for the mission. Fr. Bruno was a gift for me and, I am sure, for all those who met him”.

### **Fr. Giuseppe Cavalieri (27.03.1939 – 18.01.2021)**

Fr. Giuseppe was born on 27 March 1939 in Sant’Angelo d’Alife, in Caserta province. While he was still a child, his father, who was a forestry guard, moved the family for reasons of work to Fermo, in the Marche. At the age of seventeen, Giuseppe entered the Comboni novitiate in Florence and then went to that of Gozzano. He first consecrated himself to the Institute on 9 September 1957. When he had completed theology in Verona and Venegono and had taken perpetual vows on 9 September 1963, he was ordained priest on 28 June 1964, together with about forty confreres in the same class.

Fr. Giuseppe’s first field of apostolate was missionary animation among the youth of the region while a member of the Naples community. His service lasted about six years during a period of great change in the culture of the youth, in traditions and the religious life itself.

In 1970, Fr. Giuseppe left Italy for the Southern Province of Brazil. That was during the military dictatorship which began with a coup on 31 March 1964. The country was going through the worst period in its history, characterised by the absence of freedom, the use of torture against political opponents and the practice of state terrorism.

The first stage in his long apostolic journey lasted from 1970 to 1975, in the Comboni of São Gabriel da Palha, in the diocese of São Mateus (ES). It was a time of crisis since the formation system for adolescents as considered out of date. At a time of “global contestation” by the youth of that time, the minor seminary was considered not only useless but even harmful to the formation of the youth. One alternative was to create a college for pupils of the upper classes. The same problem was encountered at the Comboni seminary of Jerônimo Monteiro (ES). From 1976 to 1977, Fr. Giuseppe was also a member of that community. “The

first step in the process of emptying that seminary was to suspend activities and send possible candidates to other Comboni seminaries". At the high school in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim (ES), the surviving seminarians of the seminaries of Ibirajú and Jerônimo Monteiro were assembled, assisted by Fr. Giuseppe.

Fr. Giuseppe was a member of the community of Pimenta Bueno (RO) from 1978 to 1980. There, committed to the work of raising social and political awareness, he had to face up to the difficulties and risks associated with a pastoral that was considered dangerous since it aimed at uniting faith and politics.

In 1988, he was granted his request to take part for some months in the SPICS (International Pauline Social Communications Studies) Course in Rome.

In the early nineties, he assumed the presidency of the São Judas Tadeu Social Service at São José do Rio Preto (SP), showing competence and creativity. For this reason, the provincial appointed him animator and coordinator of community services.

In 1995, he was recalled to Italy and assigned to vocations ministry at the Bari community. In 2002, having returned to Brazil, he accepted the post of provincial bursar. In December 2004, he was asked to take on a parish in Brasília. Humble, available and obedient as always, he took charge of the parish of the Holy Family in Taguatinga (DF) where there was "theological, cultural and religious pluralism". That was why the parish was organised to unite the various ethnic groups in a community project, in order to avoid isolating or discriminating against the various groups. It was entrusted to the Combonis in 1971 and was served for 36 years by about 25 Combonis and definitively handed over to the archdiocese of Brasília in 2007 by the last Comboni parish priest, Fr. Giuseppe.

He was then sent to the parish of Santo Antonio (diocese of São Mateus). Other stages of the fruitful mission of Fr. Giuseppe consisted in the parishes of Nova Contagem, in the outskirts of Belo Horizonte (MG), Tangará da Serra (MG), Santa Amélia a Curitiba (Paraná), and, as parish priest, Nova Venécia (ES). He lived out the rest of his years in Carapina (ES), where he worked tirelessly in the pastoral field until he contracted ischaemia and the deadly Covid-19 virus.

In accordance with his wishes, he was buried in the cemetery of Nova Venécia alongside other Combonis, in a place that he himself had prepared for the Comboni Missionary Family.

