

FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

837

February 2025

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

Ordinations

Chávez Ixchacchal Mynor Rolando	Mixco (GUA)	18.01.2025
Vázquez Hernández Felipe de Jesús	La Guásima (M)	18.01.2025

Holy Redeemer Guild

February	01 – 15 C	16 – 28 EGSD	
March	01 – 07 CO	08 – 15 E	16 – 31 DSP

Prayer Intentions

February – We pray you, Lord, that in the face of the looming and frightening threat of human trafficking, we may increasingly be, together with you, defenders of life, promoters of dignity and facilitators of freedom. *Lord hear us.*

March – That Saint Joseph, guardian of the Holy Family, may help all the members of our Institutes to share all that they are and have, even if apparently insignificant, and may ensure that, following his example, we may give the best of ourselves and our very lives in the service of the plan of salvation of God the Father for the regeneration of all peoples. *Lord hear us.*

Comboni Liturgical Calendar

FEBRUARY

8	Saint Josephine Bakhita, virgin	Memoria
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Significant anniversaries

FEBRUARY

4	Saint John de Brito, martyr	Portugal
6	The Martyrs of Japan	Asia
23	Kidane Mehret, O. L. of Perpetual Help	Eritrea

MARCH

17	Saint Patrick, bishop	London Province
19	Saint Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Central Africa

Specialisations

Doctorate: Father Abraham Hailu Woldu

On 15th November 2024, Father Abraham Hailu Woldu was awarded a research doctorate in 'Social Transformation', specialising in 'Sustainable Peace and Security', by Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya, presenting and defending the thesis entitled *Dialogue between Christians and Moslems for sustainable peace and development in the Oromia region of Ethiopia from 1991 to 2022*.

Father Abraham thanks his home province, Ethiopia, and the General Council for funding his studies. He is currently a member of the South Sudan Province and works in northern Uganda, with South Sudanese refugees in the settlement of Palorinya.

ESPAÑA

Mundo Negro Fraternity Award 2024

Luc Ndeloua, President of the Abowani Association, and Timothée Emini, responsible for legal and political affairs of the Okani Association, received the 'Mundo Negro Award for Fraternity 2024', during the XXXVII Africa Meeting, which reflected on the theme 'The First – Indigenous Peoples of Africa Today'. The Abowani and Okani associations work with the Baka people in Cameroon.

The first day of the Meeting – 1st February – was held in the Exhibition Hall of the provincial headquarters of the Comboni Missionaries in Madrid. After the presentation by the director of the *Mundo Negro* magazine, Father Enrique Bayo Mata, there was a space for reflection with the conference '*Indigenous Peoples and Communities in Africa. Reality and future prospects*', by Prof. María del Ángel Iglesias Vázquez, principal researcher of the Research Group and relevance of the status and condition of the indigenous people, of the International University of La Rioja (UNIR).

Afterwards, Chema Caballero, collaborator of *Mundo Negro* and author of the book *Edjengui se ha dormido. From victimism to activism by the Baka pygmies*, spoke with the two winners to learn about the reality of the Baka people and the work that the Abowani and Okani associations do. The award was presented by the provincial superior, Father Miguel Ángel Llamazares. The Meeting was broadcast live by the *Mundo Negro* channel on YouTube.

On Sunday, 2nd February, at 11:00, the Meeting concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist in the parish of the Santissima Trinità, in which the parish choir Satri and the choir Karibu participated.

ETHIOPIA

***Timket* Celebration in Hawassa**

The Solemnity of the Baptism of Jesus (*Timket* in Amharic) is one of the most important feasts of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is celebrated every year on January 19 (or 20, in leap years), which corresponds to the eleventh day of the month of *Terr* in the *Ge'ez* calendar. On this solemn day, thousands of Orthodox believers gather in their churches to commemorate this great moment in the life of Jesus.

Many Catholics also participate, not only for the solemn Sunday ceremony, always extremely rich in colour, but also in the great procession held on the vigil, to pray with their Orthodox brothers and sisters and express their communion with them.

Timket is one of the events in which Father Juan Antonio González Núñez, Apostolic Administrator of the Catholic Vicariate of Hawassa, has always participated with deep devotion. This year was no exception, and I am convinced that he was particularly concerned about it because on November 15th Pope Francis appointed Msgr. Gobeza Yehu Getachew Yilma as Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate of Hawassa, and in the coming weeks he will replace Father Núñez, who has already resigned from the post having reached the age limit.

As he had already done last year, he again invited me to accompany him this year. I needed no further invitation. Furthermore, the date was very significant: that day, for the Catholic Church, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began.

When we arrived at the Orthodox cathedral, the bishop and some priests welcomed us warmly, calling us by name, demonstrating the brotherhood and friendship that exists between us and between the two Churches.

At the beginning of Saturday's ceremony, the *tabot* (a replica of the Ark of the Covenant that contained the Ten Commandments) was covered with a coloured cloth and then carried by the priests to a nearby water source. Accompanying the *tabot* were several thousand people, all dressed in white, singing hymns and spiritual songs, punctuated by the roll of drums, the sound of harps and clapping.

When we reached a large pool of water near the cathedral, the master of ceremonies introduced Father Juan and me to the entire assembly and thanked God for having wanted to enrich the rite with an ecumenical presence. The bishop also began his speech by emphasising the significance of the Catholic presence. Then he dismissed everyone, inviting them not to miss the next day when the water would be blessed and sprinkled abundantly – literally in bucketfuls! – on the people.

