

Familia Comboniana

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART

802

December 2021



HAPPY CHRISTMAS

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

Perpetual professions

Sc. Telmo Efrain Castillo Merino (EC) Quito (EC) 21.11.2021

Holy Redeemer Guild

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

Prayer Intentions

December – that Our Lord Jesus Christ may grant to all missionaries whom he has called to follow him fidelity and constancy in the mission entrusted to them. *Lord hear us.*

January – We pray for the Comboni Sisters who this year are celebrating the Jubilee of 150 years since their foundation, that they may continue being faithful witnesses of the Gospel in all the situations in which they are present, according to the particular Charism they received as a gift. *Lord hear us.*

Publications

Encontros. A Vocação nos Evangelhos, Editorial Além-Mar, Lisboa 2021, pp. 167. The Além-Mar editorial house has published a series of vocational reflections, based on stories from the Gospels, on the missionary vocation. The text was composed by **Fr. Manuel Augusto Lopes Ferreira, mccj**, considering the youth and those interested in the ecclesial community and intending to favour their encounter with the person of Christ. The process of preparation for the next World Youth Day, due to take place in Lisbon, has already begun in the dioceses of Portugal and he wanted to provide a contribution to reflection upon the missionary vocation in the Church today, placing at the centre the Word of God and the encounter with Christ.

Enrique Javier Rosich Vargas, mccj, *Misión en la periferia. Crónicas chadianas*, editorial Mundo Negro, Madrid 2021. The book is a “missionary diary” in which, through accounts of life experience, anecdotes and encounters one reflects on the complete “freshness of

a missionary life lived to the full". Fr. Kike spent more than forty years in Chad: he first went there when he was 28. He is at present in charge of the ongoing formation of lay people, priests and religious in the diocese of Doba.

Fr. Daniel Cerezo Ruiz, mccj, *Pinceladas. Desde China con amor* (new extended edition), CEU Ed., Madrid, Spain, 2021. The book is a collection of monthly articles which, over a period of fifteen years, Fr. Daniel Cerezo sent to friends, benefactors and people interested in the mission in China. The first volume was published in 2014. The volume we now present is being published by the "Asociación Católica de propagandistas (ACdP)" and includes both the first and the second volume in a new enlarged edition. There is also a photographic appendix with a photo for each article to illustrate the content. The common denominator is the impact of "The Great China" on the heart and mind of the missionary. Particular emphasis and additional stress are placed upon the journey of pilgrimage of the Christian communities amidst the adversities and systematic persecutions to which they are subjected. Reference is also made to cultural, sociological and traditional themes and their influence on the life of the itinerant missionary. The aim is to help the reader to approach the China of today in the complex context of the political campaign of "sinicization".

The style is cordial, sometimes ironic, always contains healthy realism and is often full of the unpredictable.

ESPAÑA

Book Fair

As in former years, this year the Province of Spain, through the Mundo Negro Editorial House, has taken part in various Book Fairs.

These fairs are open spaces for readers, editorial houses and bookshops in which reading is promoted by presenting what is new in the field of publishing. There are many cities and countries that organise these fairs today.

The Mundo Negro editorial House was present this year at ten book fairs: Guadalajara, Valladolid, Alicante, Miraflores de la Sierra (Madrid), Palencia, Granada, Madrid, Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), Murcia and Valencia. The final result was the sale of more than 1,600

nooks and 200 items including maps of Africa, special editions of *Mundo Negro*.

Some time before a book fair, the *Mundo Negro* administration sends out a letter to all the magazine subscribers and friends informing them of the date and place of the fair where *Mundo Negro* will be present as well as other details regarding publications.

The fairs, therefore, become a place for missionary animation and evangelisation with friends, benefactors and people interested in Africa and the world of the missions and give them an opportunity to get to know the missionaries more closely. (*Fr. Jaime Calvera Pi*)

ITALIA

“Magic and medicine – disease, grace and healing in Africa”

The presence of the Comboni Missionaries for more than a century in Padova has always been an opportunity to create a relationship with Africa, one that is spiritual, social and cultural. It is in this context that, from 9 November to 12 December, in the Samona Gallery in via Roma, Padova, a photographic exhibition was held entitled “Magic and medicine – disease grace and healing”, the work of the photographer and film director Massimiliano Troiani.