### **Fr. Italo Piffer (16.08.1929 – 19.01.2021)**

Fr. Italo was born in Cembra (Trent province) on 16 August 1929. Having done the novitiate in Florence, he made his first profession on 9 September 1950 and went to Venegono where he made his perpetual profession on 9 September 1954. He was ordained to the priesthood on 26 June 1955. He spent the next five years as a vocations promoter in the Padua community. “Some of the boys he recruited – Fr. Renzo Piazza said at his funeral – still remember him with nostalgia. One of them, Giuseppe, wrote to him: ‘You lit up my childhood ... my adolescence and youth ... and my maturity ... Illuminate now from heaven the remaining part of my journey with your shining faith ... Goodbye, Fr. Italo!’ Fr. Italo first appeared at Castel d’Azzano in the autumn of 2017 when he needed rehabilitation after falling at the Mother House. Once he was back in form, he asked to go back to Verona. ‘I am not going away because I was badly treated ... but in Verona I can have a smoke, even if only at the window ...’ and so he left us at the very beginning of 2018 and only returned when he needed looking after. When in November 2020 Covid-19 came to this house, he too was infected by the virus at a time when he had grown very weak and his usual place of residence was his wheelchair. His condition was so bad that the doctors feared he would not last until Christmas. He shared his last days with Bro. Antonio Marchi who was a bit healthier and received Holy Communion daily while Fr. Italo simply stared without speaking or responding to stimuli for days on end. One evening I noticed how he had begun to move his eyes. I greeted him and he replied in a whisper. I asked him if he would like to receive Holy Communion and he nodded his head. I gave him a fragment of the Body of Christ which he received with visible joy. It was his last viaticum. Fr. Italo’s presence among us was discreet, smiling and positive. No matter how often he was asked about his health, he always replied: ‘Very well’”.

He had left for Uganda in 1961 and returned in 2016. During those many years he had been busy in many ways such as building churches and schools. He was one who led from the front, his cap on his head a cigarette in his mouth. His focus was always on the poorest people, the disabled, the lepers or those suffering from AIDS. His vision for Africa was one of a great brotherhood among all faiths. His motto was: “‘ Work with people, not for people’”’. In this he was a great maestro. When, in 1987, the NGOs began drilling wells near the *Health Centres*, he demanded they did so not only for the *Centres* run by the Catholic Church but also for the dispensaries run by Moslems. Fr. Italo helped them “because they were very poor”, he said.

After he was transferred to Anaka, about thirty km from Gulu, one of the most dangerous areas in the north of the country, he had to walk a tightrope, continually in danger of being killed, robbed or kidnapped, but sustained only by his adamant faith and his desire to help the forgotten and poorest of the earth. He immediately understood that churches had no longer to be simple huts but built of bricks and roofed with iron sheets and for years he sought out people to finance the church he wanted to build. In this he succeeded. However, as we have noted, it was an area where rebels ruled and were coming ever more frequently to steal, even from the presbytery, looking for food and medicine. Not finding anything, they started beating him. Everything he had, Fr. Italo shared with everyone, trusting in Providence. He even reached a stage where he removed the doors of his house to show that it was open to all, especially the poorest.

Fr. Teresino Serra, in his funeral homily, underlined especially the following aspects of Fr. Italo's personality.

"A simple man: it was impossible not to like him! A man anchored in God. A no frills spirituality; his relationship with God was always spontaneous. His prayers were simple but heartfelt. He disliked theories and would say: 'The only real theology is the Gospel. All the others are like dead leaves that fall in the autumn'. A joyful man: he won people with his sincere and spontaneous smile. He was happy to live and content to meet God. A man who was rich in those riches and treasures of the heart that Christ speaks of. He loved his missionary vocation ... He was proud to be a Comboni. He loved the mission and the Institute. He would say: 'Anyone who complains about the Institute understands nothing at all. He loved his family and his family loved him. Along with his family, he greatly loved his home town and his own Trentino. He loved personal sacrifice and the arduous mission, in harmony with Comboni. He had one vice which for him was not a vice but a healthy habit: he liked to smoke. Every so often, his relatives would send him a parcel. He would call me and say: 'Come, Providence has arrived'; he would take the cigarettes and leave the rest to the community".

### **Bro. Hans Abt (19.02.1940 – 19.01.2021)**

Bro. Hans may be considered the prototype of the Brother. With his remarkable practical mind, he succeeded in all the tasks entrusted to him throughout his life. He was born on 19 February 1940 in Aalen, about 20 km from Ellwangen. He grew up in Sontheim, near Heilbronn, was admitted as a Brother candidate at Josefstal at the age of 17, having completed his training in horticulture. His mother had helped to

spread the *Holy Redeemer Guild* for many years. That was how Hans came to know the Comboni Missionaries since his childhood.

After the novitiate (1957-1959) and his first profession (29 June 1959), Hans worked for twelve years as a gardener at Josefstal and Milland. During that time, he completed a course in theology and catechesis. On 13 February 1965, he took perpetual vows. For the next two years, he did the same sort of work in Palencia, Spain: at that time, each local community had a garden to produce vegetables.