The purpose of this rite is clear: Christians must not only celebrate the baptism of Jesus but also remember their own baptism, through which they were reborn in the Holy Spirit. This celebration is so unique that UNESCO has recognised it as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity. On our way home, Father Juan said to me: “Despite the growing influence of Islam and the evangelical churches in Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church remains strong as a Christian presence. We must recognise this merit. I pray that the Orthodox of this country will always remain faithful to their faith, witnessing to everyone their great love for God.” (*Father Pedro Pablo Hernández, mccj*).

ITALIA

Brescia community prepares to take part in the Laudato Si’ Platform

On Monday, 20th January 2025, accompanied by Father Fernando Zolli, the provincial head of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the Italian province, we met as a community for an ‘ecological day’ of reflection and sharing.

In the morning, after a brief introduction, a moment of personal reflection was proposed in the light of *Psalms* 104: a hymn to the greatness and beauty of creation. Afterwards, group work was organised for a journey of ecological conversion, around these five areas: climate crisis, the precious good of water, food consumption, our consumption, our shared future.

In the afternoon, after the presentation of the summaries of the morning’s work, Father Fernando offered us some traces of ecological spirituality. Ecological conversion is not a technical question but an ethical one: it requires that we see creation through the eyes of faith.

Faith motivates us: motivations are drawn from the Word. Since the story of creation, the Word tells us that God saw that everything was good. The beauty of creation has repeatedly been discovered. There is, therefore, a need for a contemplative eye.

The community of Brescia is willing to let itself be carried away by a spirit of renewal. Challenges, in fact, are not obstacles but moments of growth that require courage and goodwill.

In this year 2025, in which we celebrate the tenth anniversary of *Laudato Si’* as pilgrims of hope, the community undertakes the commitment to join the Laudato Si’ Initiatives Platform, proposed by Pope Francis, with an ecological project, attentive to the cry of the earth and the poor.

It is committed to formulating the community project of integral ecology, enhancing what is already being done; contacting other movements and associations in the area for a structured path, done in synergy; taking

care of the Laudato Si' Garden, in the green area of our house; becoming animators of ecological spirituality, inviting friends and benefactors to moments of meeting and prayer, information and training.

A working team has been created – Father Mario Fugazza, Father Eugenio Nordjoe, and Father Tiziano Laurenti – who will prepare a draft of the ecological project by April 20, 2025, Easter Sunday. (*Father Girolamo Miente, mcccj, and Father Fernando Zolli, mcccj*)

MEXICO

Brother Arsenio Ferrari dies at the age of 103

Our dear Brother Arsenio Ferrari – a great Comboni missionary and pioneer of Baja California, Mexico – has left us for the House of the Father. He had recently turned 103 and was in the Comboni community of Oasis San Daniel Comboni in Zapopan, Guadalajara, where he received, until the end, all the attention that a veteran missionary like him deserved. He was the only survivor of the first Comboni missionaries who arrived in Mexico, more precisely in Baja California, in 1948. With his death, a stage in the history of our Institute closes and, above all, a stage in the history of the Comboni missionaries in Mexico.

Of Italian origin, Brother Arsenio dedicated his life to the evangelisation of these lands, especially of children and young people, using sports as the main means of attraction. As Father Enrique Sánchez said in the thanksgiving mass for his hundredth birthday on 18th December 2021, “Brother Arsenio was – and continues to be – a blessing for the mission and for the Institute. His presence among us alone is a reason for thanksgiving and a testimony for the many years he spent dedicating himself to others.” And he is a blessing even now that he has left us. He is no longer among us, but from heaven he will continue to intercede for the people he loved so much.

Priestly ordination of Felipe de Jesús

On 18th January 2025, Felipe de Jesús Vázquez Hernández celebrated his priestly ordination, surrounded by family and friends, in La Guásima, a town in Papantla, in the state of Veracruz, where he is from. The celebration was presided over by Msgr. José Trinidad Zapata Ortiz, Bishop of the diocese of Papantla, and with the participation of the Comboni family, was a moment that we will all keep in our memories and hearts, without forgetting the importance that day had for Felipe.

Knowing that the new priest's destination is South Africa, the bishop told him: “You must have a broad vision. As a Comboni missionary in any part of the

world, you must be a servant of Jesus' flock and you must take care of it." He then emphasised: "You must not forget to take care of yourself as well." The people wanted to make this ordination their own and showed it by introducing all the cultural and spiritual elements of the region, proud of their *Totonaca* roots (the indigenous people), with their language, their dances, their customs and their rituals. The people of 'La Guásima' proudly hand over one of their sons to the mission and are grateful to God.

It was a celebration for everyone: for the parents, for his brothers, for the diocese and for the Combonians. Felipe was very grateful, knowing that behind him he had so many people supporting him in his missionary vocation. (*Brother Raúl Cervantes*)

Father Manuel Casillas Hernández celebrates fifty years of priesthood

On 25th January, Fr. Manuel Casillas Hernández celebrated a thanksgiving mass for his 50 years of priesthood in his parish of Cristo de la Salud in León, Guanajuato, surrounded by family, friends, diocesan priests and a group of confreres who wanted to be close to him on such a special day.

Fr. Manuel was born in León on 29th May 1945. He made his first vows on 9th September 1968 and was ordained a priest on 14th July 1974. He spent the first seven years of his missionary ministry in Mexico, accompanying the young seminarians. In 1981 he was assigned to South Africa, where he spent twenty years, in different periods. From 1987 to 1991 he was provincial superior in Mexico; from 1991 to 1998 he was general assistant of the Institute in Rome.

