

FAMILIA COMBONIANA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES
OF THE HEART OF JESUS

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March 2025



HABEMUS GIGI !

On 22st February, Father Luigi Fernando Codianni, former general councillor, was elected superior general of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus (MCCJ). Father Luigi has considerable religious and missionary experience in the areas of administration and government service. He served in the Comboni circumscriptions of Brazil and Italy.

Father Luigi was born on June 13, 1964, in Celenza Valfortore (FG), Italy. He entered the Institute with his first religious profession in 1988 in Venegono Superiore (Italy). From 1988 to 1993, he studied theology in São Paulo (Brazil). On 15th May 1993, he was ordained a priest in Celenza Valfortore, in the diocese of Lucera-Troia. After carrying out his first pastoral commitment in Italy, from 1993 to 2001, he was assigned to the province of Northeast Brazil, becoming provincial superior from 2005 to 2010. In 2011, he returned to Italy, where, among other commitments, he was provincial treasurer. In the General Chapter of 2022, he was appointed general councillor, later taking on the role of following the circumscriptions of Europe, the economic sector, and legal aspects and legal representation.

Perpetual professions

Sc. Alex Geraldo Nunes	São Paulo/BR	17.01.2025
Sc. Djimini Hermann Mahuan	Nelspruit/RSA	08.02.2025/
Sc. Hernández Cruz José Manuel	Monterrey/M	02.02.2025
Sc. Mintesnot Simeneh Lemessa	Manaus/BR	05.02.2025

Ordinations

Beyokomu Anotengo Remy	Isiro/CN	19.01.2025
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Holy Redeemer Guild

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

Prayer intentions

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.*

April – For all the countries of the world, especially those where we are present as a Comboni family, so that we may always seek the common good and motivate Christians to social and political commitment. *Lord hear us.*

Meaningful anniversaries

MARCH

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

APRIL

25	Saint Pedro de San José de Betancur, religious	PCA (Central América, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador)
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Publications

Daniel Cerezo Ruiz, *Un hijo de papel – La itinerancia misionera de san Daniel Comboni* ('A Paper Son – The Missionary Itinerancy of Saint Daniel Comboni'), Editorial Mundo Negro, Madrid, 2025, pp. 168.

In the mid-19th century, a mother of eight children sees seven of them die at a young age. The remaining son discovers that God has given him a missionary vocation to carry out in Africa. A few weeks after his arrival on the continent, full of enthusiasm, he sent a photo of himself to his mother, from whose mouth flows the eloquent phrase: "I have only one paper son left." That son was Daniel Comboni.

Missionary itinerancy, not without obstacles, opens spaces and scenarios to face paths unimaginable in today's Church. Comboni's commitment to

the peripheries of the world has left behind a fascinating trail for every disciple and missionary of Jesus Christ.

Comboni spirituality was one of the priorities of the last General Chapter of the Institute. Against the backdrop of itinerancy and sending, typically missionary and Comboni characteristics, the book aims to promote and emphasise the Comboni spirituality in which the missionary is reflected and, at the same time, to satisfy the thirst for missionary spirituality.

With an interactive style, the volume involves the reader and helps his reflection, through the memory of Comboni, reading his own missionary life in a key of itinerancy. It is suitable for spiritual exercises, retreats, meditations, formation meetings and ongoing formation. *Un Hijo de Papel* offers the Comboni world and its supporters a reading which interacts with Daniel Comboni, the mission and his own life. The author, a Comboni missionary, completed this essay while on the journey of his missionary experience in Africa and China.

APDESAM

Annual meeting at Chizongwe – Zambia

The annual meeting of the Assembly of Provincials and Delegates of Anglophone Africa and Mozambique (APDESAM) was held in Chizongwe, Zambia, from 17th to 21st February 2025. All members were present: Brother Alberto Lamana (representative of the General Council), Father Diego Dalle Carbonare (EGSD), Brother Gédéon Mboma Ngunza (representative of the Brothers), Father Michael Mumba (MZ), Father Gregor Schmidt (SS), Father José Joaquim Pedro (MO), Father Andrew Wanjohi (KE), Father Anthony Kibira (U), Father Yohannes Asfaha (ET), Father Gaim Haileselassie (ER) and Father John Baptist Keraryo Opargiw (RSA).

Father Michael, after warmly welcoming the participants, led a short reflection, which served as a moment of ongoing formation, with the clear invitation to ‘feed the hungry’ while we exercise our leadership service.

Brother Alberto and Father John Baptist, in their opening speeches, mentioned that this year’s annual meeting is the last of our three-year leadership service, which also takes place in the context of a transition in the leadership of our Institute.

The three-day meeting got into the heart of the work with numerous reports from the circumscriptions, the sectors (Formation, Mission and Finance), the life and ministries of the Brothers, and the common projects of APDESAM.

A very important moment was the final reading and approval of the revised version of the APDESAM Charter 2025, which will offer guidelines for our life and mission in the near future. A significant reference was made to the next Intercapitular Assembly scheduled for September 2025 in Rome.

