

FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

835

December 2024



HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

The death of Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot

With deep sadness, we announce the death of Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, on 25th November 2024, at the age of 72.

As we gather in prayer for the eternal repose of his soul, and for the gift of consolation from his relatives and numerous friends, we are grateful to God for having given him to us as a confrere, for his esteemed ministry as a member of the Institute and for the precious service he performed to the Universal Church as Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

Born in Seville, Spain, on 17th June 1952, the fifth of nine children of a large and deeply Catholic family, in September 1973 he entered our Institute. In 2007 he was appointed consultor of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In 2012 Pope Benedict XVI appointed him secretary of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. On 25th May 2019, Pope Francis appointed him prefect of the same dicastery.

Cardinal Ayuso was hospitalised at the Policlinico Gemelli. In recent times, his health had forced him to undergo continuous hospitalisations and operations. As we know, he accompanied the Pope on almost all of his recent apostolic journeys. Due to health problems, he was unable to accompany him, last September, on the long trip to Southeast Asia and Oceania, one of the “journeys of brotherhood,” as the cardinal, a great expert on Islam and the Arab world, loved to describe Pope Francis’ visits to countries where the Catholic Church is a minority, to strengthen dialogue between religions.

Telegram from the Holy Father

Reverend Father David Costa Domingues, Vicar General of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus,

Upon learning of the death of dear Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, spiritual son of Saint Daniel Comboni, at the end of a long illness borne with great faith in the Lord, I express my closeness to the Congregation of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, as well as to the relatives of the late Cardinal and to all who knew and esteemed him, remembering with affection and admiration this brother who served the Gospel and the Church with exemplary dedication and delicacy of spirit. I think with gratitude of the ministry to which he devoted himself tirelessly, first as a zealous missionary in Egypt and Sudan, then as president of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, and finally in the service

of the Roman Curia in the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, of which he became Prefect.

In every apostolic work he was always animated by the desire to witness, with meekness and wisdom, God's love for man, working for brotherhood between peoples and religions. I raise my prayer to the merciful Father so that, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he may welcome this faithful servant into the heavenly Jerusalem, and I heartily impart my blessing to all who mourn his earthly departure – *Francis*

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL NOTES – 31th general consulta (9.11.2024)

Appointment of the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Addis Ababa

On 6th November 2024, the Holy Father appointed Father Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, mccj, hitherto Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, as Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), assigning him the titular see of Cleopatriide.

With sentiments of gratitude, we greet Msgr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie and pray for his new ministry.

On the very day of his appointment, Msgr. Tesfaye Tadesse resigned as Superior General of our Institute; Father David Costa Domingues now exercises the vicar function.

The first details of what would happen next were communicated to the circumscription superiors and to all the confreres on the same day with a special circular.

We receive this news with a mixture of feelings and emotions, among which the gratitude to God prevails for the gift that has been given to us so far in the person of Father Tesfaye as our Superior General, as well as a confrere. We recognise that the choice of his person also represents a gift for the service to the particular Church for whose growth we as an Institute collaborate.

His episcopal ordination will take place in Addis Ababa on 2nd February 2025.

Appointment of the first metropolitan archbishop of Chapecó (Brazil)

On 5th November 2024, the Holy Father appointed Msgr. Odelir José Magri, mccj, hitherto bishop of the same see, as the first metropolitan archbishop of Chapecó (Brazil). Our warmest congratulations to Msgr. Odelir Magri.

Appointment of the RCA Delegate

On 5th November 2024, the Superior General, with the consent of his council, appointed Father Billo Junior Bertrand Chrisostome as his delegate for the delegation of the Central African Republic, replacing Msgr. Victor Hugo Castillo Matarrita (now bishop of the diocese of Kaga Bandoro) from 6th November 2024 until 31st December 2025.

Appointment of the new Vicar Apostolic of Hawassa (Ethiopia)

On 15th November 2024, Pope Francis appointed Rev. Gobezayehu Getachew Yilma, currently Vicar Delegate of the Apostolic Vicariate of Meki and Executive Director of the diocesan Caritas, as Apostolic Vicar of Hawassa (Ethiopia).

Monsignor Gobezayehu succeeds Father Juan Antonio González Núñez, who since 2020 has ensured the continuity of this ministry as Apostolic Administrator, pending the appointment of a new Vicar. We are very grateful to him and also to Father Nicola di Iorio (RIP), who helped him in his service in a particular Church with close historical links to our history in Ethiopia, for the task undertaken both with zeal and sacrifice. Let us pray for Monsignor Gobezayehu, that the Lord may grant him abundant gifts of grace for his Ministry.

Note concerning the encyclical *Dilexit Nos*

The General Council encourages the confreres to read and meditate on the new encyclical of Pope Francis, '*Dilexit Nos – On the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ*', and urges all those in charge of ongoing formation in the circumscriptions to propose, plan and animate, at different times and in different ways, initiatives aimed at community, group and/or area sharing on the precious text, to rediscover the profound value of the heart as a symbol of a love that unites the human and the divine.

In the final prayer, we find the essential core of the Pope's message: "I pray to the Lord Jesus that from his holy Heart rivers of living water may flow for all of us to heal the wounds we inflict on ourselves, to strengthen our capacity to love and serve, to push us to learn to walk together towards a just, supportive and fraternal world" (*DN 220*).

It was a pleasant surprise to see Saint Daniel Comboni and the Comboni missionaries mentioned twice in the new text by Pope Francis: "We must always remember, as a holy missionary said, that 'this divine Heart that tolerated being torn open by an enemy's spear in order to pour out from that sacred opening the Sacraments from which the Church was formed, has not otherwise finished loving' (*Writings 3324*)". And again: "The

Founder [of the Comboni Missionaries, Saint Daniel Comboni] found in the mystery of the Heart of Jesus the strength for his missionary commitment" (*Rule of Life*, 3) (*DN*, 149-150). Ultimately – today as in Comboni's time – devotion to the Sacred Heart, in the way proposed by Pope Francis, functions in exactly the same way: as a threshold of a critical confrontation with the spirit of the times that, eroding the fundamentals of human dignity, touches the hard core of the Christian faith and provokes a passionate reaction.

The procedure of the electoral process for the choice of the new Superior General

The General Council has met several times in recent days to define the steps that will lead us to the extra-capitular election of the new Superior General.

The process was guided by the provisions of the *Rule of Life* 157.2. In the absence of a tradition in this regard, it was necessary to give a univocal and informed interpretation of the wording of the *Rule*, in particular with regard to the exact interpretation of the passage "*to all capitulars of the previous chapter or to their substitutes and successors*".

The dialogue with the Dicastery for Religious Life and with some confreres with clear experience allowed us to define the criteria for the exact identification of the substitutes and successors. The list of electors thus drawn up was sent to all the superiors of the circumscriptions so that they could verify that the data in our possession corresponded to the information in their archives. It was thus possible to establish the definitive list of electors, confirmed by the superiors of the circumscriptions on 24.11.2024.

In the next few days, therefore, we will proceed to verify the addresses of each of them and to formulate the instructions for the vote, which will be expressed only on a paper ballot. It is not, in fact, possible to use digital means to transmit the votes to Rome, once expressed. During the next consultation, which will begin on December 2, the General Council will conclude the process of identifying the fifth brother who, in addition to the four members of the Council, will have the right to a passive vote. The electoral process will follow on 9.12.2024.

Next general consulta

The next general consulta will be held from 2nd to 12th December 2024

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Perpetual Professions

Sc. Sérgio Mario Vilanculo	Beira (MO)	10.10.2024
Sc. Jonasse Raul Seventine	Chitima/Tete (MO)	20.10.2024
Sc. Muke Mantenge Stephane	Doba (TCH)	22.11.2024

Ordinations

Fr. Madalitso Castomo Supia	Mutarara/Tete (MO)	26.10.2024
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Holy Redeemer Guild

The Holy Redeemer Guild enables us to keep a daily remembrance for the living and the deceased in the masses celebrated by a Comboni missionary. To facilitate the organisation by the confreres, we publish in this issue of *Familia Comboniana* the entire year of the Opera del Redentore. We will continue, however, to publish in each issue the Holy Redeemer Guild of the current month and the following one. Anyone who has doubts or questions can contact the General Secretariat, writing to the following email address: curiamccj@comboni.org.