In 1975, he was assigned to the provincial house in Lima, Peru. Despite the dry climate there, he still provided the community with fresh vegetables; he had a special way of decorating the house and chapel with flowers from the garden. He did the shopping in the city, accompanied departing confreres to the airport and went to fetch arriving confreres and guests.

In 1981, he was recalled to the DSP. After the new Mother House was built at Josefstal, the old one, Comboni-Haus, was made into a centre for meetings and Bro. Hans was appointed the local bursar.

After a short period in the Bamberg community, he returned in 1990 to Comboni-Haus to resume its administration, assist with the *Holy redeemer Guild* and maintain contacts with the benefactors. The KIM movement (*missionary youth groups*) was then very active and a large number of young people would gather at Josefstal at weekends. Bro. Hans kept up good relations with the young people of the group.

At that time, he was given a completely new activity: the care of the sick and elderly confreres. In Bamberg, it happened that he had to look after a confrere who was gravely ill and depressed. He did the job so well that when Bro. Hans was transferred to Josefstal, that person refused to eat with the result that he too was transferred to Josefstal where there were other sick confreres.

Some years later, the top floor of the Ellwangen house was restructured and Bro. Hans was put in charge of the centre. Each day, he would go to town do some shopping, visit the bank and read the newspapers so as to inform the confreres of the centre, thus becoming a “walking newspaper”.

Bro. Hans was not one to put himself forward and never competed with others: he understood their needs and supplied them. Almost until the end of his life he would set the table in the refectory and use the dishwasher after meals.

He did not consider the first signs of forgetfulness to be important; indeed he made light of them. In November 2019, a serious stroke meant he needed that assistance he had given to others for so many

years. At Christmas 2020, he was infected with the coronavirus which caused his death. He died on 19 January 2021, in one of those rooms at the same centre where he had accompanied many confreres until they died. (*Fr. Reinhold Baumann*)

### **Fr. Giuseppe Giannini (06.02.1947 – 02.02.2021)**

Fr. Giuseppe – known to all as Fr. Pino – was born in Grumo Appula, Bari province, on 6 February 1947. At the age of eighteen, he entered the Florence novitiate where he took first vows on 9 September 1967. He did the scholasticate in Rome and was ordained priest on 19 March 1971. He was appointed to the Missionary Animation Centre in Bari for some years and, in 1976, he went to London to study English. He left the following year for Malawi-Zambia where he spent most of his missionary life.

From Lunzu on 4 January 1996, while approaching his Silver Jubilee of ordination, he wrote: “It was on 13 November 1977 that the most important period of my life and priesthood began: that was the day I arrived in Malawi and 18 have passed like a breeze (with the many blessings the Lord granted me in this mission). These missionary years have given meaning to the priesthood I received that cool Friday morning in March, actually the nineteenth, the feast of St. Joseph. Was a young man then, slim and with a full head of hair (things that are not just the opposite). Twenty-five years later, there is still great enthusiasm and energy in my life as a missionary priest but also a greater understanding of certain aspects of this life. Africa has taught me to savour every moment of my life and to accept others with patience and toleration. Of course, there were other lessons too that I learned in Africa. During my eighteen years in Malawi, I was given different tasks. I began with the work of a rural mission and one of my greatest satisfactions and sources of inspiration consisted in visiting the Christian families, house by house, right there in the situation of their daily lives. Then I was put into the formation sector. I spent a short initial period at the national philosophical seminary and then went as formator of our postulants for eight years. It is a task that tends to form the formator. Among other things, I was asked to teach subjects that, if I had been asked about on 19 March 1971, I might well have changed my occupation. But the Lord paints with single strokes, each one at the right time. Among the subjects I had to teach were metaphysics, the philosophy of knowledge and other similar matters. I feel happy with those years in the postulancy. Some of those young men are close to ordination, something that makes me feel like a father. I’m now working

in vocations promotion among the young people in secondary school who are seeking their path in life. Another task of mine was responsibility for the magazines: "New People", in English and "Zikomo" in Chewa, the national language of Malawi. For the second of these, I was the factotum: editor, distributor, administrator and contact person, etc. (people talk of lack of personnel!). Our postulants translate the articles into Chewa. There is no shortage of work and I am still very keen on working in Malawi. This summary shows how I have worked in all three great areas of Comboni activity: evangelization, missionary animation, vocations promotion and formation. To be sure, I feel satisfied and have many reasons to thank the Lord for these 25 years which I will complete just two days after the beatification of Daniel Comboni".

In 2003, Fr. Pino was recalled to Italy and assigned to the General Curia where he was the local superior until 2008, the year he returned to the mission – this time to Kenya – in the role of formator at the Nairobi scolasticate.