He currently works in Ireland, where he devotes himself to missionary animation. Due to problems with the documents relating to his residence permit, he had to postpone the celebration of his priestly anniversary until now. However, the ceremony was marked by joy and gratitude to God and to the many people who supported him and who collaborated so that the celebration was truly the sharing of a feeling of gratitude for the many gifts received in these 50 years. Now Fr. Manuel, with his documents in order, can enjoy a well-deserved rest, while he prepares to return to Ireland, where he will continue to proclaim the Gospel and make missionary work known to the Irish people.

PCA

Priestly ordination in Guatemala

On Saturday, 18th January 2025, the Comboni Missionaries of the Province of Central America joyfully celebrated the priestly ordination of our Guatemalan confrere Mynor Rolando Chávez Ixchacchal. The

liturgy was presided over by Comboni Missionary Msgr. Vittorino Girardi, Bishop Emeritus of Tilarán-Liberia (Costa Rica), in the beautiful church of the parish of Jesús Obrero Buen Pastor, in Colonia El Milagro in Zone 6 of Mixco, near Guatemala City. All the Comboni communities of the province were present, as well as the parish priest and the faithful of the parish, several friends of Father Mynor who came from Costa Rica, where he carried out his diaconal ministry, the Comboni Lay Missionaries and many of his relatives. In his homily, Msgr. Girardi reminded Mynor of his duty to configure himself to Christ at all times and to make common cause with those peoples to whom he will be sent. He insisted on the need to entrust oneself fully to the Lord who chose and sent him and to serenely accept the weaknesses that, according to his promise, will be filled by the merciful action of God, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. During the week preceding the ordination, we celebrated the Eucharist in almost all the communities of the parish, where we had the opportunity to hold moments of missionary animation and vocational promotion.

On Sunday, 19th January, in the same church where he was ordained, Father Mynor celebrated his first mass. This celebration was also attended by the parishioners, his family and the Combonians of the province. Father Mynor chose to entrust the homily to Father Byron Valverde, who, starting from the Gospel of the wedding at Cana, exhorted him to live his priesthood with the same availability as the Virgin Mary, doing what the Master asks of him, at every moment and in all the circumstances of his missionary consecration.

Father Mynor has been assigned to the Comboni Province of Ethiopia, where he will go as soon as he has prepared the necessary documents. May St. Daniel Comboni and the Comboni saints of all times intercede for him before the Lord of the Harvest that He may grant him wisdom and fidelity. May his ordination renew our missionary commitment as a Comboni Province and may the testimony of his self-giving inspire numerous vocations for the entire Guatemalan Church, as he himself has asked of his parish community. (*Father Carlos Humberto Rodríguez, mccj*)

PORTUGAL

Sunday of the Nations

'The first Sunday of the Nations' was held on 19th January at the Comboni headquarters in Jardim de Cima/Santarém. The city area of the diocese of

Santarém has decided to organise a Sunday of the Nations every third Sunday of the month in the Jubilee Year of 2025. The program of each of these Sundays will consist of the celebration of a Eucharist with the immigrants who live in the region, followed by a fraternal meeting with the sharing of gastronomic specialties from different countries.

The evaluation of the first celebration of this Sunday of the Nations is very positive and promising. There was interest, availability and a spirit of fraternal service in the various families who participated in the event. This is a good missionary animation initiative that will help the Christians of the diocese to live more deeply the spirit of the Jubilee Year, which invites us to be 'pilgrims of hope', guided by the light that is Jesus.

For the organising committee – says Father Carlos Alberto Nunes – “this activity also aims to facilitate the integration of the different peoples and cultures that live in the territory of Santarém. We begin by appreciating and sharing the many gifts that we all possess. This is undoubtedly a new way of doing mission in this diocese, but also in the new context that is being experienced throughout Europe.”

“Only in this way – comments Father Carlos Nunes – will we be followers of Jesus, witnessing and proclaiming that we are part of a single family of God and a single human society, based on good coexistence, peace, justice and love. To this end, we already have an intercultural choir, which is consolidating, and many people willing to serve with joy and collaborate in the renewal of communities and the Church.”

The next Sunday of Nations will be on 16th February. “Come and see! Join us,” concludes Father Carlos Nunes, for whom this is the mission that we all must fulfil today.

CHAD

Assembly of the Delegation

As per tradition, in the first week of January, the Comboni missionaries of Chad gathered in assembly in N'Djamena. In the same week, Brother Kakule Wasingya Bienfait, of the community of N'Djamena, completed his studies at CEFOD, discussing a thesis on microfinance. *Alf mabrouk* (congratulations), *Bienfait!*

The assembly is an important and significant event in the life of the delegation. The theme '*Missionary Identity*' was the backdrop to the work.

The brothers of all the communities participated, contributing to the sharing of ideas, experiences and difficulties. The beautiful thing – and what gives hope – is the presence of new confreres: one, 'old' from the mission in Chad; and others who are young.