January	01 – 15 A	16 – 31 BR	
February	01 – 15 C	16 – 28 EGSD	
March	01 – 07 CO	08 – 15 E	16 – 31 DSP
April	01 – 15 CN	16 – 30 EC	
May	01 – 15 ET	16 – 31 I	
June	01 – 07 ER	08 – 15 LP	16 – 30 P
July	01 – 15 KE	16 – 31 M	
August	01 – 15 MO	16 – 31 MZ	
September	01 – 15 NAP	16 – 30 PCA	
October	01 – 07 RCA	08 – 15 TCH	16 – 31 RSA
November	01 – 15 SS	16 – 30 T	
December	01 – 15 PE	16 – 31 U	

Prayer Intentions

December 2024 – For the Lay Comboni Missionaries who this month are celebrating their Inter-Continental Assembly: that the Holy Spirit may accompany them, illuminate them in making decisions for the good of the mission and keep them faithful to their vocation. *Let us pray.*

January 2025 – Let us pray that, through our missionary service, we may help build up the kingdom that Jesus came to bring to the world: a kingdom of justice, love and peace. *Let us pray.*

Comboni liturgical calendar

DECEMBER

3	Saint Francis Xavier, priest, <i>Patron of the missions</i>	Feast
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Meaningful anniversaries

DECEMBER

1	Blessed Clementina Alfonsina, Anuarite Nengapeta, virgin and martyr	Congo
3	Saint Francis Xavier, priest, <i>Patron of the missions</i>	Feast Mozambique Spain
12	Our Lady of Guadalupe, <i>Patron of the Americas</i>	Mexico

Publications

Tonino Falaguasta Nyabenda, mccj, *Missionari Comboniani Veronesi*, Verona 2024. In this libretto, Father Tonino examines the living and deceased Veronese Comboni missionaries and sets out a brief profile of nine of them since «they distinguished themselves for what they were and for what they achieved in their missionary lives as people who rendered incarnate the charism of our Holy Founder».

Kasereka Amini Wasingya, mccj, *L'Eglise catholique en terres musulmanes dans un contexte d'ouverture au dialogue interreligieux. Expériences personnelles de la mission au Sahel*, Kinshasa, RD Congo, October 2024.

The author, starting from his experience of mission in the Sahel, analyses the challenges of the Catholic Church in an almost exclusively Muslim context, primarily the social and educational mission. He asks what interreligious dialogue really is, what it aims at, why it is important, what obstacles it encounters and how it can be promoted, in the constant concern that these populations may live in a peaceful and fraternal climate. From here, for example, the importance of the interreligious cultural centres created by the Catholic Church and of the classical Arabic language that favours contact between peoples without discrimination.

CURIA

Training course for treasurers

From 28th October to 8th November, the General Treasurer's Office of the Comboni Missionaries in Rome presented a training course in the field of economics, aimed primarily at those responsible for administration and those who will assume or have recently assumed, the service of treasurer in the various Comboni circumscriptions. There were eleven participants, coming from ten circumscriptions, eight of which are in Africa and two in America.

"We know that economics is a strategic sector for the circumscriptions," wrote the General Council, encouraging superiors to identify confreres available to serve in this sector, "and, considering the socioeconomic changes in all countries and the realities of the circumscriptions themselves, it is of capital importance to raise the skills of the confreres to understand the complexity of reality and contribute to the generation and consolidation of those economic innovations that are part of the engine of sustainability."

The main objective of the course was to offer some fundamental criteria for economic management and to provide information, knowledge and practices related to economics, keeping in mind the context in which each one finds himself operating.

"A completely new and, at the same time, profitable experience", is how Brother Deogratius Alule, of the Province of Egypt-Sudan, described his participation in the course: "The course has broadened my horizons, making me move from a narrow vision, of simply keeping the accounting books, to a broader perspective, which involves keeping in order and taking care of our assets, in the awareness that it is a delicate and important service... Now, thanks to the course, I feel more the need to acquire a spirit of financial brotherhood and, therefore, to embrace with full trust and understanding the 'Total Common Fund' as a tool to put funds in common and available to all of us, in a spirit of brotherhood and family."

Special thanks go to Father Angelo Giorgetti, General Treasurer, and to Father Sebastian Chmiel, his assistant, who organised the course, chose the topics and managed the progress, accompanying the participants throughout the two weeks.

We also thank the confreres who collaborated with them for the success of the course – Fathers Pietro Ciuciulla and Paolo Latorre, Brothers Daniele Giusti and Marco Binaghi – and the community of the General House in Rome for their welcome and fraternity.

Brother Óscar Cunha, a new member of the Curia

Brother Óscar Cunha has recently arrived in Rome, a new member of the community of the General Curia. Born in 1957 and growing up with the dream of becoming a missionary, he entered the Institute in 1977.

After his first experiences in Italy, Ireland and Kenya, in 1987 he was assigned to the province of Togo-Ghana-Benin, “a very particular cultural world – he tells us – where there are also animist religions with priests and priestesses, male and female novices with convents and altars consecrated to the gods», but where he found a people – the éwé – friendly and welcoming, deeply religious, with whom he lived «more willing to learn than to teach and, even more, ready to share.”

After five years, spent in Portugal, and a year in South Africa, he was appointed to the mission in Zambia and then in Benin. These experiences of mission abroad, the many people we meet, the different environments, the Church and the liturgy... do not leave us indifferent. “I feel nostalgia for all this,” Brother Óscar admits, “but the mission, of which the Holy Spirit is the protagonist, is always new. And in it, we too are constantly renewed.”

ASIA

Visit by Father David Domingues to the Delegation

From 4th to 28th October, we had the joy of welcoming Father David Domingues, Vicar General, on an official visit to the Asian Delegation, a reality that is not new to him, having spent twenty years of service in the Philippines. Father David was able to visit all the communities and meet all the confreres, friends and collaborators in the different nations that make up the delegation.

On the 7th, we began our journey from Manila to Limay, Bataan, to visit the community of St. Francis Xavier. After many years of discernment, three years ago the delegation began this pastoral commitment in the Philippines, in a mixed context of urban and rural areas, with the presence of some communities of the indigenous population called Aetas, until recently a people of hunter-gatherers that anthropologists consider descendants of the original inhabitants of the archipelago.

In Limay, we are strengthening the Christian community and building the church and rectory of the parish of St. Daniel Comboni, the first parish in Asia dedicated to our Holy Founder. On the 10th, Father David presided at a Eucharistic celebration in the presence of the local clergy, civil authorities and parishioners from the different chapels and communities that make up the new parish.

We then visited the Daniel Comboni Seminary community in Quezon City, Metro Manila, the heart of our basic formation, which hosts the 'Come and See Programme' for Filipino aspirants, the postulancy and the novitiate, where, at the moment, we only have Vietnamese candidates.

On 14th October, we visited the Comboni Mission Center in Sucat, Parañaque City, Metro Manila, which, in addition to being the headquarters of the delegation, is also the "headquarters" for the publication and distribution of *World Mission Magazine*. Although it is difficult to maintain a printed magazine economically today, it is clear that the value of *World Mission Magazine* goes far beyond its economic aspect: the campaigns we promote through its pages benefit more than one local community in the Philippines, and beyond. We must also remember that more than half of the radical members of the delegation met the Comboni Institute through the magazine.

On 17th October, we flew to Vietnam to visit the community of Blessed Andrew of Phu Yen, in Ho Chi Minh City. We are grateful to the Lord and to St. Daniel Comboni for the many vocations in Vietnam. Father David was able to experience the hospitality, friendship, the variety of foods and the exceptional testimony of faith of the Vietnamese Catholics.

The arrival of Christianity in Vietnam can be traced back to the influence of French missionaries in the 16th century. Today, one of the most relevant aspects is the peaceful coexistence of Christianity with Buddhism and other traditional beliefs. In this context, Catholics witness their faith not so much with words as with their life choices, their good example and their actions.

On 20th October, we flew to Taipei, Taiwan, to visit the community of St. Peter Wu Guosheng, where, since 1997, we have been carrying out a missionary pastoral commitment through some small, well-animated Christian communities, composed of a mixed presence of local Taiwanese, aborigines and migrants mainly from Vietnam. The confreres are very busy with daily celebrations, visits to homes and blessings, assistance to the sick and study.