In 2014, to his great joy, he was again sent to Malawi-Zambia where he was assigned to the parish of Lisungwi, dedicated to pastoral ministry. In 2015, he took part in the Renewal Course in Rome and then returned to Lisungwi. He was struck down by the coronavirus and died in Nguludi hospital on 2 February 2021.

### **Fr. Salvatore Pacifico (28.11.1936 – 13.02.2021)**

Fr. Salvatore was born on 28 November 1936, at San Bartolomeo in Galdo, in Benevento province. He entered the Florence novitiate and took first vows on 9 September 1955. He went as a scholastic to Verona and took final vows on 9 September 1961. He did theological studies in Rome and was ordained on 7 April 1962.

Immediately afterwards, he was appointed to Gozzano novitiate as teacher and prefect of studies where he remained until September 1968 when he went to England to study English.

The following year, he arrived in Sudan where he spent almost all his missionary life – teaching at Comboni College, Khartoum. In 1973, he went to Lebanon to study Arabic and returned in 1975, having been appointed rector of the seminary.

On 1 January 1977, he left Khartoum for Italy, having been transferred to Venegono as novice master. In July 1983, he left for the mission bound for Kwajok, South Sudan, as curate.

On 23 June 1985, at the invitation of Mons. Nyekindi, Bishop of Wau, he left Kwajok, a guerrilla zone, for Wau, where he was made rector of the Senior Seminary.

Fr. Fernando Colombo writes: "For the early 2000s, Fr. Salvatore ministered in Wau where he dedicated himself to promoting local vocations. He was convinced that the time had come for local vocations. In this line, he was called to Khartoum as spiritual director of St Paul's National Seminary. However, his period of service there was short as the confreres re-elected him (after the period 1996-2001) as provincial superior of Khartoum. The unusual decision to recall him to serve as provincial after he had already been in the office for a period of six years, shows the great esteem the confreres had for him. Fr. Salvatore, even though he was no over seventy, set to work with great energy. It was the period of the *Ratio Missionis* and the province was somewhat behind in this work; he therefore launched the programme called "Resuming the *Ratio Missionis*", guiding it in view of the General Chapter in 2009 and animating the confreres with various initiatives.

He dreamt of returning to South Sudan to spend the last years of his life in some remote place at the service of the most abandoned. Even before the end of his mandate, some days before Christmas 2010, he decided to go to Raja where help was needed and stayed on the spot until he was appointed there.

Fr. Pacifico had a very deep spirituality, similar to that of St. Ignatius' *agere contra*: he was willing to sacrifice himself for Christ and his mission. He was a happy person but soundly attached to his principles at the same time, he was very courteous and understanding towards human weakness".

The last days in the life of Fr. Salvatore are described to us by Fr. Joseph Maku who was with him. Fr. Salvatore had gone to Juba for the annual provincial assembly, from 16 to 22 January. Afterwards, he went to Moroyok to deliver a short course on the history of our Institute to the pre-postulants, ending on 4 February. "At the end of the assembly – Fr. Joseph writes – he told me he wanted to do a few days' retreat after the course for the postulants and asked me to direct it. This I did from 5 to 12 February and all went very well; Fr. Salvatore showed no signs of being unwell, though he did look tired and said as much, adding that, if his hour had come, he was ready. On 13 February, Fr. Paul Idra phoned me to say that Fr. Salvatore was not well. At mid-day he had had a stroke. He died that evening surrounded by a number of fathers and Sisters. His death was peaceful".

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

**THE FATHER:** Iván, of Bro. César Chacón Huamán (PE).

**THE MOTHERS:** Cesarina, of Bro. Antonio Soffientini (I); Glafira, of Fr. Mario Alberto Pacheco Zamora (M).

**THE BROTHERS:** Ricardo, of Bro. Sergio Gómez Cuadros (PE); Pablo, of Fr. José Delgado Domingo (TCH); Corrado, of Fr. Fulvio Cristoforetti (†); Rocco, of Fr. Rodolfo Cipollone (I); Manuel, of Fr. Carlos da Silva Neves Sobrinho (†); Placido, of Fr. Francesco Laudani (CN).

**THE SISTERS:** Mariana de Jesús, of Fr. Fernando Eduardo Flores Avila (CO); Anna, of Fr. Eduard Falk (PE); Maria, of Fr. Fidelis Pezzei (DSP).

**THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS:** Teresa Tortorella, Flor Castro Romero, M. Palma Goretti, Anna Maria Grimoldi.

**THE SECULAR COMBONI MISSIONARY:** Teresa de Palma.