Fifty photos, taken over a period of ten years in different African countries, approach the theme of magic and medicine as it has been lived for centuries by some peoples of West Africa.

The camera lens allows us to approach the human reality of both physical and psychological sickness and it captures the interweaving between the method of the “scientific”, allopathic, modern, imported treatment and that which is traditional and millennial and refers to the use of the products of nature such as herbs, leaves, roots, bark or fruit, accompanied by magic-ritual gestures, invocations of the world of the spirits and the ancestors. This custom is present in voodoo practice but also in hospitals and dispensaries.

The exhibition has been organised in collaboration with the Department of Culture of the Commune of Padova, the Comboni Missionaries, the Banca Popolare Etica and the Nigrizia Foundation.

Padova, fertile ground for the charism of Comboni

“Here the missionary charism of Saint Daniel Comboni has found fertile ground”, said Fr. Alcides Costa, Assistant general and representative of Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General, at the Mass

of thanksgiving for the centenary of the presence of the Fathers of the African Missions, now the Comboni Missionaries, celebrated on 10 October last in the cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption.

“Many young people, men and women – Fr. Alcides continued – set out from here to travel the roads of the mission to announce and witness to the Gospel of joy often among people who were humiliated in their dignity and impoverished in their social position. Jesus is the only civilisation of Africa, Saint Daniel Comboni affirmed. More than 300 men and women missionaries from the diocese of Padova collaborated in this work”.

Mons. Claudio Cipolla, Bishop of Padova, presided at the Mass which was concelebrated by forty priests among whom were about twenty Combonis from Verona, Castel d’Azzano, Cordenons, Rome and Casavatore. Among those present were Fr. Fabio Baldan, Provincial of Italy, Mons. Rino Perin, a Comboni and Bishop Emeritus of M’Baiki (Central Africa), and some official representatives of the civic authorities.

Liturgical service was provided by the scholastics of Casavatore, all Africans of various nationalities. The conclusion of the celebration was animated by members of the GIM, to the rhythm of guitars and drums. The congregation was made up of many religious including Comboni Sisters and Secular Comboni Missionaries, laypeople, former students, relatives and many friends and Comboni collaborators. The event was broadcast live on the platform of the diocese of Padova and other local TV stations.

Mons. Cipolla, while giving thanks for the hundred years of presence and apostolate of the Comboni Missionary men and women in the Church of Padova and in the whole world, emphasised that every baptised person “Can and must ‘be a witness and prophet’: great figures like Comboni, of course, encourage us towards this wonderful awareness. For us, Fr. Ezechiel Ramin is also a strong reminder of this since he was born here in our country, grew up with us and was educated in the family and community of the diocese of Padova”.

MALAWI-ZAMBIA

Provincial Assembly and visit of Fr. Tesfaye and Fr. Pietro

This year, the Provincial Assembly was held from 16 to 20 November at the Benedictine monastery of Msipadzi/Chipata, in the east of Zambia.

Despite the difficulties posed by the Covid pandemic, almost all the 35 members of the Province attended. The Assembly was also honoured by the humble and active presence of our Superior General Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse. Fr. Tesfaye, after a moment of recollection that moved the hearts and minds of all, took a full part in the work of the Assembly, listening and intervening freely and proactively. During the last three days, Assistant General Fr. Pietro Ciuciulla also participated. This helped the Province to tackle with sincerity the sector of economy and finance: we hope to find new ways to make progress with our Total Common Fund, also since the Province has the honour of having adopted it before it became the practice of the Institute.

Those were days of intense reflection, sharing and seeking together the paths to follow in the various fields of our mission. First and foremost, we examined the Code of Conduct which, at the end of the Assembly, we were invited to sign. Each one of us received his copy of the Code from the hands of the Provincial. The themes of Mission, Formation and the Provincial Directory were then discussed.

The work concluded in a positive atmosphere with a Eucharistic celebration presided by Fr. Tesfaye. The presence of our two confreres, members of the General Council, was much appreciated and left us feeling most grateful.