The annual meeting in Chizongwe was truly a moment of communion, fraternity and clarification and deepening of our continental identity. We are very grateful to the circumscription of Malawi/Zambia that hosted us and to all the members for their presence and active participation.

The news of the election of the new Superior General, Father Luigi Codianni, reached us as we were already leaving on the day of departure. However, we all promised to remain faithful to the new 'supreme moderator' and ready to collaborate with him. (*Father John Baptist Keraryo Opargiw, mccj, continental coordinator of APDESAM*)

BRASIL

Two young men consecrate to God for the mission

The testimony of the life of Saint Daniel Comboni, thanks to the strength of his missionary charism, continues to inspire young people from all over the world who, with joy and generosity, consecrate their lives to God and to the mission of the Kingdom through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience.

Alex Geraldo Nunes, a Brazilian, born in Capela Nova, Minas Gerais, is one of these restless and courageous young people who have decided to consecrate their lives to the mission. He entered the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries, did his missionary formation in Brazil, Mexico and Peru, and pronounced his definitive 'yes' to God with perpetual vows on 17th January 2025. On 18th January, he was ordained a deacon by Msgr. Odelir José Magri, in São Paulo.

Minte Simeneh Lemessa, called 'Minte', has also chosen the consecrated and missionary life as his life project. Born in Jijiga, Ethiopia, he entered the Institute of Comboni Missionaries and did his missionary formation in Ethiopia, Zambia and Brazil. On 5th February 2025, he consecrated himself to God and to the mission by professing perpetual vows. On 8th February, he received diaconal ordination with the imposition of hands by Msgr. Zenildo Lima da Silva, auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Manaus.

We congratulate Alex Nunes and Mintesnot Simeneh for having responded with love and joy to the call that the Lord made to them, consecrating their lives for God and for the mission of the Kingdom in the

charism of Saint Daniel Comboni. Alex and Minte are waiting to know their destination to carry out their first missionary experience. Let us accompany them with our prayers. (*Father Raimundo Rocha, mcccj*)

EGYPT-SUDAN

Egypt – Centenary of the church of Sakakini and the 25th anniversary of ‘St. Bakhita Centre’

The solemnity of Saint Bakhita was celebrated on Friday, 7th February, at the ‘Arbaa wNus’ Centre in Nasr City (Cairo). Monsignor Claudio Lurati presided over the celebration, which – like every year – brought together many Sudanese and South Sudanese from the Sacred Heart parish in Sakakini and other nearby parishes.

This year will be a year of special events for the parish of Sakakini: in fact, it is celebrating the 100th anniversary of its foundation (until the 1980s it was managed by the Society of African Missions) and the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Arbaa wNus Centre, dedicated to Saint Bakhita.

Beirut – Pastoral of migrants to reach out to society

The Apostolic Vicar of Beirut, Msgr. César Essayan, presided over the Eucharist with a group of migrants who usually gather in Badaro, Beirut. On this happy occasion, the bishop emphasised that, since many migrants work in the homes of Lebanese, their presence is an opportunity for the Latin Church to reach all those homes where the Gospel could not otherwise reach. In this way, migrants are not ‘objects’ but ‘subjects’ of the Church’s work of evangelisation, which is carried out not only by bishops and priests, but by all the people of God. The day of conviviality which started with a moment of formation led by Father Faustin Mboka, concluded, after the Eucharist, with a fraternal agape. The Badaro migrant group was born as an initiative of Father Claude Ondongar, when, still a student at the Jesuit University of Saint Joseph, he had the idea of creating an opportunity for Catholic migrants present in the northern area of Beirut to meet.

Sudan – News from Khartoum and Kosti

In recent weeks, there has been a significant advance by regular army forces in Khartoum, with reports and videos showing several members of the Rapid Support Forces leaving the capital. With the arrival of the army in Bahri (North Khartoum), for the first time in more than 18 months, we have had news of our provincial house, which fortunately seems to be in

good condition. However, the clashes in the central area (Souq Arabi, where Comboni College is located) and the southern area (Azhari and Soba) of Khartoum continue to be very heavy. In Kosti, the destruction of the nearby power plant has caused a power cut lasting for two weeks now, complicating life in the city, where the lack of running water is increasing the number of cholera cases. Unfortunately, neither one of the sides of the conflict seems to want to consider negotiating an end to hostilities.

ETHIOPIA

Father Tesfaye Tadesse ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Addis Abeba

Father Tesfaye Tadesse, former Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 2nd February 2025. Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, the current Archeparch, was the principal ordinand, assisted by Comboni Bishop Menghesteb Tesfamariam, Archeparch of Asmara, Eritrea, and Bishop Abraham Desta of the Apostolic Vicariate of Meki, Ethiopia.

The ordination took place in the Catholic Cathedral of the Nativity during a colourful Ethiopian Rite liturgy that lasted more than five hours. The cathedral and its complex were packed with people. The entire ceremony was live-streamed in the cathedral and on the Internet.