A highlight of the visit was when, after the morning celebration, we joined the faithful for breakfast, as is customary in the parish. This daily meeting is a precious moment of sharing a simple meal as a sign of communion and fraternity, before work.

On 24th October, we flew to Macao, China, to visit the community of Saint Augustin Zhao Rong, where the Comboni presence in the Chinese world began in 1989. The community serves the local Church and hosts the Comboni Work for Mainland China, called Fen Xiang.

The year 2024 marked a very significant moment for our presence in Macao: the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the parish church of Saint Joseph the Worker, which we Comboni Missionaries initiated from the beginning. The most important event was the creation of a group of Catholics that has steadily grown to over 500 parishioners.

The conclusion of this celebration was highlighted with a historical exhibition in the Yao Hon public market, the inauguration of which, on 26th October, was attended by Father David, the confreres, representatives of the associations and parish groups, and almost all the parishioners.

We are very grateful to the Lord for this moment of communion and sharing with the entire Institute, through the presence of the Vicar General. All the communities of the delegation prepared well for the visit, ensuring a time of individual community sharing with Father David. We had the opportunity to gather for various celebrations, meeting those who are involved in our different pastoral services: the bishops, the local clergy and the laity, as well as friends and benefactors. (*Father Victor Manuel Aguilar Sánchez, mccj*)

BRAZIL

Provincial reflection group

The Province of the Comboni Missionaries of Brazil has reactivated the Provincial Reflection Group, which aims to be a forum for reflection and proactive analysis on the Comboni mission in Brazil, with a particular focus on the Amazon and the urban peripheries, and is made up of Comboni missionaries who work in the different missionary areas and services of the Province. It could also be called the Observatory of the Comboni Mission in Brazil.

The reflection group does not replace but includes and dialogues with the Secretariat of the Mission. Starting from the missionary options and the path undertaken, the group reflects on the present and future of the mission, without the intention of creating something extraordinary, but to understand, in the light of the signs of the times and the magisterium of the Church, the new missionary challenges and how to respond to them effectively, according to the Comboni charism.

The Provincial Reflection Group includes Father José Mumbere (JPIC and Amazonia), Father Teddy Keyare (Indigenous Pastoral and Amazonia), Father Serafim Aparecido (Urban Peripheries and Human Rights), Father Roberto Minora (Secretary of the Mission), Father Raimundo Rocha (Provincial), Brother João Paulo (Communication and Missionary Animation) and Father Amaxsandro Feitosa (Basic Formation). Other

Comboni Missionaries and laypeople are also invited to contribute to the reflection. (*Father Raimundo Rocha, mccj*)

CENTRAL AFRICA

Ordination and installation of Mgr. Victor-Hugo Matarrita, new bishop of Kaga-Bandoro

Msgr. Victor-Hugo Castillo Matarrita, a Costa Rican Comboni missionary, hitherto superior of the Comboni delegation in the Central African Republic, was appointed by Pope Francis, last September 5, bishop of Kaga-Bandoro (Central African Republic). Last Sunday, November 17, the episcopal ordination and installation of Msgr. Victor-Hugo took place in the churchyard of the Cathedral of Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus in Kaga-Bandoro. The solemn celebration was presided over by Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga, CSSp, Metropolitan Archbishop of Bangui.

The apostolic letter, dated 5th September 2024, with which Msgr. Castillo Matarrita was appointed bishop of Kaga-Bandoro, was read during the Eucharistic celebration, in the presence of Card. Nzapalainga, some bishops – including the Comboni missionaries Msgr. Juan José Aguirre Muñoz, Bishop of Bangassou, and Msgr. Jesús Ruiz Molina, Bishop of M'Baïki – the college of consultors, numerous Comboni confreres, the diocesan and religious clergy and the people of God.

Msgr. Matarrita, after receiving the imposition of hands by the consecrator, Card. Nzapalainga, and of the two co-consecrating bishops, Msgr. Nestor-Désiré Nongo-Aziagbia, SMA, bishop of Bossangoa, and Msgr. Miroslaw Gucwa, Bishop of Bouar, addressed the faithful with these words: "Brothers and sisters, Christians of Kaga-Bandoro, men and women of good will who live in the prefectures of Nana Grebizi, Bamingui Bangoran and La Kemo, I know that you have suffered greatly from the events that have shaken our country. But I would like to invite you to look far into the future. Let us look at it together with eyes of hope. Christ precedes us. [...] Trust in God, do not be afraid. Our discouragement will never overcome the closeness of the God of life. Let us work together to rebuild fraternity and communion in the Church. My hope is that on this blessed land, we can experience the impartiality of God. [...] I would also like to invite you not to lose the joy of welcoming, of meeting. Joy is this beautiful characteristic that God has given you. And it develops even more when you welcome each other as brothers and sisters». Representing the Comboni General Council was Father Elias Sindjalim Essognimam, General Assistant, who described the event as "a day full of emotions and beauty." "It was beautiful to see the joy of the people of God,"

he emphasised, “who considered themselves orphans and who have now found a shepherd; to see the African dances, the generosity of the people who, in their poverty, gave so many things to the new bishop, for his life and for his mission. It was also beautiful to see the two Comboni bishops lay their hands on the head of their brother. It was truly a beautiful celebration, a real feast.”

However, Father Elias continued: “In the face of the challenges that the diocese is facing, which will be the same ones that Msgr. Victor-Hugo will have to face, many questions occurred to me to which have not found an answer, but - he concluded - the important thing is to be aware, as our faith tells us, that God is with us, in our same boat, and will never abandon us.”

CONGO

Visit of Father Elias Sindjalim to the Province

From 4th to 30th October 2024, the Province received Father Elias Sindjalim, Assistant General in charge of Francophone Africa, on an official visit. Given the distance between some communities and the difficulties of travelling in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Father Elias planned the visit in two stages.

In this first stage, he visited the communities of Butembo, Kisangani, Yanonge and the four communities in the Kinshasa area. During the second, scheduled for February 2025, he will visit the communities of Sainte Anne, Magambe, Mungbere, Buta and Bondo.

Father Elias immersed himself in the realities in which the Comboni missionaries live in the different areas: the insecurity in the east of the country, which has caused the movement of populations to the cities, causing famine and poverty, the rivalries between the Mbole and Lingola, which continue to cause fatalities, and the mass displacement of populations in Kisangani.

One of the highlights of the visit was listening to each of the brothers, who shared with him the joys and sorrows they experience in their missions. In his ‘feedback meetings’ with the communities, Father Elias noted that many brothers are committed to the missions even beyond their strength, and he thanked them for their testimony and their sacrifices in the fields of evangelisation, formation and missionary animation, despite the challenges that the province faces, such as the lack of personnel and economic difficulties.

Father Elias invited the brothers to take care of their physical, spiritual and mental health to maintain missionary momentum and gave some guidelines for improving community life and the proper functioning of the

mission. Each meeting with the communities ended with a Eucharistic celebration and a fraternal meal.

The general assistant also met with Msgr. Laurent Sondirya, vicar general of the diocese of Butembo-Beni, Msgr. Léonard Ndjadi Ndjate, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Kisangani, Msgr. Carlos Ndaka, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Kinshasa, and Msgr. Mitja Leskovar, Apostolic Nuncio in the DR Congo, for a courtesy visit and to discuss some important issues for the Comboni mission in the country. For their part, these ecclesiastical authorities thanked the Comboni missionaries for the work they carry out in different places in the DR Congo.

The confreres of the communities visited thank Father Elias and the major superiors for their closeness to the Province and for their encouragement and assure the General Council and the Institute of their prayers.

DSP

Consignment of a relic of Blessed Father Giuseppe Ambrosoli

November 22, 2024, was a memorable day for the Comboni Missionaries of the Ellwangen community, for the German-speaking province and for the Institute. A group of four brothers from the community went to the Heuberg military camp near Stetten am kalten Markt to deliver a relic of Blessed Giuseppe Ambrosoli, which was intended for the chapel of the military barracks.

Father Markus Körber had organised and prepared all the details of this event in advance with foresight and care; he had gone to Stetten am kalten Markt the day before with the relic and a picture with the motif of the beatification.