After almost a month with us, bringing us support and enthusiasm for the mission, they were faced with the emergence of the Omicron version of the Covid virus in South Africa and the challenge of travelling restrictions affecting passengers flying to Italy. We wish them both a safe return to Rome, though we would be most happy if they decided to stay here with us for good! (*Fr. Carlos Nunes*)

TCHAD

Meeting of young Comboni Missionaries in Chad

During the second week of November, a meeting was held at Bakara (Chad) for all the young Comboni Missionaries working in Chad and from various countries: Congo, Central African Republic, Mexico, Benin, Togo and elsewhere. The priests ordained less than ten years ago and Brothers who made their profession just a few years ago met to share experiences. The meeting was led by Fr. Enrique Javier Rosich Vargas who presented the figure of Saint Joseph, that wise

and responsible worker who agreed to collaborate in God's salvific mission as the father of Jesus.

We Combonis are well aware of the importance of accompanying the young missionaries in their first apostolic assignment after ordination, for priests and after perpetual profession for brothers, once they have completed basic formation. It is a period during which they take on responsibilities with insufficient experience and a time when they need to have support to prevent them from falling into the many temptations they may encounter.

TOGO

A time for a fresh start in the spiritual life and communion

While the month of November is usually lived ecclesially as a month of prayer and communion with our brothers and sisters of the Church triumphant and suffering, it is even more so for us Comboni Missionaries in Togo-Ghana-Benin.

Each year, in this Province, the month of November is reserved for the annual spiritual retreat which is held in common or personally in alternate years. The provincial retreat lasts one week is held twice, once in English (usually in Ghana) and once in French (usually in Togo).

This year it was held in common; the first session was held in Accra, at the Spirituality Centre of the SMA from 8 to 13 November, and the second was held in Vogan, at the Spirituality Centre of the Cenacle Sisters from 15 to 20 November.

The two weeks of deeply lived retreat were led by Fr. Ameka (OP), who urged us to see the community as the reason for our life and our identity.

When the retreats were over, as a sign of communion with our deceased confreres, the confreres visited the graves of our confreres interred, like seeds, in the land of Togo, especially those in Vogan of: Fr. Pierino Re, Fr. Augusto Zancanaro and, more recently, Fr. Roberto Pazzi, who died a hermit and was buried at his hermitage of "The Holy Cross" at Vogan.

IN PACE CHRISTI

Fr. Antonio Álvarez Gomez (01.01.1938 – 05.10.2021)

I first met Fr. Antonio long ago on 5 January 1954, at the minor seminary of Colonia Montezuma, Mexico City. He was a devout boy, fond of his lessons but he did not find them easy; he was a bit of an introvert. He made his first religious profession on 11 February 1961 and went to Venegono to study theology. There he pronounced his final vows on 9 September 1965 and was ordained a deacon.

On 3 July 1966, together with three companions, he was ordained a priest by Pope Paul VI in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was a festive and meaningful event not only for the newly-ordained and their families but also for the entire Institute: they were the first group of seminarians produced by the Mexican Comboni Missionaries. Fr. Antonio went to Chilchota where he celebrated his first Mass and was given his first assignment to San José del Cabo, in Southern Lower California where he worked as a curate for two years. He then moved to the parish of Santa Rosalia in the north of the diocese where he engaged in pastoral work for three years.

In 1971, he left Lower California and went to Sahuayo to collaborate in missionary animation in the parishes and education centres as well as with groups of Comboni *damas* and other missionary associations. He was then appointed to Kenya where he worked for a while at the mission of Naivasha. When he returned to Mexico, he asked to remain there and was sent to the parish of Las Virgencitas, in the diocese of Netzahualcoyotl. He had not been happy with his African experience and we, his confreres, noticed how extremely critical and negative he was. Nevertheless, he willingly continued to work at the tasks entrusted to him.