Present were almost all the bishops of Ethiopia, the vicar general of the Comboni missionaries, Father David Domingues, the Comboni bishops Wokorach Raphael P'Mony, archbishop of Gulu, Uganda, and Ndjadi Ndjate Léonard, auxiliary bishop of Kisangani, DR Congo, some Comboni provincial superiors of the English-speaking African provinces, many Comboni brothers and sisters from Ethiopia and abroad, a large number of local priests and religious, sisters, faithful as well as representatives of other Christian Churches, the government and the diplomatic corps.

The liturgy was in Ge'ez with the English translation shown on the screens. Some hymns were in Amharic, including a song written by Father Dawit Wubishet, an Ethiopian Comboni missionary who is spending a sabbatical year in the United States.

During the homily, Card. Berhaneyesus spoke about the episcopal ministry. He began by saying: "We are happy to receive today from the Holy Father and the Comboni missionaries the new auxiliary bishop." He then continued by exhorting Bishop Tesfaye to be a good shepherd especially for those in need, "a father of the poor, the displaced and the refugees." The offertory procession was animated by dancers from the Kunama refugee community of Eritrea. The ceremony was followed by several short

speeches. The first was that of Msgr. Massimo Catterin, chargé d'affaires at the Nunciature of Addis Ababa. "The episcopate is the name of a service," he emphasised. Father David Domingues thanked God for the gift, life and ministry of Msgr. Tesfaye in the Institute and in the Church. Addressing the new bishop, he exclaimed: "We are truly proud of you." Archbishop Menghesteb recalled that it was he who invited the young Tesfaye to join the Comboni missionaries: "Many years ago, I thought I had caught a small fish. Little by little, he has become a big fish. I see Bishop Tesfaye as my dear son." Other speakers were the provincial superior of the Comboni Missionaries in Ethiopia, Father Asfaha Yohannes, and the leader of all the Evangelical Churches in the country.

Bishop Tesfaye concluded the speeches with a word of thanks in Amharic, English, Italian, Spanish and French. "I continue to count on your prayers and support," he said.

After the liturgical celebration, the guests were served a delicious lunch of traditional Ethiopian dishes and some entertainment.

Father Tesfaye made his profession of faith during evening prayer in the Cathedral, on the eve of his ordination. (*Father Joe Vieira, mccj*)

Fr. Merhakristos Gobeza yehu Getachew Yilma, Bishop of Hawassa

Father Gobeza yehu Yilma, appointed Apostolic Vicar of Hawassa on 15th November 2024, was ordained bishop on 9th February 2025 in the Kidane Mehret ('Covenant of Mercy) Cathedral, ending the see's long vacant period. Bishop Gobeza yehu Yilma – who took the episcopal name of Merhakristos ('guided by Christ' in Ge'ez) – was ordained by Cardinal Berhanyesus Souraphiel, Archeparch of Addis Ababa, assisted by Bishop Abraham Desta, Apostolic Vicar of Meki, and Comboni Bishop Tesfaye Tadesse, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Addis Ababa.

Seven other bishops were present – six from Ethiopia and one from Nigeria – along with over 100 priests, a large number of nuns and catechists, and a huge crowd (about 5,000 faithful) that filled the Cathedral and three large tents outside. There were also numerous guests from Europe and the United States, local politicians and representatives of the Protestant Churches.

Father Juan Núñez, apostolic administrator of Hawassa for over four years, greeted the ordination of the new bishop with great joy: "The interim period was so long that it seemed to have become permanent. During the long wait, everyone continued to pray for Hawassa to have its own bishop. Finally, the propitious day has arrived."

Mons. Massimo Catterin, chargé d'affaires at the Vatican Nunciature in Addis Ababa, thanked Bishop Merhakristos for having accepted God's

call to be apostolic vicar of Hawassa. Addressing the newly elected bishop, he said: “Remember that you were consecrated bishop in the Jubilee Year.” He then thanked Father Núñez for his generous service as apostolic administrator.

Bishop Merhakristos was born in Dodola, in the Bale area, 46 years ago. Before entering the major seminary of Meki, he studied agriculture at the University of Jima. He then did his theological studies at the Capuchin Franciscan Institute in Addis Ababa and was ordained a priest in 2005. Before being appointed apostolic vicar of Hawassa, Bishop Merhakristos was the vicar delegate of the apostolic vicariate of Meki and executive director of Caritas-Meki.

The apostolic vicariate of Hawassa covers an area of over 100,000 square kilometres, with nine million inhabitants. It has almost 290 thousand faithfuls, distributed in 20 parishes and 558 chapels. It boasts 531 part-time catechists and 109 full-time, 74 religious sisters from 11 missionary one local congregation, 47 religious men and six brothers from four missionary institutes, 21 diocesan priests, nine major seminarians and two deacons. (*Father José Vieira and Father Pablo, mcccj*).

ITALY

Mission Assembly in Verona

From 27th to 30th January, the Mission Assembly of the Italian province took place at the Mother House in Verona. It was a significant moment of reflection, sharing and planning for the future of the Comboni mission in Italy.