Three other confreres – Brother Hans Eigner, Father Deogratias Nguonzi and Father Michael Zeitz – left on Friday, 22nd November, at 4 a.m. to arrive in time for the celebration.

With the help of a very busy local couple, they all entered the barracks together after the document check. To everyone's surprise, a group of about a hundred faithful, most of them in military uniform, were waiting for the relic of the blessed missionary, together with the military chaplain Father Stefan Havlik OT. Holy Mass began promptly at 7:30.

The chaplain warmly greeted all the participants. The chapel was full, especially with young soldiers. Some representatives of the local parish were also present.

The parish priest, the main celebrant, spoke in his homily about the significance of the Blessed and the delivery of the relic. He managed to create a connection between the current situation in the barracks and that of

the time of the Blessed, who was in Heuberg from May to December 1944: as a medical student, Giuseppe Ambrosoli was assigned to the paramedic service; he had also confided to some soldiers his intention to become a priest, a doctor and missionary.

After the homily, Father Deogratias Ngunzi, a Ugandan Comboni member of the DSP, who celebrated his 10th anniversary of priesthood that very day, handed over the bone relic of Blessed Ambrosoli to the military chaplain. Father Stefan received it and placed it in a small metal box, which would then be placed on the altar.

After the Mass, all those present were invited to share coffee and sandwiches: it was a beautiful moment together. Some approached the relic on the altar and the large painting of the Blessed and asked for information about him. Enriched and impressed by this extraordinary experience, the four confreres returned happy and cheerful to the community of Ellwangen, which accompanied the event with a novena to Blessed Giuseppe Ambrosoli. (*Fr. Michael Zeitz mccj*)

EGYPT-SUDAN

Sudan and Lebanon – Wars no longer at the centre of the media

While the media look for news and what is happening in the most powerful countries – see the elections in the United States – war continues to rage in both Sudan and Lebanon. In Sudan, for over a month, fighting seems to have actually intensified in Khartoum and in the Gezira (the area between the Blue Nile and the White Nile), while tension seems to have lessened in El Obeid and Kosti.

Our two Comboni communities still operating, Port Sudan and Kosti, are carrying on their work with a degree of normality. While in Kosti communications have been interrupted for over two months, the situation on the ground is calmer than before, so much so that schools are reopening.

In Lebanon, however, bombings continue in the southern areas and explosions are also reported in the north and east. Our formation house, however, carries on with its academic and pastoral activities, as scheduled.

The media may forget the victims of war, but our prayers must not be distracted from their cries. (*Father Diego Dalle Carbonare, mccj*).

Port Sudan – New Comboni College Nursing Faculty Headquarters

In June 2022, the Comboni College of Science and Technology launched the first part of the new Licentiate in Nursing course in Khartoum. Interrupted in the capital due to the outbreak of war in April 2023, the program resumed in January 2024 in a new location, Port Sudan. The College has

also set up some offices inside Comboni Secondary School from which to manage other online academic programs.

To launch the nursing course, an agreement was required with the Ministry of Health of the Red Sea State, in particular, to organise the clinical practice that students carry out in the city's hospitals. Furthermore, Comboni College has requested the National Council of Health and Medical Professions to recognise its final diploma, so that graduated nurses can register and practise their profession wherever they decide to work. A technical committee of the Council, after examining the curriculum of studies and visiting the new location in Port Sudan, granted recognition of the nursing faculty on 10th November. The demand for nurses is great, especially in this troubled time of war, and Comboni College is responding as best it can! (*Father Jorge Naranjo, mcccj*)

ITALIA

The heart of the Congo in the heart of Bari

'The heart of the Congo in the heart of Bari'. It was with this 'slogan' that Father Corrado De Robertis, superior of the Comboni community of the capital of Puglia, began his speech on Saturday, 9th November, during the inauguration, in the Archaeological Museum of Santa Scolastica, of the exhibition "In the heart of the Congo", promoted by the African Museum of Verona and the Nigrizia Foundation, with the patronage of the metropolitan city of Bari and the Department of Culture of Bari, and created in collaboration with the NGO Abusuan. Present at the inauguration were José Antonio Bordallo Huidobro, former Spanish ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Vito Leccese, the newly elected mayor of the city of Bari, Dr. Roberta Giuliani, director of the Museum, Father Palmiro Mileto, a Comboni, and over a hundred people. Everyone appreciated the 60 sculptures and traditional art objects, the masks and a rich selection of fetishes and fabrics, of different styles, coming from 27 Congolese villages and representing 12 cultural groups.

The works on display lead to the discovery of themes such as the search for the spiritual world, religions, communication with spirits and prayers addressed to them, magic and the power of specific evocations, connecting with nature and the world of the ancestors. Each section is designed to offer a unique experience, which invites reflection on how these themes are intertwined in African culture.

In his speech, Ambassador Bordallo said: "Each piece on display expresses a deep connection with the history and culture of the Congolese people. Through these works, we can travel to a world rich in life and

colours; they allow us to rediscover our common humanity. These pieces speak forcefully and directly to heart and soul.”

Mayor Vito Leccese highlighted the importance of the encounter between different cultures. “Coming into contact with such a distant culture,” he said, “allows us to grow as a city. Daniel Comboni would be happy to see an exhibition like this in the city of Bari, which offers us the opportunity to learn about the history, culture and civilisation of the real Africa.” Father Mileto delved into the meaning of masks in particular, emphasising how they are “a means to transmit to us something that goes beyond us.” It is through the forms that are given to masks in their materiality that “they make the invisible visible.” Thus, the mask, even more than its artistic value, is a ‘being’ that represents, at the same time, a divinity and a force in human society. “Beneath the material appearance and its aesthetic appeal,” continued Father Mileto, “we must not forget that the mask is always a harbinger of a vision of the world... The primary *raison d’être* of these objects is not the pleasure of the eyes. The deep purpose of the mask is to revive the founding myths, to perpetuate the memory of the ancestors and to act positively on supernatural forces. In other words, masks help to ensure the cohesion, social roles and orderly living of the group in compliance with the laws and tradition.”

Visitors to the exhibition are advised to embark on this journey into African art with curiosity – allowing themselves to be amazed by the messages of life that are offered – and to experience it as a meeting space, between cultures and mentalities, with the twelve Congolese cultural groups from which the exhibited artefacts come.

The hope is that each visit will be a privileged moment to experience the value of the encounter, in the awareness that it will not be weapons that will save the world but the ability to meet in an attitude of welcome and recognition of the other as other, in a perspective of mutual enrichment and inter-fertilisation. The exhibition will remain open until 31st December, according to the usual opening hours of the Archaeological Museum.

(Brother Antonio Soffientini, mccj)

Sixtieth anniversary of ordination

Last 9th November, the Acse (Comboni Association for the Service of Emigrants), in Rome, celebrated the 60th anniversary of the priesthood of Father Venanzio Milani, a Comboni missionary and president of the Association. The volunteers who provide the various services of the Acse to migrants were present: the teachers of the Italian and computer courses, the dentists, those who distribute the weekly food parcels, the lawyers of the legal service, the secretarial and reception staff, and others.

A mass was celebrated enlivened by Congolese songs. Representatives of the Comboni Sisters and Comboni missionaries were also present, several of whom were Congolese.

Father Milani thanked everyone, in particular the Lord who called him to the missionary priesthood, Saint Daniel Comboni who welcomed him into his Institute, the brothers and sisters and lay people with whom he collaborated. He emphasised that “a vocation is not realised only with the will, strength and courage of the one who is called. Many other elements come into play, especially many people. The journey is not made alone.” At the end of the celebration, clearly moved, Father Milani expressed a sincere thank you to all those who were close to him and collaborated with him in various experiences.

Father Milani is one of the people who knew and helped the founder of Acse, Father Renato Bresciani. He is also, by the founder’s will, the first signatory of the deed of incorporation of Acse from a civil point of view, in 1995. He has been president of the Association on several occasions and has been so since 2016. The celebration ended with a fraternal agape.

City of Padua Bontà Award 2024

The National Association of the Knights of Italy of the provincial section of Padua has awarded the 2024 Bontà (goodness) Award to the Comboni Missionaries of Padua.