He was later sent to the Central American Delegation to help with missionary animation. On his return to Mexico, he asked permission to have an experience outside the Institute and stayed for about a year in the diocese of Tapachula. He was then sent again to the parish of Santa Rosalia and later to Ciudad Constitución where he worked with no problems. During that period, he asked to take part in the Renewal Course which helped him greatly, as he himself said, to overcome his vocational doubts and uncertainties. On his return, he was sent to the community of Montezuma to render pastoral assistance to the faithful of the chapel. He later became a vocations promoter in Sahuayo where he did fine work. He also helped with the spiritual assistance of

the faithful of the chapel of Santa Rita da Cascia, for which the community of the seminary of Sahuayo was responsible. He was also granted his request to live at the chapel. It was then that he began to have health problems: he became unable to walk or get up without help. Unfortunately, he was stricken by the Covid-19 virus which ended his life in a matter of a few days. (*Mons. Jaime Rodríguez Salazar*)

Bro. Andrea Ernesto Cagna (29.10.1939 – 06.11.2021)

Bro. Andrea was born on 29 October 1939 at Buscate (Milan). He did his novitiate in Venegono and made his first profession on 5 June 1976. After spending two years in Pordenone, in 1979 he was assigned to the province of Malawi-Zambia. He took final vows on 8 January 1984. He carried out all his missionary activities in Malawi-Zambia (1979-1988, 1992-1998, 2001-2017) and in Italy (1988-1992; 1998-2001; 2017-2021).

He served the mission of Malawi-Zambia for more than 30 years, sharing the life of the people and being part of the life of the Church without ever feeling he was a foreigner. People understand that those who come in the name of God, with light footsteps and a desire to serve, is not a foreigner but a brother who has come to make common cause with the people and become part of living Church and society. This was confirmed by Fr. Antonio Guarino who, writing from Lusaka, in Zambia, tells us: "This very bad news about the death of Brother Andrea. I knew him very well and we worked a lot together. I spent the best years of my missionary life in Malawi with him. He was an ingenious person, one of those great people and he will be sorely missed".

Bro. Andrea went to the home of the Father on the morning of Saturday 6 November 2021, at the community of Castel D'Azzano, aged 82 years.

He had been in Castel d'Azzano just a few weeks, having come from the Rebbio community due to a sudden worsening of his condition. A few days ago, he was taken to the A & E suffering from a high degree of asthenia. He stayed there just for a short time and was brought back to the community. Unfortunately, his condition worsened and he died of heart failure.

His funeral was held on Monday 8 November at the house of Castel d'Azzano with the Superior, Fr. Renzo Piazza, presiding. Bro. Andrea had asked to be buried in his home town of Buscate where he was

born and grew up, where his family gave him the gift of faith and where his missionary vocation was born.

Many confreres from all over the world have been enquiring about Bro. Andrea and sending their condolences as they recall their ties with him. (*P. Renzo Piazza, mccj*)

Fr. Alessandro Zanoli (14.03.1921 – 19.11.2021)

Fr. Alessandro left us on 19 November at the venerable age of one hundred years. He was “the dean” of the Institute.

He was born at San Giovanni in Persiceto, in the province of Bologna on 14 March 1921. At a tender age, he entered the Comboni apostolic seminary in Riccione. “The Lord alone knows I had no intention of entering. I met two of my friends and they said: ‘We are going to enter the Comboni seminary in’: ‘I’ll come with you’, I replied. Those two left and went home but, by the grace of God, I am still here”. He spent two years in Brescia to finish secondary school and was sent to the novitiate, one year in Venegono and another in Florence.

He spent five years in Troia and nine years in Sunningdale (England) as the novice master. Fr. Alessandro was then sent to Africa where he spent almost forty years: South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and two years in Eritrea.

A long life speaks for itself. A long life well spent is a witness in itself. Fr. Alessandro served the Lord always in humility and simplicity, standing in the breach well beyond the age of ninety.

Right up to the end, he possessed an enviable clarity of mind: one didn’t have to shout to make him understand and he continued to follow the life of the Institute and the community with such vigilance and attention that nothing escaped his notice.

He may well call him “a great man”, for his long life, his long and passionate missionary service and his existential quality of rectitude. At the same time, he was a humble man and rather shy. He never failed to thank people for their simple visits to him during his final days, happy to share a little prayer and to know that his confreres and relatives were close to him, remembered him, prayed for him and sent him their greetings.

He had a deep love for the mission: his leaving for Sudan was his happiest memory in all his hundred years; the years he spent in Africa were the best years of his entire life.