During the first day, those present shared one or two signs of hope present in the missionary journey of their respective communities. Among the many signs listed, the one considered most present and significant was the concrete commitment of many communities in welcoming, in solidarity and collaborating with local realities in the pastoral care of migrants and in providing for their hospitality needs and in dealing with emergencies.

Then Don Giuliano Zanchi, professor of theology of the diocese of Bergamo, took the floor, sharing a reflection on the theme ‘*Jubilee and Mission – Generating Hope*’. In his speech, Father Zanchi underlined the importance of the Jubilee as an instrument of justice and liberation, evoking the need to rediscover its authentic meaning in response to the logic of individualism and the defence of one’s own interests that dominate today, in order to build a social model based on solidarity and hope.

The provincial superior of Italy, Father Fabio Baldan, presented an analysis of the current reality of our communities present in the province, underlining the need to reorganise their activities and revisit the modality of our presence through the merging of the European provinces into a single one. It has been talked about for a long time, but now the time has come to concretise and make a reality what until now has only been an idea. This will require everyone's collaboration, because it will imply the reorganisation of resources and a renewed pastoral commitment.

Despite the difficulties, it is possible to see signs of hope, especially if we are animated by the inner strength that makes us capable of transforming our reality. Father Baldan said: "Hope is not an illusion, but a concrete attitude that manifests itself in perseverance and commitment, looking at the current situation of the provinces with realism and sincerity, maintaining above all a gaze of faith and hope, in order to build a better future, without assuming an attitude of resignation."

The morning of the second day was dedicated to the revision of the *Mission Charter of the Italian Province*. The discussion highlighted the need for clearer and less complicated or abstract language. It was also suggested that we pay more attention to the mission in the field of politics and finance and to the need to draft a more current and reality-related document. The final revision was entrusted to the secretariat.

In the afternoon, the reports of the various areas that operate in the field of the mission carried out in the province were presented. In this regard, the general secretary of the mission, Father Fernando Galarza, presented the website of the general secretariat of the mission (combonimission.net) and the missionary activities that take place at the Institute level. He indicated the importance of collaboration within the entire Comboni Family, through a commission dedicated to this and by supporting missionary initiatives in the different continents.

For his part, Father Daniele Moschetti, representative of the Migrants Commission, presented the activities carried out, including the collaboration with the Archbishop of Ferrara-Comacchio, Giancarlo Perego, the new president of the Commission for Migration of the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Migrants Foundation. The organisation of the Jubilee in the Land of Fire and the proposal of an ecclesial network of the CEI on migration were also discussed, which were positively received, but have not yet been developed concretely.

Father Pietro Ciuciulla, representative of the Nigrizia Foundation, spoke of the need felt – and partly present to a degree in the implementation phase – for an integration between the paper and digital sectors of our magazines, with a greater presence on social media and podcasts.

Several missionary projects have been funded, and significant events have been held, such as the 'Arena di Pace'. While on the one hand, paper subscriptions to magazines are decreasing, on the other, digital subscriptions are increasing. A reorganisation of the African Library, the African Museum and the photo library is planned to enhance their patrimonial content.

The representatives of the Comboni Lay Missionaries, after introducing their presence in the province, informed those attending about what happened in the recent General Assembly of the LMC in Maia (Portugal), where the discussion on the theme of autonomy and the organisational and economic responsibilities of the LMC continued.

Finally, the 'criteria of missionary presence' of the Comboni parishes in Italy were presented, which will need to be constantly updated through workshops of reflection on prospects. (*Brother Tomasz Basiński, mcccj*)

PERU

Closure of the Palca Community

In a moving ceremony, filled with feelings of gratitude and emotional memories, the Comboni missionaries 'said goodbye' to the diocese of Tarma, after more than 60 years of dedication and service. Their presence was a beacon of hope and faith, because they worked tirelessly in almost all the parishes, first of the prelate and then of the diocese. For six decades they evangelised, taught religion, supervised constructions, but above all strengthened the faith of many people. Their stay, which began at the request of the Vatican to found a new prelate, left an indelible mark on the lives of those who were touched by their work of evangelisation. The story begins when the Comboni missionaries arrived in the area to face the challenge of starting a new future diocese. The first to take charge of the parish of Palca, as the first parish priest, was Father Hubert Unterberger, in 1974, although his first visits date back to two years earlier, when he was still a member of the community of Tarma.

He was succeeded as parish priest by Father Hilmar Gulba (1933-2023), who expanded the parish church with a side nave and replaced the wooden bridge leading to the parish house with one made of iron and cement, and, in 1994, Father Eduard Falk (1935-2024) who was parish priest for 30 years, until illness forced him to retire first to Lima and then to Germany, where he died on 1st January 2024. Father Luis Weiss took over from Father Falk, followed by Father Alfonso Pérez, who has the honour of closing the glorious list of Comboni parish priests of Palca.

On 1st February, the parish of San Domingo de Guzmán in Palca was

handed over to the diocesan clergy by the bishop of Tarma, Msgr. Timoteo Solórzano (MSC). The solemn ceremony was attended by many Comboni and diocesan priests, as well as a large number of friends and parishioners.