The ceremony took place during the annual conference of the association, in the School of Charity, after the Mass celebrated on Sunday 24 November in the parish of San Francesco, in Padua.

Every year, the Association awards a prize to institutions that live and work in favour of others, with gestures of closeness and support to the most fragile and needy people.

The welcome of poor people and those with difficulty integrating into society is rewarded: the economically poor, those with physical disabilities, the sick and immigrants.

The Comboni community was recognised as an institution that is close and supportive of those who struggle in society and live in precarious or marginalised situations. The missionary action of the Comboni missionaries on the path indicated by Saint Daniel Comboni was also recognised: their presence in Africa and other continents, as charity workers.

It is an award that comes from the more than one-hundred-year presence of the Comboni missionaries in Padua, who, in this territory, have spent so much for the human, Christian and intellectual formation of missionaries and citizens. Many Comboni missionaries come from Paduan families, many of whom went to missions in various parts of the world, especially in Africa.

It is an award that comes from the esteem, affection and solidarity, always shown towards the community and the numerous individual Comboni missionaries of Padua. (*Father Gaetano Montresor, mccj*)

LONDON PROVINCE

Visit of Father Luigi Codianni to the Province

Assistant General Father Luigi Codianni arrived in Dublin on 5th October 2024. After spending three days with the community in the Irish capital, he went to Leeds, Yorkshire, accompanied by Father Ruben Padilla, Provincial Superior. They stayed there for two days and then went to the community in Glasgow, Scotland, where the feast of St. Daniel Comboni was celebrated together with the Comboni Sisters, benefactors, collaborators and friends.

Subsequently, Father Luigi and Father Ruben went to London to the community of Dawson Place. Father Luigi then flew to Italy to attend the funeral of Father Nicolino Di Iorio, who died in Ethiopia and was buried in his hometown, Celenza. Two days later, he returned to London and visited the communities of St. Joseph's Parish (Roehampton) and Sunningdale.

During his stay, Father Luigi met with all the confreres both individually and at the community level. In his open and sincere conversations, he offered us support and encouraged us to persevere in our faith and missionary vocation, even amid the legal challenges faced by the Province, assuring us that we are not alone in our battles.

His words have increased our sense of unity and solidarity with the Institute. His updates on the various situations and recent developments of the Comboni Family have been enlightening and stimulating, his repeated encouragement to continue our work with responsibility and commitment have strengthened our sense of belonging.

After completing his visits to the communities, Father Luigi remained in London for the meeting of the provincial superiors of Europe, held in the provincial house in Sunningdale from 28th October to 2nd November.

The missionary month of October was made particularly significant by his presence, especially on the occasion of the feast of St. Daniel Comboni celebrated in Carmyle, Glasgow, which was attended by the Comboni Sisters, collaborators, benefactors and friends.

During the Mass, Father Luigi addressed those present with words focused on hope and the immense need for peace in situations of conflict such as those in Sudan, South Sudan, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central Africa. His praise of the courage of the

missionaries who remained in these areas full of dangers was touching. His appeal to pray for peace and security was particularly strong. We are deeply grateful to Father Luigi for his visit and his dedication to the Institute. We pray that his travels will always be safe and that God's blessing will always be on his work as a member of the General Council. May Our Lady of Walsingham and Saint Daniel Comboni continue to guide and protect him in his mission (*Father Padilla Rocha Rubén, mcccj*).

PROVINCIA DE CENTROAMÉRICA

Costa Rica – Mons. Girardi receives a doctorate *Honoris Causa*

On 13th November, the University Council of the Universidad Teológica de América Central (UTAC), in Costa Rica, awarded an Honorary Doctorate to Msgr. Vittorino Girardi, Bishop Emeritus of Tilarán-Liberia.

"Who is Msgr. Vittorino Girardi? As he likes to define himself, he is a repentant sinner forgiven by God." With these words, Philogène, a young Haitian student of his, on behalf of the students, thanked him for his teaching at UTAC since its foundation in 2010, and even before, when the religious institutes of Costa Rica established the Instituto Teológico de América Central (ITAC) as a centre of philosophical and theological formation for their candidates for consecrated life.

In a sober but moving ceremony, in the presence of academic authorities, students of philosophy, theology and religious sciences, Comboni missionaries present in Costa Rica and a large group of friends and benefactors, Fra' Mario Madrigal, rector of the University, on behalf of the university council, read the decree with which UTAC, for the first time in its history, awarded the *Honoris Causa* doctorate, for his teaching work and his collaboration in the pastoral accompaniment of many generations of religious throughout Central America and the Caribbean, to Monsignor Vittorino Girardi.

At the time of the investiture, he was given the academic gown and other university symbols, namely the toga, the mozzetta, the cap, the book of sciences – in his case, the Bible –, as well as a commemorative plaque and a diploma. The investiture ceremony concluded with a short speech of thanks by Monsignor Vittorino.

The ceremony was preceded by a Eucharistic celebration, presided over by Msgr. Mario Enrique Quirós Quirós, bishop of Cartago, representative at the Episcopal Conference of the National Commission for Culture and Education and the Catholic University of Costa Rica. (*Father Carlos Humberto Rodríguez Cascante, mcccj*)

Guatemala – Reunion of young Comboni missionaries

As part of the ongoing formation journey, some Comboni missionaries of the Province, those of the New Generations (Nuevas Generaciones – NG), that is, from first vows to 10 years of perpetual vows or holy orders, met from November 12 to 14, at the headquarters of the provincial house, in Ciudad de Guatemala. Angel Soto, young coordinator of the NG of the Latin American Conference of Religious (CLAR), accompanied the meeting with the themes of the CLAR. Father Damián Bruyel, a Comboni, spoke about his missionary experience in Mexico and Central America. Sister Silvia Gómez, of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart, shared their way of living the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus.

Coming from Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica, we shared the joys and challenges of being consecrated missionaries, rediscovered Comboni through his writings, and reread our history by “consulting” the biographies of some Comboni missionaries who have already returned to the Home of the Father.

An afternoon trip to Antigua Guatemala led us to appreciate the history and faith of a believing people. We visited the tomb of San Pedro de Betancur, the patron saint of our province. (*Father Juan Diego Calderón Vargas, mccj*)

SOUTH SUDAN

Meeting of community bursars

From 20th to 22nd November, nine community bursars met in Juba for a formation meeting. Also present was the provincial superior, Father Schmidt Gregor Bog-Dong, the outgoing provincial treasurer, Brother Pomykacz Jacek Andrzej, and his next replacement, Father Zębik Krzysztof Adam. Also present was Father Luigi Codianni, General Assistant, who came from Rome.

The three-day meeting turned out to be a real moment of formation, animated by Father Codianni.

The treasurers presented the budgets of their respective communities and the projects planned for the year 2025. Father Codianni briefly informed those present about the general situation of the Institute with regard to personnel and the challenges related to the commitment – which must involve everyone – in the search for funds, to make the Institute increasingly self-sufficient. He then presented some points regarding the economy and sustainability, referring to the decisions taken by the XIX General Chapter. Finally, he led a careful examination of the chapter on the economy in the Code of Conduct.

The meeting gave rise to a strong call for the treasurers to be truly “responsible” people (in the sense of being “personally answerable” for the execution of the tasks entrusted to them) because the economy today requires professionalism and specific skills.

Community treasurers must not hesitate to help and even correct their confreres when necessary, and to collaborate with their superiors to plan, implement and regularly monitor together both pastoral programs and human promotion projects. (Father Zębik Krzysztof Adam, mcccj)

TOGO-GHANA-BENIN

Golden Jubilee of Comboni presence in Benin

The first Comboni missionaries arrived in Benin on 22nd December 1974. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of this presence, the provincial superior of Togo-Ghana-Benin, Father Hounaké Kouassi Timothée, and the Comboni missionaries present in the country today, organised a solemn liturgical celebration on October 27 in Cotonou, in the parish of Saint François d’Assise in Fidjrossè, presided over by the metropolitan archbishop of Cotonou, Mgr. Roger Houngbédji. Eleven priests, mostly Comboni missionaries, who came from the various missions of the province, concelebrated. In his homily, Mgr. Roger thanked the Comboni missionaries for the service they are offering in the diocese, especially in the parish of Saint François d’Assise in Fidjrossè, and invited them to make themselves even more present among the people entrusted to them, especially among the poorest and most abandoned.