Father Renzo Piazza, in the ongoing formation session, developed the theme of missionary identity. It was an interesting and enriching presentation that allowed us to reflect, personally and in working groups, on this theme that is so significant for the life of each of us. In the following days, various activities helped us to listen to each other and share the various situations of our missions. An interesting picture emerged, with the current problem of an overload of work and too many commitments in proportion to personnel. The Comboni mission in Chad fully responds to what the Institute and the local Church expect from us in the various ministries (missionary animation, basic and ongoing formation, evangelisation, formation of communities and leaders, interreligious dialogue, JPIC ...). It seems to me that, from listening to each other about the various realities in which we are present, the commitment, the passion, the closeness of each of us to the people, to the youth, have clearly emerged; in a word, our *making ourselves neighbours and giving hope*, even if the socio-political framework of the country is difficult. Making an appointment for the next assembly, we returned to our communities enriched with many beautiful and inspiring ideas, strengthened spiritually (this year we will all participate in the annual retreat), ready and eager to serve the Lord of Life to the best of the human and spiritual capacity of each one. (*Brother Enrico Gonzales, mccj*)

SOUTH SUDAN

Centenary of the Faith in Ngboko

In 1924, the Combonian missionary Giacomo Gübert (born in Fiera di Primiero-TN in 1886, ordained a priest in 1904 and died in Cairo on 14th January 1959), founded a mission in Ngboko, in the county of Ri Yubu, on the border with the Central African Republic, not far from the Democratic Republic of Congo, near the demarcation line between the French and the British during the colonial era. The way in which the parish came into being was curious.

In 1923, the French present in Central Africa hired some Azande soldiers who lived in territory under British rule, to go to their area and help them quell some local rebellions. Upon their return, these soldiers began to show clear symptoms of sleeping sickness contracted during their expedition, and the British colonialists thought it best to keep them in prolonged forced isolation in a location near the border.

To ensure that the sick received adequate care, the Combonians sent Father Gübert. He stayed for a while as a 'nurse', but then he also began to work as an evangeliser. A catechumenate was born and on December 8, 1924 the first baptisms were administered. The parish was called

'Ave Maria' and fell within what was then the Combonian Circumscription of Bahr el Ghazal. The mission of 'Ave Maria' is now managed by the Community of the Missionaries of St. Paul (MCSPA).

On 5th December 2023, the celebrations for the Centenary of the Faith began in the parish of Ngbokoko. On 8th December, the parish church 'Ave Maria', recently completely renovated, was reconsecrated. Msgr. Edward Hiiboro Kussala, bishop of the diocese of Tombura-Yambio, was invited to preside over the ceremony. Also present were the parish priest of the parish of Obbo (Central African Republic), the parish priest of the mission of Lobur, Father Joseph, superior of the MCSPA, numerous missionaries and diocesan priests, religious men and women and many Christians who came from every part of the diocese.

The various celebrations of the Centenary concluded on 8th December 2024, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, with the participation of the provincial superior of the Combonians, Father Gregor Schmidt, in the presence of over ten thousand people from the various villages of the region.

The lightheartedness and exuberant joy of such celebrations are unfortunately an exception in South Sudan today. Even in the county of Ri Yubu, armed clashes are still ongoing. But, overcoming fear, it was decided not to postpone the closing celebration, but to offer the local population a new and clear sign that the Gospel brings reconciliation and peace. Many speeches were made, and in all of them the recognition that Jesus is truly the messenger of peace for the South Sudanese resounded like a refrain.

Over time, the Comboni missionaries have given up all the missions they founded in the areas now included in the diocese of Tombura-Yambio (in the State of Western Equatoria), but they are still remembered with gratitude for having brought the Christian faith there in that distant 1923. (*Father Gregor Bog-Dong Schmidt, mccj*)

TOGO-GHANA-BENIN

A Year that ended well

At the end of 2024, the Comboni Missionaries of the Province, as well as the local Churches of the Archdioceses of Cotonou and Lomé and the Diocese of Keta-Akatsi, joyfully witnessed three great events.

1. *Priestly Ordination in Lomé* – On 21st December 2024, in the parish church of the Risen Christ in Hedranawoe (Togo), in front of a huge crowd of relatives, friends, priests, men and women religious, faithful from different parishes, 26 deacons were ordained priests by the imposition of hands by Bishop Isaac-Jogues Agbemenya Gaglo, Apostolic Administrator of the

Archdiocese of Lomé. Of these 26, 22 were from the Archdiocese and 4 were Comboni Missionaries.

In his homily, Archbishop Gaglo drew the attention of the ordinands to three essential dimensions of the life of the priest: what he is, what he does, and what he lives. The being of the priest is a mystery because he carries within himself the one he represents, Christ. The administrator quoted the phrase of the holy Curé of Ars: “The priest is something great because he can give God to men and men to God.” The priest – he continued – “lives moments of solitude, joy and sadness. With humility and a great spirit of openness, he can learn from the faithful who, in some areas, could be much more fervent and committed than he is. He does not command like a master, but works and guides the people of God entrusted to him.”

2. *Perpetual vows in Fidjrossè* – on Sunday, 22nd December 2024, in the parish church of Saint Francis of Assisi in Fidjrossè, in the archdiocese of Cotonou (Benin), the perpetual profession of the scholastic Constantin Dangninou took place. The ceremony was presided over by the provincial superior, Father Timothée Hounaké Kouassi, who, after expressing appreciation for the efforts made by Constantin to respond to the call received from God, highlighted the gratuitousness of God’s love that comes to man, giving him confidence. He then invited the faithful and relatives to pray for Constantin and to support him so that he may make his life a total gift to the Lord forever.