On 2nd February, a solemn mass was celebrated in the cathedral, at the end of which Msgr. Solórzano unveiled a commemorative plaque in honour of the Comboni missionaries. The plaque, located next to the tomb of Msgr. Lorenzo Unfried Gimpel (MCCJ), second bishop of Tarma-Cerro de Pasco (from 1980 to 1988), is an everlasting reminder of his dedication and service.

Both ceremonies were characterised by profound emotions and a deep sense of gratitude, and were embellished with songs that solemnised every single moment.

The Prelature of Tarma was created in 1958, with Bishop Antonio Kühner (MFSC) as its first prelate. After serving as parish priest of Huánuco, Kühner was appointed bishop of Huánuco in 1980. Bishop Lorenzo Unfried Gimpel, then auxiliary bishop of Arequipa, was appointed his successor and took possession of the prelate of Tarma on January 4, 1981. All the parishes remained in the hands of the Comboni missionaries until 1985, when the prelate was elevated to a diocese. Faithful to our Comboni charism, we contributed to the construction of this diocese until it was sufficiently developed. After serious discernment, Palca was handed over to the diocesan clergy, marking the end of our presence in these Andean lands and in the 'pearl of the Andes', Tarma. This passage represents a bittersweet moment, as it symbolises both the culmination of a mission and the beginning of a new phase for the local community.

The legacy left by our missionary brothers – initially mostly German, then Spanish, Italian and other nationalities – is today a source of inspiration. Their history bears witness not only to the challenges they faced, but also to the triumphs they achieved, thanks to their resilience and their faith. Their spirit continues to motivate Peruvian missionaries, especially the small group who left these lands for the mission *ad gentes*.

We can only say "Thank You!". Thanks be to God and to so many brothers and sisters who have forged this beautiful missionary history full of hope. (*Father Nelson Mitchel, mccj.*)

SPAIN

GERT Meeting: requalifying the mission in Europe

Since 2002, a group of Comboni missionaries, at the request of the Secretariat of Missionary Animation and the Provincial Superiors of Europe,

has met regularly to share the results of their research, in order to contextualise the Comboni missionary presence on the Continent and define a reference paradigm to respond to the challenges posed to us by reality in continuous change. This group is known as the European Group for Theological and Pastoral Reflection (GERT) and, over time, has opened up to all branches of the Comboni Family.

From 4th to 7th February 2025, the GERT met at the provincial headquarters in Madrid, Spain, for the annual moment of sharing and was warmly welcomed.

On the first day, the members of the group shared the socio-religious situation of their countries of origin, with a particular focus on the Comboni reality. The result was a gloomy, but not negative, picture. In reality, we must take into account the progressive aging of the personnel, which opens the doors to a greater internationalisation of the Comboni communities. In fact, the new recruits come mostly from African countries and bring with them new ways of perceiving reality and responding to the challenges of our time.

Many communities in Europe are involved in welcoming and accompanying migrants. This is a service carried out in a society that is gradually closing itself off to foreigners and making 'right-wing' political choices. There is also a growing commitment to a conversion towards integral ecology, listening to the cry of the earth and the poor.

The themes of migrants, interculturality and the current challenges facing the European Church were the common thread of the interventions and discussions on the second day. The group first shared the theme '*The stranger in the Old Testament*', noting how faith in the one God slowly formed in Israel, also thanks to the contributions offered by neighbouring cultures. The image of a monolithic Israel separated from its neighbouring peoples is, in truth, a literary artifice: a higher understanding of God and his presence in the world would never have been achieved without the contribution of other cultures. Israel has always lived in a multicultural situation.

The second intervention focused on the ways that would allow us to move from mere welcoming to a true integration of foreigners in Europe. The speaker, starting from the biblical icon of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, developed the idea of a Comboni mission towards migrants that is a defence of their rights, but also of clear evangelisation. We must work to make migrants co-protagonists of our mission among themselves, in line with Comboni's idea of 'Saving Africa with Africa'.

The relationship between Christianity and culture was addressed by interesting research on secularisation, which should not be seen in an anti-

religious and negative sense, but as the fruit of a religious journey intended as 'common ground' for interreligious dialogue. In this perspective, interculturality should be understood as a 'movement of reinterpretation' of cultures and, therefore, also of faith. This would create space to build a society where everyone, starting from their own renewed tradition, can contribute in a positive way. Respect for human rights should be the first step towards true social dialogue. It is not just about integrating into the host culture, but about making a 'qualitative leap' to allow the various cultures to walk on equal terms.

A final contribution was on the 'search for identity'. An important theme in this historical moment of transition, where the 'loss of identity' is a real danger, sometimes perceived as a threat by those who are insecure about their social and religious identity. The journey of searching for one's own identity cannot ignore the community (giving space to otherness) and must remain attentive to the temptation of intimism (the self that determines all reality).

The interventions and the results of the discussions will be sent to all the communities of the Comboni Family in Europe, and can be used for ongoing formation initiatives.