The joyful Eucharist was well attended by the faithful of Fidjrossè and others who came from outside. Father Timothée Hounaké thanked the Lord for the mission entrusted to the Comboni missionaries in Benin and for the confreres who gave their all and those who continue to do so. He expressed gratitude to the Conference of Beninese Bishops and, more particularly, to Bishop Roger, who came to preside at the Eucharist. Finally, he expressed his thanks to the faithful, who came in large numbers to join in the Jubilee celebration.

Father Timothée took the opportunity to trace a little of the history of the Comboni presence in Benin.

After the expulsion of the Comboni Missionaries from Sudan in the 1960s, the Institute began its presence in West Africa, at the request of the then bishop of the diocese of Lomé (Togo), Msgr. Casimir Tonyu Messan Doseh-Anyron, who asked for the presence of the Comboni Missionaries to evangelise a part of the territory, at that time dominated essentially by voodoo. The missionaries arrived on 19th January 1964. Ten years later,

they moved east, entering Benin, and also west, settling in Abor (Ghana), near the southern border of Togo. The first presence in Benin was in the diocese of Lokossa, with the parish of Lobogo, where, on 22nd December 1974, Fathers Giovanni Radaelli and Senén Gándara Mandianes arrived. Later, a second Christian community was accepted in Bopa. The Comboni presence in the two communities did not last more than 15 years. After leaving the diocese of Lokossa, the Combonis began their missionary service in the diocese of Cotonou and, starting from the capital, they took charge of a small area that was still sparsely inhabited, but which, with the passage of time, has seen its population grow rapidly and today already has six parishes, in the same geographical space that had been entrusted to us at that time (29th October 1989).

A few years later, on 13th June 1996, the Combonis were entrusted with a second parish in Toffo, this time in a rural area, which was then returned to the diocese to open two communities in the north of Benin, in an environment with a Muslim majority. The diocese was that of Djougou and the communities entrusted to us were Manigri, on 24th December 2004, and Toko-toko, on All Saints' Day 2008. On 10th October 2005, an international French-speaking novitiate was opened, based in Cotonou. At the beginning of January 2022, a missionary animation centre was opened on the outskirts of the capital, in Pahou, dedicated to human promotion in the agricultural sector.

There are about thirty Comboni missionaries originally from Benin and a good part of them work in other countries where the Comboni Institute is present. The seed sown in the earth is bearing fruit. Called to evangelise, we see that the Combonian charism has fascinated many children of this country.

In celebrating 50 years of presence, I believe that we have more than enough reason to express our sincere thanks to the Lord for what we have been able to do and, above all, for all that we have received from him. (*Father José Francisco de Matos Dias, mcccj*)

IN PACE CHRISTI

Father Gino Melato (24.09.1930 – 07.05.2024)

Gino was born in Saletto di Montagnana, in the province of Padua, on 24th September 1930, into a large and very poor family. After completing elementary school, he entered the diocesan seminary of Padua. In June 1952, he finished his three-year high school studies. He had already decided in his heart that he would become a missionary. He spoke about it to the superiors of the seminary, who encouraged him.

In Padua at that time, becoming a 'missionary' was equivalent to becoming a '*combonian*'. In fact, a short distance from the episcopal seminary, there was the Apostolic House of the Comboni missionaries, where Father Alberto Buffoni, in charge of vocation promotion (the official name at the time was "recruiter"), worked. He had already written Gino's name down in his notebook and visited him several times.

On 4th September 1952, Gino entered the Combonian novitiate in Florence. At the end of the first year, Father Audisio Giovanni, superior and master of novices, noted: "Gino is an excellent element. He has brought to the novitiate the good formation he received in the seminary, and is already well formed in virtue. Very inclined to study - perhaps too much! - to the point of leading us to ask ourselves if he is not more concerned with his intellectual formation than with his spiritual one. Sometimes he is even too demanding towards his companions, lacking that broad understanding which is a sign of a loving charity".

On 9th September 1954, Gino took his first vows and was assigned to the scholasticate of Venegono Superiore for theology courses. He took perpetual vows on 9th September 1956. On the 22nd of the same month he was made a subdeacon and on 5th November was ordained a deacon. On 15th June 1957 he was ordained a priest by the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Saint Paul VI, in Milan Cathedral.

Father Gino was immediately sent to the Region of Mexico, assigned to the mission of San José del Cabo, in Baja California, as assistant parish priest; the superior was Father Bernardo Becchio. He arrived there in January 1958 and remained there until November 1961, when he was transferred to the mission of San Ignacio, also in Baja California. In March 1963, he returned to San José del Cabo, as superior and parish priest, but was immediately called to the residence of La Paz, seat of the apostolic prefect, Msgr. Giovanni Giordani; his task was that of assistant parish priest. In July 1966 he was again in San José del Cabo, which had become a quasi-parish, as superior and parish priest. In 1969 he was assigned to the cathedral of La Paz. In eleven years, Father Gino changed mission several times, for health reasons or to find serenity. Thirsty for knowledge, he participated in numerous courses, seminars, and conferences offered by the various dioceses of Mexico.

In 1973, Father Gino was engaged in ministry at the Cathedral of La Paz, and remained there until 1976. In the meantime, in 1974, the Comboni Institute, while continuing its service in the 'missions' of Baja California, began a missionary presence among the Indians of Chinantla, in the state of Oaxaca. Two years later, on 16th January 1976, they officially took on an "urban mission" commitment with the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the Las Virgencitas colony, in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, in the diocese of Texcoco. Father Gino was one of the three who formed the new community.

In March 1985, Father Gino received his new destination from Rome: Ecuador. In July 1986, he arrived in Ecuador, assigned to the parish of the Sacred Heart, in Quinindé, in the diocese of Esmeraldas, first as curate, then, from 1990, as parish priest. In his community were Father Francisco Gómez Uribe, Father Claudio Zendron and Brother Antonio Muñoz Cabrera.

From July 1993 to June 1994, he took a sabbatical year, in various locations in Ecuador and Colombia. Upon his return, he was assigned as parish priest to San Lorenzo, then assistant priest in the parish of the Virgen del Carmen, in the diocese of Portoviejo, and again parish priest in Quinindé. "Wherever he went – writes Father Claudio Zendron – he wanted to build evangelisation centres to fight against fundamentalist sects, especially in the neighbourhoods of the town of Quinindé, but also in the other parishes where he was involved... I cannot deny that his pastoral approach was very incisive, especially through the Christian Family Movement, which he managed to develop a lot, with excellent results in terms of preparing couples for marriage and forming families... The problems came from his character, his intransigence and his perfectionism."

At the end of October 1998, Father Gino was in Italy on vacation, when he received the letter of assignment from the Province of Italy: he was assigned to the rectory of San Tomio, in Verona. But the new arrival found too many things that were wrong, and «that had to change, if one wanted to be up to the task assigned». The other members of the community were no longer young and did not like too many changes.

He had many health problems and was extremely nervous. A few days later, in fact, he was taken to Milan, to the 'Giuseppe Ambrosoli' Centre, for medical tests and treatment.

Father Gino seemed to recover and decided to return to Ecuador, where he was assigned to the parish of Guayaquil. A month later, he asked to be moved to San Lorenzo, where he managed to stay until February 2003, when he decided to return to Italy, although he remained legally assigned to the province of Ecuador. His health problems had increased.

In March 2004, he was assigned to the community of Venegono Superiore. In January 2005, he moved to Gozzano, first as a missionary animator, then, from February 2008, 'to rest'. In 2009, he returned to Venegono Superiore, but he was never at home: he had a thousand commitments with parish priests and missionary groups in many places.

By the end of September 2014, he was forced to "retire" to the community of Accoglienza Confratelli Anziani in Rebbio. Father Gino's body retired, not his mind or his hands on the computer keyboard. He was still a volcano of ideas. He devoured books, reviewed them and offered copies of the text to his confreres, in the hope of sparking a discussion.

At the beginning of April 2022, Father Gino had to be taken to the 'Fratel Alfredo Fiorini' Centre in Castel d'Azzano for treatment. His health worsened.