3. *Diaconal and Priestly Ordinations in Akatsi* – On Saturday, 28th December 2024, all roads led to the Cathedral of Christ the King, in Akatsi (Ghana), in the Diocese of Keta-Akatsi, for the diaconal ordination of two acolytes, one diocesan and one Comboni, and the priestly ordination of the Comboni deacon Augustine Awudi. Bringing together faithful, priests, men and women religious from Ghana, Togo and Benin, the celebration began with the solemn opening of the cathedral door, thus marking the beginning of the Jubilee Year in the local Church, responding to the invitation of Pope Francis, who placed the Jubilee Year under the theme “Pilgrims of Hope”. The bishop of the diocese, Msgr. Gabriel Edoe Kumordji, SVD, during his homily, insisted on the importance of celebrating the Jubilee Year, inviting everyone of the faithful to make the effort to go on pilgrimage to the ‘places chosen’ by the diocese, adding: “Those who can go to Rome, let them do so.” Then addressing the ordinands, he invited them to exercise assiduously their role in the Church and to imitate Christ, with diligence, in all aspects of life. The celebration saw the much-appreciated participation of the bishop emeritus of the diocese, Msgr. Anthony Kwame Adanuty.

IN PACE CHRISTI

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot (17.06.1952 – 25.11.2024)

Miguel Ángel was born in Seville (Spain) on 17th June 1952, into a large and deeply Catholic family. Andalusian culture, with strong Islamic influences, entered his blood and strongly affected his sensitivity, mixing inextricably with the clear Christian faith of his father, Juan de Dios Ayuso Rubio, and mother Natividad Guixot Visconti who were blessed with nine children, of whom Miguel Ángel was the fifth.

After primary school, Miguel Ángel entered the Colegio Sant'Antonio Maria Claret to attend middle and high school. He also spent a year in the minor seminary of Seville. But his parents, although not against their son becoming a priest, asked him to obtain at least a high school diploma, if not a university degree, before making definitive commitments. Thus, the young man enrolled in the Faculty of Law at the University of Seville, but continued to attend Christian commitment groups and participate in spiritual retreats for young people.

Shortly after, finding himself with a copy of *Mundo Negro* in his hands, he wanted to learn more about the Institute by meeting some of its members and was fascinated by it. He then decided to become one of them.

On 24th September 1973, he entered the Comboni novitiate in Moncada, where on 15th August 1975, he made his first religious profession. In August 1976, he was at the scholasticate in Rome, to continue his theology courses at the Pontifical Urbaniana University. On 27th July 1978, he obtained a baccalaureate in Theology, with a grade of magna cum laude. In the meantime, Miguel Ángel had asked and obtained from his major superiors the assurance that he would be able to work in the Islamic world in the future and intended to prepare himself adequately. In October 1979, he enrolled at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome. In March 1980, he received a letter of assignment to Egypt.

On 2nd May 1980, he took his perpetual vows and on 20th September he was ordained a priest in Seville by Cardinal José María Bueno y Monreal, Archbishop of Seville. On 18th June 1981, he obtained a Diploma in Arabic Studies. He asked to attend a third year and, on 14th June 1982, he obtained a Licentiate in Arabic Studies and Islamic Studies.

In October 1982 he went to Cairo, assigned to the 'Cordi Jesu' Community, in the Abbassiya district, first as local bursar, then also as parish priest of the nearby Latin rite parish, not far from the Coptic Orthodox cathedral and the large and very famous University of al-Azhar, one of the main world centres of religious teaching of Sunni Islam. The Comboni community also ran a centre for the many young Sudanese Catholics

present in the Egyptian capital as students, migrants or political refugees. Father Miguel Ángel dedicated himself to assisting the tens of thousands of those young Sudanese. In the meantime, he asked to be sent to Sudan, possibly to the south. He was granted his request, but assigned to the north, to the Province of Khartoum, from 1st July 1986, and appointed to the mission of El Obeid, as director of the diocesan pastoral centre. In July 1991, he was assigned to the community of Khartoum North, the provincial headquarters, engaged in teaching as a professor of Islamology at the Teacher Training Center (until the end of 1993), but also in pastoral work.

In July 1994, in need of medical care, he returned to Spain, assigned to the community of Granada, where, when he could, he gave lessons on Islam and interreligious dialogue, but for the most part he followed courses to obtain a doctorate in Dogmatic Theology at the Faculty of Theology which, in 1996, appointed him scientific collaborator of the 'Centro de Investigación sobre Relaciones Interreligiosas' (CIRI).

In June 1997, he returned to Egypt, assigned to the community of Cairo, in the Zamalek area, in whose house the management of the "Dar Comboni" was hosted. In September 1999, Father Miguel Ángel returned to his homeland for his final exams in Dogmatic Theology and in September 2000 he returned to Cairo as a professor of Islamology until May 2001, also becoming superior of the community.

At the end of September 2002, he was assigned to the Curia of Rome as he was requested by the PISAI as a professor. He was immediately appointed director of studies. From June 2006 he was also the Dean. He remained there until 2012.

On 25th June 2007, Benedict XVI appointed Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran as president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The Cardinal knew Father Miguel Ángel very well and immediately co-opted him as a consultant to the Council. On 30th June 2012, Pope Benedict XVI appointed him secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

At the beginning of 2016, the health of Cardinal Tauran worsened and, on 29th January, Pope Francis, wanting to ensure greater authority in the service of Father Miguel Ángel, appointed him titular bishop of the diocese of Luperciana, and on 19th March he ordained him a bishop in the Saint Peter's Basilica. After that, there came a series of commitments, of trips to every corner of the world to witness to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Shintoists, Confucians and followers of traditional religions, that it is precisely through personal friendship that a dialogue can be established. On 23rd May 2016, in the Vatican, there was a historic meeting between Pope Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyib, the great Imam of al-Azhar, the highest authority of Sunni

Islam. From this, the idea of a common document on human brotherhood emerged. On 28th April 2017, Msgr. Ayuso accompanied the Pontiff on a visit to al-Azhar University. On 25th May 2019, he was appointed president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, succeeding Card. Tauran, who had died on 5th July 2018.