In order to give continuity to the service of the Gert, some themes were proposed to be explored and brought to everyone's attention regarding the missionary presence in Europe in the light of the socio-cultural processes underway. The development of this theme is expected from various points of view: that of intercultural communities (Father Fernando Domingues), political commitment (Father Giuseppe Caramazza), social violence (Father Moses Otii Alir), the difficulty of finding new interpretative paradigms (Father Paolo Latorre), the contribution of the elders (a brother yet to be identified) and the development of the mission in the last General Chapter (Father Fernando González Galarza). The participants thanked Father Fernando Zolli for the many years of service rendered to the Gert as coordinator. Father Fernando is leaving for the Congo. The leadership of the group will therefore have to be reorganised, which, with the active participation of all the members of the Gert, will be able to give continuity to this service. The Gert will meet online on the afternoon of May 5th. (*Father Giuseppe Caramazza and Father Fernando Zolli*)

SOUTH AFRICA

Perpetual vows and diaconal ordination of Hermann Djimini

On 8th February 2025, the feast of consecrated life in the diocese of Witbank, the scholastic Hermann Mahunan Djimini professed his perpetual

vows, in the presence of Father John Baptist Opaargiw Keraryo, provincial superior, during a solemn Eucharistic celebration held in the parish church of St. Peter in Nelspruit. The mass was presided over by Mgr. Thaddeus Xolile Kumalo, bishop of Witbank, and concelebrated by numerous confreres, some diocesan priests and Fr. Francis Stephane Adimou, parish priest of Hermann's home parish in Benin.

Particularly significant was the presence of a good number of religious women who work in the diocese, including the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, who arrived in South Africa in 1939 to support our confreres in the foundation of the local Church, and the Benedictine Sisters. The people, though not as numerous as we expected, participated enthusiastically in the celebration, solemnised by the hymns of a very competent parish choir.

In his homily, Father Bheki Tshabalala, parish priest of St. Peter and missionary of Mariannahill, called for a renewal of religious life, inspired by the message of Pope Francis for the World Day of Consecrated Life (2 February 2025).

The following day, Sunday 9 February, Hermann was ordained a deacon. The celebration took place in the Church of the Holy Family in Waterval, the Comboni parish where Hermann spent his year of pastoral experience. The people of the parish came in large numbers, filling more than 400 seats under the tent set up in the church grounds. The mass was presided over by Mgr. Thaddeus Xolile Kumalo, bishop of Witbank, and concelebrated by some Comboni priests who work in the area. The Eucharistic ceremony, which lasted almost four hours, was animated by numerous songs performed by the entire congregation to the rhythm of the drums.

At the end of the mass, everyone enjoyed a hearty and delicious meal that a group of women volunteers from the parish prepared for the occasion. (*Father Efre Tresoldi, mcccj*)

IN PACE CHRISTI

Brother Arsenio Ferrari (18.12.1921 – 21.01.2025)

Arsenio Ferrari was born in Lugo di Valpantena (Verona) on 18th December 1921. He attended elementary school in the village, then stayed with his family, helping his father in the fields. Only later, feeling the need to have at least a diploma in something, in 1940 he enrolled in a professional course in agriculture at the Provincial Inspectorate of Agriculture in Verona, obtaining a certificate. In August 1941 he entered the Comboni

novitiate in Venegono Superiore, where, on 13th June 1943, he took his first vows as a 'Brother'. He was assigned to the scholasticate of Rebbio (Como) as a gardener, remaining there until June 1947, when he was assigned to the apostolic school for brothers in Thiene (Vicenza), as a technical instructor in agricultural matters. Every year, Arsenio sent a letter to the superior general with the request to renew his religious profession and with the plea to be able to leave for a mission in Africa. His wish was fulfilled in July 1947 with a letter from the Superior General, Father Antonio Todesco, in which he was informed of his first assignment to a mission: not in Africa, however, but in Mexico, where the Institute had recently agreed to begin its presence in the Apostolic Vicariate of Baja California.

In January 1948, the first 6 Comboni priests and three brothers arrived in La Paz. Arsenio was one of the latter. The territory of the vicariate included the entire peninsula of Baja California. The southern half of the vicariate was entrusted to the Institute, with a population of about 150,000 people.

Brother Arsenio was assigned to the El Triunfo Station, with Father Amedeo Ziller and Father Bruno Adami. Arsenio was 26 years old and full of energy, supported by enthusiasm, generosity and creativity, qualities that would never fail him during the many decades he would spend in this, his second homeland.

The card that summarises his missionary life in Mexico leaves no doubt: he worked in all the missions of what is now the Comboni Province of Mexico. Therefore, there is no place where there is no sign of the passage of Brother Arsenio. In what is now the diocese of La Paz, Baja California Sur, from Los Cabos to the north, in the coastal missions of Bahía Asunción and Bahía Tortugas, everywhere there is some building, some work or some person that recalls the silent and hidden dedication of a missionary who passed by doing good, without attracting much attention. In the diocese of Tuxtepec, Oaxaca, and in particular in the parish of San Felipe Usila, the façade of the parish church, built with enormous sacrifices by Brother Arsenio, still makes a beautiful impression. In 1986 Brother Arsenio was in the parish of Valle Nacional, among the indigenous Chinanteca population. From there he moved to Valle de Chalco, in the large suburbs of Mexico City. In the diocese of Chalco, many still remember the old red jeep that passed through the dusty streets of Valle de Chalco, driven by Brother Arsenio who, in the company of Brother Amancio Galerón, came to build the first chapels, destined over time to become enormous parishes of over a million people. And they also remember the

kites, slides and swings built by the ingenuity of Brother Arsenio, that were immensely popular among the children who lived in those places unknown to the world.