He loved the Institute, offering his youth for the formation of future Comboni missionaries and his mature years to accompany the

student priests during a historically difficult time. He loved the community of Gozzano where, already over ninety, he served in pastoral ministry and he loved Castel d'Azzano where he went out of obedience and settled in well, asking to be put in a double room "To keep each other company".

It was an easy task to accompany him during his final days which he spent in serenity, despite his pain. "Fr. Alessandro, I think you must be in some pain'..." I would say to him. And he would answer: "That's right, but I deserve it!" To anyone who asked Fr. Alessandro how he was doing, he replied: "I can't wait for the moment when it all ends ... so that I can leave this world ... to be with the Lord forever ... (*Fr. Renzo Piazza, mccj*)

Fr. Aristide Guerra (27.12.1927 – 22.11.2021)

Aristide was born at Nonantola, in the province of Modena, on 27 December 1927. After secondary school at the metropolitan seminary of Modena, he applied to enter the Institute. He did the novitiate in Venegono and Gozzano, took first vows on 9 September 1949 and perpetual vows exactly two years later, on 9 September 1951. He was ordained a priest on 7 June 1952 and was immediately assigned to Asmara in Eritrea where he worked for all of 69 years until he died on 22 November 2021.

When I was a pupil in the seminary of Decamerè, from 1963 to 1969, Fr. Aristide was one of our teachers; he taught us a number of subjects such as mathematics, English, history and geography. He taught with great commitment and dedication. During the period from 1966 to 1968, given that the number of seminarians was growing, it was necessary to add another building to those already existing. Once the engineer had made the plans, Fr. Aristide carried out the construction work with extraordinary competence; he was a practical man who had learned much from his father, a bricklayer.

Fr. Aristide was truly a great worker who taught us how to work well and to spare no effort. At Decamerè and Asmara, together with other confreres, he worked as a formator and the Lord gave him the grace of seeing a fine group of priests, the fruit of his work. Even those who took another path in life remember him with great admiration.

Following the example of our Father and Founder Saint Daniel Comboni, Fr. Aristide always showed special love and preference for the poor. In Decamerè as well as in Asmara and at Villaggio Genio, he

helped many people, making common cause with them. The poor still remember him well.

When Comboni College was nationalised, Fr. Aristide could have gone to other missions but he chose to stay in Eritrea, in what was his first beloved mission. He showed great love for the Eritrean people. He took up their cause and paid the price of his choice in person. He lived with the Eritrean people for 39 years before independence and a further 30 years afterwards. Both before and after independence, times were, and still are, difficult, but Fr. Aristide wanted to share the joys and suffering of our people, sometimes risking his very life: he was more Eritrean than the Eritrean themselves.

Over his long life, Fr. Aristide was always compassionate, merciful, meek and ready to ask pardon of anyone he might have offended. He embraced evangelical poverty and lived a simple life. He was a man of God and spent many hours praying. He had a great devotion to Our Lady. He would prepare himself well for Eucharistic celebrations and composed his homilies with great care. We may say he personally lived the beatitudes. Fr. Aristide is truly a model of one who is consecrated, a missionary and a prophet. (*Fr. Tesfaghiorghis Haile mccj*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHERS: Arnaldo, of Fr. Stefano Giudici (I); Margarito G. Garrido Jr., of Fr. Margarito Garrido III (A).

THE MOTHERS: Emilia, of Fr. Leonel Rodrigues Claro (TCH); Aurelia, of Fr. Alejandro Canales Maza (TCH); Benita, of Fr. Jacovo Carmona Miranda (TCH).

THE BROTHERS: Alfio, of Fr. Severino Crescentini (I); Luigi, of Fr. Benito Cruciani (EGSD); Luis Alfonso, of Fr. Enrique Sánchez González (M).

THE SISTERS: Ortensia, of Bro. Silvano Bergamini (I); Romana, of Fr. Piergiorgio Prandina (C); Sr. Adriana, of Fr. Tonino Falaguasta (I) and the aunt of Fr. Giorgio Padovan (I).

MISSIONARI COMBONIANI - VIA LUIGI LILIO 80 – ROMA