To achieve the objectives set out in the Abu Dhabi Document, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the Higher Committee for Human Fraternity made up of Christians, Muslims and Jews was created. On that committee, Msgr. Ayuso represented the Holy See. On 11th September, on the occasion of the first meeting, Msgr. Ayuso was chosen as president of the Committee. On the occasion of the consistory of 5th October 2019, Pope Francis made him a cardinal.

From 13th to 16th September 2022, in his new role as Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (from June 5), Card. Ayuso went with Pope Francis to Kazakhstan, in the heart of Central Asia, to participate in the Congress of the Heads of World Religions. From 3rd to 6th November he was in Bahrain, for the 'Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence'. He returned to Bahrain in 2023, alone, to confer episcopal ordination on Monsignor Aldo Berardi, Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia, and for the opening of the Holy Door in Abu Dhabi for the Jubilee of the Martyrs of Arabia. He was also present in Mongolia, in September 2023, for an ecumenical and interreligious meeting. It was then that illness began to dominate.

The year 2024 was an ordeal. He had to be hospitalised several times at the Gemelli hospital in Rome due to cardiovascular issues. Immediately after yet another hospitalisation, on 10th October, the feast of Saint Daniel Comboni, he summoned up his courage and agreed to preside over the Eucharist in the chapel of the General Curia at the Eur. It was to be his final visit to the community of which he had officially been a member for many years. In his homily, he addressed the confreres present with a strong invitation to "assume, not the mentality of a manager, but that of a servant, because we are called to offer our lives." In mid-November, he was again taken to the Gemelli Hospital where he passed away on the 25th.

On the 26th, Pope Francis sent a telegram of condolences to the Vicar General of the Institute, Father David Costa Domingues, in which he remembers "with affection and admiration this brother who served the Gospel and the Church with exemplary dedication and delicacy of spirit."

On 27th November, the funeral was held at the Altar of the Chair in the Vatican Basilica of St. Peter during Mass celebrated by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Dean of the College of Cardinals, and by many concelebrants. At the end of the Eucharist, Pope Francis presided over the rite

of final commendation and farewell.

Numerous messages of condolence were received from all over the world: from the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyb, from the Patriarch of Alexandria of the Catholic Copts, Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak, from the President of the Italian Buddhist Union, Filippo Scianna, from the King of Spain, Felipe VI and from Imam Nader Akkad, Advisor for Religious Affairs of the Great Mosque of Rome.

The Church of Seville remembered its illustrious fellow citizen with a funeral mass celebrated on Friday, 29th November in the city's cathedral, presided over by the Archbishop, Msgr. José Ángel Saiz Meneses.

On 3rd December, the body of Cardinal Ayuso arrived in Seville. And now the first Comboni Cardinal rests in the San José crypt of the cathedral, next to Cardinal Bueno y Monreal, who ordained him a priest in 1980. (*Father Franco Moretti, mcccj*)

Father Fernando Colombo (01.07.1934 – 19.12.2024)

Fernando was born in Usmate Velate, then in the province of Milan (now in the province of Monza and Brianza), on 1st July 1934, to Camillo and Agnese Magni. On the 4th he was baptised in the parish of Santa Margherita. The family enjoyed an excellent reputation in the parish. One of the sisters entered the novitiate of the Canossian Missionary Institute of Vimercate at a very young age. Little Fernando, therefore, grew up in an environment where having a religious vocation was not unusual. And so, after finishing elementary school, he entered the archepiscopal seminary 'San Pietro Martire' in Seveso, where he attended middle school and the first two years of high school. He revealed his desire to become a missionary to Father Giuseppe Zanoni, one of the Oblate Brothers serving the diocese of Milan as a spiritual father, but the latter advised him to wait at least until the end of high school. And it was Father Giuseppe who introduced the cleric Fernando to the Superior General of the Combonians. Fernando, having been received into the novitiate of Gozzano in September 1951, took his first religious vows on 9th September 1953, and on 9th September 1959, in Venegono Superiore, he made his perpetual religious profession. The reports of his superiors were always excellent: good intelligence, strong will, a serious and thoughtful character, polite and cordial, lover of piety, prompt in discipline, always distinguished in his studies and exemplary in his duties.

On 2nd April 1960, Fernando became a priest at the hands of Clemente Micara, Cardinal Vicar of the Diocese of Rome, in the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano. At the beginning of May 1962, he received the letter

of assignment to the Scholasticate of Venegono Superiore as a teacher of Canon Law and Moral Theology.

In 1968 he already had in his pocket the letter of appointment to the mission – Burundi – and a plane ticket to Paris where he went for a short period to brush up on his French. At the beginning of 1969, he flew to Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi. A few days later, he reached the mission of Chibitoke to study *Kirundi*, a very difficult Bantu language.

His stay in Burundi was very short. In February 1970 he was appointed secretary general of formation, at the Curia, in Rome. Strengthened by his preparation, he contributed decisively to the drafting of the new Ratio Studiorum, which was to renew not only the contents of formation but also the methods and the structure of the student houses at various levels.