Even in the Archdiocese of Mexico, many remember him. It took only two years (1964-1966) of Brother Arsenio's presence at the Comboni community of Artesanado for people to speak of him as a wonderful person. The community ran a small training program for young people who had left the reformatory and were welcomed with great affection by the community, coordinated by Father Santiago Piccinelli. Brother Arsenio appeared to everyone as an unsurpassed instructor in the formation of young people, thanks to his technical and pedagogical knowledge necessary to prepare, teach, train and form people, transmitting the correct knowledge for the development and execution of activities and tasks with the appropriate processes and techniques.

A humble and simple worker – Arsenio was a person who lived his dedication to the mission without attracting attention or making personal demands. He was a man of work and nothing put him off. He maintained a cheerful and enthusiastic attitude while he was erecting walls or scraping floors, sharing the fatigue and tiredness with bricklayers and helpers whom he considered fellow workers. His attitude with others was always cordial and kind, even though he had a character and an inner energy that helped him to gain respect when necessary. He knew how to maintain fraternal friendships with those close to him. He did not have great personal needs and knew how to be content and thankful for everything that was made available to him to move forward and carry out his ministry.

A poor and austere missionary – Poverty and austerity were the two traits that accompanied him throughout his life. His spirit of poverty was not only manifested in his lifestyle, but above all in his willingness to go wherever the mission called him. His possessions were limited to a few tools and a personal suitcase where there was always plenty of space. He was not demanding and was content with what Providence placed at his disposal. Late in the evening, we saw him put the leftovers in a pan and that became his dinner.

A Man of Prayer – To maintain the intense activity of each day there was a profound experience of faith and prayer. He was found early in the morning in the community chapel for his personal prayer before participating in the Eucharist. He was not a man who spent many hours in the chapel, but the workshop where he taught or the construction site where he built became for him the chapel in which dedication and many sacrifices were transformed into silent prayer lived with joy. He was concerned

with introducing young people to this spirit and used to begin the sports activities he organised for them with a moment of recollection and prayer.

The final mission – In 2005, Brother Arsenio returned to Italy and stayed in Verona for a year for medical checkups and treatment. Some brothers suggested that he stay in Italy, considering his age and health problems. His answer was: «I want to return to my mission in Mexico». In May 2006, he was already back in the community of the seminary in Guadalajara and from there he moved to the new community of the Oasis, whose construction was about to be completed, and he immediately felt at home again, even though his strength was gradually decreasing.

In July 2010, he returned to Italy again for medical tests and, although he knew he would not be able to recover his former strength, he insisted on returning to Mexico. Two months later he was back at the Oasis, this time as one of the elderly and sick members who needed treatment.

Little by little he needed more and more care, and illness prevented him from moving and communicating, but his mind always remained alive and reacted to contact with other members of the community, showing a serene face until the end.

Brother Arsenio's mission in these last years of his life was to remind us of the value of faithfulness to a choice made for life. His presence reminded us that what matters in the mission is not how much we can do, but the ability to live giving ourselves every day with generosity and joy. He came to have to depend totally on the help and care of others, but he continued to teach us that what makes us great in the mission consists in going all the way, allowing ourselves to be led in everything and for everything by the Lord.

His last mission was that of silence and total abandonment, and it was certainly the most fruitful because, through his presence, he allowed the Lord to manifest himself as the true protagonist of every mission.

Brother Arsenio fell asleep in the Lord on 21st January 2025, at the age of 103, in the Oasis community in Zapopan, Guadalajara, where he received, until the end, all the attention that a veteran missionary like him deserved.

Today we can say that Brother Arsenio was a cheerful and always enthusiastic missionary, who lived the Comboni charism with great passion, and he told us with his life how proud he was to be a son of Saint Daniel Comboni.

He passed among us, and we were granted to have him with us for many years as a witness to the beauty of the missionary vocation, and today it is up to us to say thank you because in Brother Arsenio we have been given the gift of a cheerful, enthusiastic, humble and simple missionary.

The memory of his life will surely become an example that challenges us to live with passion and without reservations the gift of our Comboni missionary vocation.

Thank you, brother Arsenio, for leaving among us the most beautiful gift of your Comboni missionary vocation and the gift of your long life. (*Father Sánchez González Enrique, mccj*)

Brother Bernardino da Silva Ferreira (10.10.1939 – 31.01.2025)

Brother Bernardino da Silva Ferreira was born in Rio Caldo (Terras do Bouro, Gerês) on 10th October 1939 and was baptised four days later. The eldest of nine children, he attended primary school in the village, but did not go beyond the third grade and began to help his father with the work in the fields. He would only attend the fourth grade in 1956, at the age of 17, and then returned to work to help the family.