He was confined to a wheelchair but was cared for with love and care. At the beginning of May, he stopped eating. He became extremely weak but was very calm. On the night leading up to 7th May, he died peacefully, lovingly assisted by members of the community and the service personnel. The funeral was celebrated on 10th May in the chapel of the Centre, then the body was transported to the cemetery of Castiglione Olona. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

Father Michele Dinoia (24.02.1940 – 16.07.2024)

Michele was born in Barletta on 24th February 1940. His father Giacinto and mother Daloso Rosa were blessed from above with ten children: eight sons (Michele was the fourth) and two daughters. The family was poor but very close-knit and active in the parish of San Giacomo. The first two children entered the seminary while still boys. At 10, Michele also followed the example of his seminarian brothers (who, however, soon after abandoned the idea of the priesthood). At school, he met a Comboni missionary, Father Eugenio Bianchi, who spoke about the missions and was enthusiastic about them. In August 1950, he attended the "trial month" and was accepted into the Apostolic School that the Comboni missionaries ran in Troia; he then moved to Sulmona to finish middle school and attend the two years of gymnasium. In June 1956, he took the entrance exams to the classical high school as a private candidate. For the second and third years of high school, he moved to the new house in Carraia (Lucca). His final report was splendid: "A clear, generous boy, a lover of his vocation, convinced of what he does and ready for sacrifice. He has always taken his seminary training very seriously." On 24th September 1959, he was in Gozzano to begin the Novitiate. On 9th September 1961, he took his first temporary vows.

A few days later, he was in Verona, at the Mother House, to begin his theological studies. On 9th September 1964, he made his perpetual religious profession. On 26th June 1965, he became a priest in the Cathedral of Milan, by the hands of Cardinal Giovanni Colombo.

On 6th July, he was assigned to the Southern Region of Italy, and the regional superior, Father Valentino Saoncella, assigned him to the Apostolic School of Sulmona, as vice-rector and teacher.

In July 1971, the long-awaited letter of assignment to the mission also arrived for Father Michele. The general council assigned him to the province of Zaire (now DR Congo). After a short family vacation, he went to Paris to learn French. After a year, he confessed that he felt a strong need for further preparation before venturing into the service of evangelisation in Africa. He obtained permission to study at the International Institute 'Lumen Vitae' in Brussels (from 2016, it would be moved to Namur), which he himself chose and where he intended to attend the two-year course of catechesis and pastoral care, in the evangelisation and development section.

After graduating, Father Michele left for Zaire. He arrived there in July 1974, assigned to the mission of Mungbere (erected two years earlier), in the Eastern Province, district of Haut Uélé, diocese of Wamba, with the role of assistant parish priest.

Two years later, he was appointed parish priest. In 1978, he was elected regional councillor. He remained in Mungbere until the end of June 1980, when he was assigned as parish priest to the parish of Saint Martin of Tours, in Kinshasa, N'Djili. On 1st July 1981, he was elected provincial councillor (Zaire became a province).

In July 1988, he was assigned to the parish of Nangazizi as local bursar and director of the diocesan catechetical centre. In 1990, he was appointed provincial secretary and secretary of evangelisation and missionary animation. In May 1992, he returned to Italy for the holidays, passing through Nairobi, where he visited the Zairian scholastics living in the scholasticate of the Kenyan capital. He also stopped in Rome, for the same reason. Then he found time to fly to São Paulo to visit the Zairian scholastics there. He went back to Zaire at the end of September and returned to Nangazizi until the end of December 1994. Wherever he went, Father Michele cultivated relationships with people with extreme care.

On 1st January 1995, he was assigned to the provincial headquarters in Isiro and continued as secretary of evangelisation. In 1997, he was appointed parish priest of the parish of Isiro, until March 1998, when he was transferred to Bamokandi, in the diocese of Dungu-Doruma. The following year, he was also superior of the local Comboni community.

On 26th June 2015, a solemn day was organised for the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination.

In mid-December 2017, he was forced to return to Italy for treatment. On 24th June 2018, Father Tesfaye Tadesse, superior general, sent him the letter of assignment to the Province of Italy.

On 1st December 2021, his poor health recommended transferring him to the 'Brother Alfredo Fiorini' Centre in Castel d'Azzano.

Father Michele died on 17th July 2024, 'loved' by everyone at the Centre, surrounded by the affection and prayers of his brothers and the loving care of the health personnel. The funeral was celebrated in the Centre chapel on 19th July. The body was then taken to the cemetery in Verona, as per his instructions. On 20th July, a memorial mass was celebrated in Barletta, in the parish of San Paolo Apostolo. (*Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

Father Nicolino Di Iorio (19.07.1958 – 06.10.2024)

Nicolino was born on 19th July 1958, in Celenza Valfortore, in the province of Foggia (Italy), in the diocese of Lucera-Troia, to Luigi Di Iorio and Antonietta Montagano, in a deeply Catholic and traditional family.

After graduating from the "Enrico Fermi" Scientific High School in Bari in July 1977, in October of the same year he entered the Comboni postulate in Florence for the first two years of theology at the Florentine Theological Institute, where he obtained his diploma. On 10th October 1979, he entered the Comboni novitiate in Venegono Superiore (Varese), where he made his first religious profession on 6th June 1981. He attended the third year of theology in the Comboni scholasticate in Chicago (1981-1982), and then went to Elstree, England, to complete the theology courses at the Missionary Institute of London (MIL). On 21st June 1985, he obtained a Diploma in Missiology at the Mil, and on 3rd December, he made his perpetual religious profession. On 11th January 1986, he was ordained a deacon in the parish of Saint Teresa in Borehamwood, by the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal George Basil Hume. On 17th June 1986, he obtained a Bachelor of Theology and a Master of Arts in Religious Studies, awarded by the University of Louvain (Belgium). On 9th August 1986, he was ordained a priest in the parish of Celenza Valfortore, by the Bishop of Lucera, Msgr. Carmelo Cassati.

Assigned to the province of Italy, in September 1986 he was sent to the minor seminary of Brescia as a formator and teacher. The following year, he was superior of the minor seminary of Troia and vocations promoter; he also taught religion in the local middle school. During his free time from teaching, he attended a course for seminary educators in Rome, at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Salesian University, and on 25th June 1991, he obtained the document of "certification of professional qualification as an educator".

On 1st July 1993, Father Nicola was assigned to the Province of Ethiopia. His first pastoral commitment was in the mission of Tullo, among the Sidamo ethnic group, in the Vicariate of Hawassa, where he remained until the end of November 1994. The following month he was in Fullasa, as vice superior and bursar of the community. He remained here for four years, until September 19, 1998, when he was called to Addis Ababa by the outgoing provincial superior, Father Carlo Giana, to prepare to become rector of the Major Seminary of Hawassa, located in Gulele-Addis Ababa, replacing Father Sisto Agostini.

On 1st January 1999, Father Nicola began his service as rector of the seminary. That same day, Father Corrado Masini began his provincialate, and Father Nicola was one of the four provincial councillors elected. In October, for pastoral needs, he had to leave for Teticcia, where he was appointed parish priest (15th February 2000) and then also superior of the community (January 2001). At the end of February 2003, he was appointed provincial secretary of evangelisation and coordinator of ongoing formation.

On 1st October 2005, the new provincial superior, Father Tesfaye Tadesse, assigned him to the provincial house in Addis Ababa as bursar and provincial attorney and superior of the community of the provincial house.

Even though the administrative work was more than abundant, and he loved his priestly and missionary vocation, Father Nicola dedicated himself body and soul to the Italian Catholic community of Addis Ababa and the “San Giuseppe” Charitable Aid Center.

On 1st July 2012, Father Enrique Sánchez, Superior General, assigned him to the Province of Italy.

On 1st January 2013, he was in Rome to begin a sabbatical year, with the community of student confreres hosted in the General House. In August, he was assigned to the community of Bari, assigned to the missionary animation centre. In December, he was appointed superior of the community and on 1st January 2014, elected provincial councillor.

In October 2016, he was again assigned to the Province of Ethiopia. In the provincial headquarters of Addis Ababa, Father Nicola also served as superior and local treasurer of the community. On 31st December, his term as provincial treasurer ended, and he could at last throw himself back into the pastoral ministry that he so long awaited.