There was a lot of work, but Father Fernando did not give up: he wrote articles that he circulated among the formators present in the Comboni formation houses, prepared questionnaires, summarised the answers and published the results in the MCCJ Bulletin.

At the end of November 1978, he was able to return to the mission, this time assigned to Uganda. In June 1980 he went to Kampala. The provincial assigned him to the mission of Warr-Zeu, in West Nile, in the diocese of Arua. In July 1981 he was elected provincial councillor. He was very committed to the revision of the agreements between the Institute and the local bishops, in particular the bishop of Arua, his direct ordinary. The aim was to have agreements according to the new directives issued by the previous General Chapters and expressed in the VR.

But the urgent need for a formator in the international scholasticate of Kampala took priority and, on 23rd June 1984, he was appointed superior and formator. Two months later, the new school year began and the scholastics immediately appreciated the new formator: he brought new ideas and challenges, and they consider themselves blessed from above.

On 1st August 1985, his friend Father Francesco Pierli was elected superior general. The young superior general regularly consulted the one who shaped the new style of formation in the Institute and from which he himself benefitted during the years of scholasticate and during the period of his specialisation in Rome. Through letters, the two discussed the possibility of moving the scholasticate from Kampala (the capital of a country too exposed to disorder, coups, socio-political crises, violence, etc.) to Nairobi, and on 1st July 1988, Father Fernando was assigned to Kenya: “I am certain,” Father Pierli writes to him, “that, in addition to making you appreciated as a professor at Tangaza College, you will also be loved and esteemed by your confreres.” In the second half of 1992, elections for the new provincial council were held in the province. The confreres did not seem willing to lose Father

Fernando and elected him provincial superior. When his mandate expired, on 1 January 1999, he was assigned to the London Province, for the service of formator at the Elstree Scholasticate. At the beginning of July 2001, he returned to Kenya, assigned to the mission of Ongata Rongai, in the diocese of Ngong.

In 2003, while continuing to belong officially to the province of Kenya, he placed himself at the service of the diocese of Rumbek, in South Sudan, at the request of Bishop Cesare Mazzolari, mccc. In mid-2013, Father Fernando had to be admitted to a hospital in Nairobi, with serious problems of disorientation of time and space. After the necessary tests, the doctors recommended that he be relieved of the many duties he had. In September, he left for Italy and was taken to the Centro Confratelli Ammalati 'Padre Giuseppe Ambrosoli', in Milan, for in-depth tests. Father Ferdinando had moments of lucidity and asked to be allowed to return to Rumbek, even just to hand things over. At the end of January 2014, he went to Nairobi. In August he went to Rome, where he wanted to participate in a Course for elderly confreres. After only three weeks, the state of mind that led to his urgent hospitalisation in Nairobi returned and he was taken back to the Centro Ammalati in Milan.

In December 2014, feeling a little better, Father Fernando had the courage to return to the mission, assigned to the mission of Mapuordit, in South Sudan, where there was also a hospital run by the Comboni doctor Brother Rosario Iannetti, for eventual medical assistance. In August 2015 he moved to the mission of Moroyok, a community opened in April of the same year as a formation centre (with a pre-postulancy) and for assistance to elderly missionaries.

In April 2016, Father Fernando had to return to Italy and went to the Centro Ammalati in Brescia. There he received a letter from the Superior General, Father Tesfaye Tadesse, with his definitive assignment to the province of Italy.

In July, he moved to the community of Rebbio (Como), where he remained until the end of 2018 when he returned to the Centro Ammalati in Milan. The situation worsened and, in August 2022, he was assigned to the 'Fratel Alfredo Fiorini' Centre in Castel d'Azzano (Verona).

In December 2024, Father Fernando was very ill and was taken to the Borgo Roma Hospital in Verona where he passed away on the 19th. On the 23rd, his funeral was held in the community of Castel d'Azzano, presided over by the superior of the Center, Father Giovanni Munari, in the presence of the provincial superior, Father Fabio Baldan, and many confreres. Various people ask to speak and highlight, in addition to his extraordinary human and spiritual qualities, his innumerable contributions in

the path of renewal of the Institute after the Second Vatican Council. Finally, Father Fernando's remains were taken to Usmate Velate and interred in the local cemetery. (*Father Franco Moretti, mcccj*).

Father Giacomo Biasotto (10.08.1937 – 29.12.2024)

Giacomo was born in Prata di Pordenone on 10th August 1937, to Santo and Maria Piccin, the second of three children. In the parish, he regularly attended catechism and, as an adolescent, became a regular visitor to the “*school of faith*” offered by Catholic Action. In this context, Giacomo's desire to become a priest was born in his heart.

On 2nd July 1961, Giacomo was ordained a priest in Aviano by Msgr. Vittorio De Zanche. Immediately afterwards, he was assigned as curate to the parish of San Giovanni di Polcenigo, where there was a good group of young people to whom Don Giacomo dedicated much of his time, committing them to follow the dictates of the Gospel more closely and to open themselves more and more to the universal mission of the Church. He continued to repeat that the Church is missionary by nature, and so the idea of becoming a Comboni missionary was born in him.

In September 1967 he entered the Comboni novitiate in Florence. On 1st May 1969, he took his first vows. Immediately afterwards, he was assigned to Pordenone as the spiritual father at the scholasticate for brothers. He made his perpetual profession on 1st May 1971. At the end of 1972, he received the letter of assignment to the missions of Zaire.