He did his military service in Mozambique. When he returned, he found work for a few years at the Military Academy, first as a servant, then as a typographer. In 1972, in addition to working, he began to attend a professional correspondence course, to become an industrial designer. On 16th February 1973, he obtained the Diploma in Industrial Design – Design of Machines and Civil Buildings, issued by the Technical Education and Professional Orientation Center, located not far from Lisbon.

Immediately afterwards he entered the postulate of Coimbra. In September 1974, he began the two-year novitiate in Santarém. He enjoyed community life and was soon convinced that fraternity would always be at the centre of his missionary life. In the letter in which he asked to take his vows, he wrote: "I believe that there is no true growth without forgetting oneself, without living for God and for the brothers. My vocation introduces me to the community, not to be a 'centre' around which everything revolves, but to be a member of it and one who owes much to others." On 19th June 1976, he took his first religious vows.

After a short vacation with his family, he was sent to Pordenone, Italy, to the International Brothers Scholasticate, where he remained for two years. In March 1977, the superior general, Father Tarcisio Agostoni, sent him the letter of appointment: he was assigned to the Region of Northern Brazil starting 1st July 1977. For various reasons, however, he had to postpone his departure. He arrived in Brazil on 18th April 1978, and was assigned to Balsas, in the south of Maranhão, at the episcopal seat of Msgr. Rino Carlesi. Brother Bernardino was immediately put in charge of construction. He remained in Balsas until June 1982, when he returned to Portugal, assigned to the community of Aveiro, as bursar. In July 1986

he was bursar of the novitiate community of Santarém. In 1988 he returned to Balsas, still assigned to construction. Then he went to Maracacumé (1994) and to Pastor Bons (October 1994-June 1997), before returning to his homeland in July 1997, to the novitiate of Santarém as bursar. In 2001, he returned to Balsas, but assigned to the Pastoral Area of Potosi. In January 2005 he went to Rome for a refresher course. In July he was back in Brazil, in the parish of Teresina, where there was a Center for the Elderly and Sick, in charge of the maintenance of the house.

In 2008 he was still in Balas but moved in 2011 to Vila Nova de Famalicão where he was involved with the Christian communities that he encouraged with celebrations of the Word. In 2013 he returned permanently to Portugal, first to Santarém, then to Viseu.

Both in Portugal and in Brazil, Brother Bernardino was very sensitive to social problems: he understood the hard life of the people. In a letter written to a confrere from Balsas, we read: «Social problems – first of all poverty – have grown, not only in Balsas, but throughout the immense country of Brazil». He worked that people might grow in faith and hope in the God of History.

In his later years, he meditated at length on his missionary life and wrote down his reflections in a volume he entitled *Trajetória de uma vida (The Path of a Life)*. Here are some extracts: “I have fond memories of all the people I met on the mission. I am not afraid to say that I learned a lot from the northeasterners of Balsas. [...] The Mission is this: if you give, you receive, and a lot. Because the principle holds that every human being is ‘similar’ to others: he lives by receiving and giving, within the great set of ever-widening circles that, in the end, include all of humanity.” And again: “As we approach maturity and reflect on our past life, we realise that there are forces of destruction always active within us and around us. We see that selfishness prevails over altruism, that pride is greedy for power and success, and that human fragility is in itself insurmountable. Therefore, it is with the discovery of ourselves that we realise the absolute necessity of a salvation that can only come to us from above. [...] To be ‘justified’ – to use religious language – means to reconcile oneself with what God has done, and therefore with history and with one’s own past, with one’s own life and death, so that it is once again possible to have confidence in the future. By finding in our past the ‘traces’ of God’s saving passage in our history, we are able to speak with full knowledge of the facts of God’s redemptive action in history.”

Brother Bernardino spent the last years of his long life in the Comboni community of Viseu, with the serenity of one who continued to be a

missionary even in old age. He died on 31st January 2025, surrounded by the prayers and love of his brothers. His body now rests in the Rio Caldo cemetery. (*Father Fernando Domingues, mccj*)

LET US PRAY FOR OUR BELOVED DEAD

THE FATHER: Jino Wikole, of the scholastic Adrabo Jerry (UG).

THE MOTHERS: Maria Amélia, of Father Joaquim José Moreira da Silva (P); Caroline, of Father Simtokena Sa'akaha Baènyem (Kevin) (DSP).

THE SISTERS: Adelheid, of Father Sebastian Hopfgartner (DSP); Ruth, of Father Vicent Turinawe (EC); Sr Luz María, of Father Aurelio Cervantes Fajardo (M); Highisti Haile, of Father Tesfaghiorghis Hailè Berhane (ER).

THE COMBONI MISIONARY SISTERS: Sr. Pia Rosaria Antonelli; Sr. Pia Clementina Baldessari; Sr. M. Hakima Emmanuel Mikhael; Sr. Adhanom Luciana.