But his mastery in managing economic and administrative matters forced him to say yes to the new Apostolic Administrator of the Vicariate, Father Juan Antonio González Núñez, who asked him to be the diocesan administrator to help him in the arduous tasks of finances, relations with the local clergy and diocesan pastoral care. He was also very involved in the ongoing formation of the religious women present in the diocese, especially through monthly retreats, and was responsible for celebrating a Mass in English every Sunday for the international community of Hawassa.

In September 2024, Father Nicola took a short vacation in Italy. After five weeks, he returned on 5th October. Father Corrado Masini went to meet him at the airport in Addis Ababa. It was late in the evening. Apart from being tired from the journey, Father Nicola seemed to be in good health. The medical tests done at the “Solievo della Sofferenza” Nursing Home in San Giovanni Rotondo were good. “I just need to rest,” he said and went to his room. At six in the morning, he got up but immediately went back to bed. He did not turn up for lunch. Someone went up to call him and found him dead in his bed.

The next morning, a funeral mass was celebrated in the chapel of the provincial headquarters. Then the body was taken to the hospital for an autopsy. On the 10th, the memorial of Saint Daniel Comboni, a requiem mass was celebrated in the cathedral of Hawassa for Father Nicola and Sister Maria Sarina Nici, a Comboni missionary who died in Italy on 1st October, well known and loved in Ethiopia, where she served for 28 years. The Eucharist was led by the Capuchin Bishop Dejene Hidoto, Apostolic Vicar of Sodo, and concelebrated by Msgr. Seyoum Franso, Apostolic Vicar of Osanna, Father Juan Núñez, Father Asfaha Yohannes, Provincial Superior of the Comboni missionaries in Ethiopia, and over fifty priests, both diocesan and missionary.

The cathedral was packed with Sisters from various congregations present in the vicariate and many faithful.

The family members from Italy let it be known that they wished to have the body of their dear Father Nicola returned to Italy and the funeral was celebrated on 16th October, in the mother church of Celenza Valfortore.

Father Nicola was a generous person, with a huge heart. He was a capable and upright administrator of the finances of the Province of Ethiopia as well as of the Vicariate of Hawassa, managing to remedy deficit situations and reviving the finances to serve the mission. Always interested and ready to listen to anyone who needed a word of encouragement or comfort, he never relented. Indeed, he accompanied people for a considerable time, with his physical and spiritual closeness. Elderly or sick brothers who lived in the Provincial House of Addis Ababa or passed through there for a short period were personally accompanied and assisted by him.

The premature passing of Father Nicola is a great loss for the Sidamo population, whom he loved immeasurably; for the Italian community of Addis Ababa, of which he was a charismatic leader; for the Vicariate of Hawassa, whose many commitments weighed heavily on him in this long phase of transition, awaiting the appointment of a bishop for the vacant see; for the Comboni Institute; for his family, especially for his parents in their nineties, for whom he cared immensely. (*Father Marco Innocenti, mcc,j and Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

Father Franco Noventa (27.04.1941 – 12.10.2024)

Franco was born in Padua on 27th April 1941. In 1951 he entered the Apostolic School of the Combonians in Padua for the last year of elementary school, for the three years of middle school and the two years of high school. In October 1957 he moved to Carraia (Lucca) for the three years of classical high school. In October 1960 he began his novitiate in Florence, where he took his first vows on 9th September 1962. For the four years of theology, he went to the scholasticate of Venegono Superiore. On 9th September 1965, he made his perpetual religious profession and on 28th June 1966, he was ordained a priest. He was assigned to the Apostolic School of Thiene as prefect and teacher until the end of June 1968, when he was sent to Brossard, Quebec (Canada), in the then Comboni Region of the United States, for a three-year specialisation in Pastoral Theology, which he crowned by obtaining Master's degree in June 1971.

In July of the same year, he was in the mission of Obo, in the diocese of Bangassou, in the Central African Republic, on the border with Sudan, 1,200 km from Bangui. He remained there until the end of June 1975, when he was called to Italy, assigned as a formator at the Postulancy of Naples. For Father Franco, this was the beginning of a six-year experience that marked him

positively: he would often share the memory of this happy period with the young postulants.

In July 1981, he was assigned to the mission of Moïssala, in Chad, belonging to the Comboni Province of Central Africa-Chad. Strengthened by his experience in Obo, where he learned the local language well, on the first Sunday he even gave the homily in Sango.

But his integration, for several reasons, was immediately difficult. First, it was not possible to have a gradual handover with Father Delgado Domingo José. Second, the Mbay language is much more difficult than Sango, and this made him very nervous. Among the parishes of the diocese, Moïssala is the one with the lowest number of baptised: Catholics do not come to church very willingly.

Despite everything, Father Franco throws himself into work, getting help from catechists, especially as interpreters. He reorganised the catechumenate, resumed the training courses for catechists, visited the villages in his sector and revived the communities. In his teaching, he was always too explicit. Often, he did not hesitate to mention the weaknesses of his followers, such as excessive drinking, a tendency to lie, and frequent recourse to witchcraft... Faced with a problem, he would react perhaps too directly and often encountered equally strong reactions from the people, which hurt him deeply.

When the Comboni missionaries arrived in Moïssala in 1977, they found an old house built by the first Jesuits to arrive in the area. A new and more comfortable house was needed. Father Franco took charge of the problem. The inauguration of the new home took place on the Feast of the Sacred Heart in 1984.

Three months later, Moïssala found itself in the heart of the rebellion that had broken out in the country. An extremely difficult period began: villages burned, endless violence, ferocious reprisals, with many deaths. People fled to the Central African Republic. The Fathers and Sisters who remained in Moïssala transformed the mission into a relief centre for the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

After several years in Issy-les-Moulineaux, Paris, as a formator of scholastics at the International Scholasticate, in October 1992 he was again assigned to the mission of Moïssala as parish priest. This second period proved much more tiring than the first.

One could summarise Father Franco's missionary experience in Chad and Moïssala as follows: he loved a lot and suffered a lot. But he was also a sower of hope on the frontiers of the Sahel, through his work of evangelisation and formation.

His health problems became increasingly serious. In the second half of November 1994, he was hospitalised in Paris, at a centre specialised in infectious and tropical diseases. His recovery was slow. He was in and out of hospital for repeated checks.

In January 1996 he was in Florence as a formator of postulants until July 1999, when he took on the service of missionary animation until December 2001. In January 2002 he was assigned to the district of the Curia, assigned to the community of Paris for missionary animation.

On 30th December, he received a letter from Father Teresino Serra who assigned him to the Central American Delegation starting on 1st January 2006. In May, he was in San José de Costa Rica, a member of the Postulancy community, with the task of leading the parish of “Medalla Milagrosa”, in Barrio Cuba, but in March 2010 he was forced to return to Italy for health reasons. In August, he underwent another stomach operation.

In April 2022, Father Franco returned to Italy, with the intention of placing himself once again in the hands of his doctor friends in Padua, getting better and returning to San José. But his general condition of deterioration and cognitive decline led his superiors to inform the provincial superior of Central America, Father Juan Diego Calderón Vargas, and to decide together to give Father Franco a place in the community of Castel d’Azzano. Father Franco accepted and adapted well to the new community. He said that all he had to do was prepare for the meeting with the Father. He went to meet the Father on 12th October, 2024, surrounded by the care of the medical staff and the prayers of his confreres. *(Father Renzo Piazza, mccj, and Father Franco Moretti, mccj)*

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHER: Archangel Lickson, of Father Archangel Banda (MZ).

THE BROTHERS: Guido, of Father Giuseppe Brunelli (I) and Sr Anna Brunelli (SMC); Tarcisio, of Father Aldo Pozza (NAP) and Father Mario Pozza (†); Patrick Mwanzia, of Father Evans Nzuka (KE); Luigi Oledra, of Father Ruffino Ezama (NAP).

THE SISTERS: Ana, of Father Jorge García Castillo (†); Efigenia, of Father Rafael Rico Hernández (†); Anna, of Father Aldo Pozza (NAP) and Father Mario Pozza (†) and of Tarcisio (a former Comboni student).

THE SECULAR COMBONI MISSIONARY: Lina Calabrese (I).

COMBONI MISSIONARIES – VIA LUIGI LILIO 80 – ROMA