On 3rd May, Father Giacomo was already in Isiro: he rested for two days and resumed his journey to the mission of Tadu, 300 km from the capital, where he had to devote himself to learning the local language, Lingala. Between one language lesson and another, Father Giacomo also wanted to experience pastoral life in the villages, always accompanied by a catechist who acted as interpreter. If there was a sick person to be anointed, he was the one to volunteer. If there was a group of catechumens or the students of a small school to visit, he was the first to ask to join those who were going there. Tadu was not the mission to which he was assigned, but he decided to leave his mark on it: on the back wall of the church, he painted a large crucifixion; on the side wall, a beautiful Madonna and child. Six months later, Father Giacomo has the opportunity to go to Rungu. From Rungu, he went to Isiro, where the provincial superior, Father Ferdinando Colombo, gave him his final appointment: the mission of Pawa, just 56 km from the capital. He went there immediately. In the community, he found Father Elio Piasentier and Brother Annico Meloni. Regular visits to the 12 villages that made up the parish began immediately.

In 1982, Father Giacomo returned to Italy for a vacation. In 1983, he returned to Zaire and was assigned to the mission of Duru, among the Azande, near the border with Sudan. He remained there for only one year: adapting to life in the forest was difficult for him. After Dungu and a period at the parish of Sant'Anna in Isiro, in 1984 he asked his superiors to return to Italy. He gladly accepted being assigned to the community of Pordenone, where there was a postulancy for Brothers, with the task of also animating the parishes of the area in a missionary sense and helping in the ministry.

In 1989, he returned to Zaire, to the small diocesan seminary of Dungu, as a spiritual father. Two years later, the seminary was entrusted to the local clergy and Father Giacomo was assigned, as second formator, to the interprovincial Francophone Combonian novitiate of Isiro-Magambe, where the Novice Master Father Lorenzo Farronato. The two had known each other for a long time.

In March 1995, due to psychological and physical exhaustion, Father Giacomo was allowed to leave the novitiate and was assigned to the community of Lemba (Kinshasa), where the provincial bursar's offices were located.

On 1st January 1996, Father Fernando Zolli was elected provincial superior and asked Father Giacomo if he was willing to be his secretary. He accepted, and in May he joined him in Isiro, where the provincial resided. The socio-political situation worsened. Even in the northwest, the rebels spread disorder and terror. The mission of Isiro was attacked and vandalised. The missionaries took refuge in the forest. They managed to communicate by radio with the regular soldiers still present in a barracks in the city and were picked up by them and transported to the airport of Isiro, where a plane was waiting to take them to Kinshasa. From there they left Zaire on a flight made available by the Spanish government.

The Italians arrived in Milan on 13th January. Father Giacomo spent a few weeks on vacation with his family. In April he was again on a plane taking him back to Africa and he reached Isiro on 5th May.

In 2005 he was assigned to Dondi mission where he stayed for five years: he engaged in the apostolate, visiting the villages, giving lessons to catechists at the pastoral centre, visiting the sick in the hospital... and, in his spare time, he painted a large crucifix and portraits of Saint Ambrose and Blessed Anuarite in the main church.

After Easter 2013, he left the DR Congo (formerly Zaire) and returned to Italy, assigned to the community of Cordenons. He immediately threw himself into the apostolate in the various parishes of the diocese but, from tests, it emerges that he has a tumour in his nose. He was immediately operated on. Then, for two and a half years, he had to "commute" between Pordenone and Verona-Negrar for repeated rounds of chemotherapy. Numerous other

surgeries followed because the tumour had spread to the nasal septum. At the end of February 2020, he was assigned to the community that manages the rectory of San Tomio, in Verona. As was his habit, he spent hours in the confessional.

Father Giacomo's health became increasingly serious, to the point that the provincial council, in June 2023, at the end of yet another hospital stay, took the decision to assign him to the community of the "Fratel Alfredo Fiorini" Centre in Castel d'Azzano.

And it was there that Father Giacomo passed away on 29th December 2024, surrounded by the affection and prayers of his confreres and the care of the medical staff. His funeral was celebrated in the chapel of the Centre on 2nd January 2025. Father Romeo Ballan, a long-time friend of Father Giacomo and former provincial of Zaire, gave the homily. "In 35 years spent in Congo – he said among other things – Father Giacomo has carried out various activities in different missions of that immense country. He also recounted them in a slim volume, entitled *Testimonianza di Vita e di Missione*. Although animated by missionary and Comboni passion, Giacomo has always maintained his style of a 'good diocesan priest'. Those who know the varied geography of our missions in Congo, the many socio-political situations recorded in recent decades and personal and community events, are surprised and admired by Giacomo's unfailing availability and readiness to go to new missions, stay there, help and leave for other destinations where his presence could be useful and, often, make a difference. The frequent trips, the difficult transfers, and the delicate insertions into community and pastoral contexts that were not always easy were certainly not painless. But Giacomo was always moderate regarding the information he offered, capable of covering tensions, emergencies, and crisis situations with the veil of charity." After the Mass, the remains were interred in the Monumental Cemetery of Verona. (*Edited by Father Franco Moretti, mccj*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE BROTHERS: Carlos, of Father Francisco Gómez Uribe (M); Giusto, of Father Luciano Benetazzo (I) and Father Stelvio Benetazzo (†).

THE SISTER: Zulmira, of Brother António Martins da Costa (†).