

# COMBONI MISSION

*Autumn 2024*

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# COMBONI MISSION

Autumn 2024

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## From the Editor

# Promoting Mission by promoting 'Comboni Mission'

The Holy Father reminds us in his message for World Mission Day (calling upon inspiration from the parable of the wedding banquet): "Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find" (Mt.22 v9) to keep alive the flame of preaching the gospel in today's world. This is the primary task of the Church!

You can catch up on his message on page 11 and reflect on how you too can further the work of evangelisation. Pope Francis from October 2 – 27 will gather bishops, religious, laity at the Vatican for the meeting of the Synod always seeking to involve all the Church as the People of God. Setting out to be a less clerical-led Church and a more collaborative ministry of women, laity, bishops, priests, religious priests and nuns. When we consider declining numbers of church-goers and faith motivated Christians then we are called to work and pray for more vocations to the active ministry - both lay and religious. Let us remember to do this during these days of the Synod!

Following on from the message of the Holy Father we are reminded then of our call to spread the Good News also here in Europe as worldwide. Mission in Europe has also become a challenge for our own Congregation. We see it also in the increasing number of clergy coming here from other countries to take up parish ministry and become part of this mission in Europe. They are most welcome but I always ask myself what about our own laity and their greater involvement in the running of parishes.? Perhaps our Bishops have been slow to incentivize this basic mission of all Christians. The tendency

seems to be the decreasing number of churchgoers and living out of their faith. Whilst serving our mission at home by promoting Justice and Peace initiatives, prison care, parish work, we must not lose sight of our big mission "to go out".

Helping us to promote our European and worldwide mission is also through the publication of our own missionary magazine 'Comboni Mission'. Many of our benefactors through the media of our magazine have become acquainted and prayed and worked for our missionaries in

many parts of the world. The sad news is that readers and subscribers to our magazine have also been declining. Could I suggest for our readers "to go out" and invite a friend, a fellow parishioner, a neighbour to join in our supporter's group by taking up a copy of our magazine and become a true

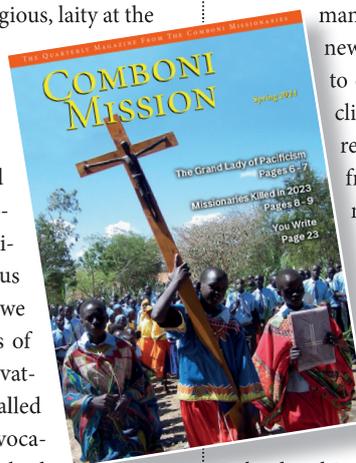
Friend of the Comboni Missionaries? This would be a wonderful and generous gesture. On weekly Mission Appeal work throughout the UK, Northern

Ireland and Ireland our priests present the magazine as an admirable and practical way of supporting, through prayer and giving, the poor and needy both at home and abroad!

Can we take up this challenge?



Fr. John



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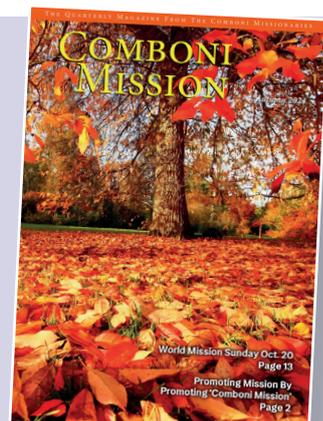
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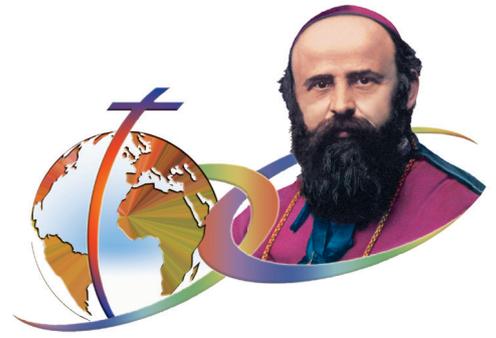


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# Getting to know the *Comboni* *Missionaries*



## ***“I love life and I like to repeat that life is beautiful!”***

Father Manuel João Pereira Correia, a Comboni missionary, has been living for 14 years with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a disease he tries to tackle with missionary spirit, serenity and the “gift of a smile”. Br Tomek Basinski, a Polish Comboni missionary, gave him a short interview, which we publish below.

### **How did your missionary vocation come about?**

My missionary vocation... was born with me! Ever since I was a child, I felt the desire to be a priest, perhaps due to the influence of my mother who, when I was very small, would ask me during Mass: “Manuelino, wouldn’t you like to be a priest?”. This desire grew with me, so much so that when they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would answer with conviction: ‘I want to be a priest!’ My colleagues and some family members laughed at me, but the dream remained alive.

When I was ten years old, in primary school, a Comboni missionary came and spoke to us enthusiastically about the missionary vocation. When he finished his speech, he asked us who wanted to go to Africa with him. No one raised their hand. Not even me, out of shyness. The teacher, who perhaps sensed that I could be a ‘candidate’, called me during the break and introduced me to that vocational promoter. A few months later, I was accepted into



*Father Manuel João Pereira Correia, Comboni missionary.*

the seminary. And so, my vocation as a Comboni priest was born.

I must emphasise that the decision to give my definitive ‘yes’ to the Lord did not come from a clarification of my doubts, but from an intimate conviction that, even if the future revealed that my decision had been rash or even wrong, the Lord would

give meaning to my story. This conviction became a ‘promise of meaning’ for me: “I will always be with you to give meaning to your life!”. This promise has always accompanied me and illuminated the difficult moments of my life.

A few days before my ordination, my father revealed to me that, at the moment

of my conception (I am the first-born son), my parents had made a kind of prayer or 'consecration': "O Lord, if our first child is a boy, we offer him to you as a priest!"

He added that he had not told me this before so as not to condition me in my choice.

There is also another confidence of my mother's that moved me deeply, but I keep it jealously only for myself! In a way, I see myself in Jeremiah's vocation, with his doubts, fears and shyness, but called by God from the womb!

**You worked in different communities and countries until something happened in 2010 that forced you to return to Europe and stay there. What happened?**

I started having difficulty walking and I wondered what it was. At first, I thought it was lack of exercise. In the evenings, after I finished my activities, I started cycling. When it became clear that it was something else, I went to see a neurologist, who advised me to return immediately to my country, Portugal, for tests and gave me a letter in a sealed envelope to present to a specialist. When I got home, I opened it and read the verdict. Probable diagnosis: amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). In Lisbon, this diagnosis was confirmed to me. When I asked the doctor what the evolution of the disease would be, he replied: "Very simple, first you will walk with crutches, then in a wheelchair, then..."

I thanked him for his frankness and left. I went back to Africa (Togo) to finish the last months of my service as head of the Comboni missionaries in West Africa (Togo, Ghana and Benin) and, at the end of the year, I returned to Europe.

**How did you react when you got the doctor's diagnosis?**

The first night I cried a little, I confess, but then the Lord gave me a grace I did not expect: a great serenity, which has always accompanied me. Of course, at first, I wondered why this misfortune had happened to me, but I immediately gave myself the answer: "And why shouldn't it have happened to me? Am I privileged?"

I often thought about when I would be completely trapped in my body, but one certainty gave me peace: "I will not be alone. The Lord will be a prisoner within me!". I also thought about the possibility



*Fr Joao Manuel as a young priest in his mission*

of being completely isolated from external reality, but another conviction grew within me: "I will always have the possibility of living in the inner world that dwells in the cathedral of my heart!"

**Your ministry has certainly changed as your illness has progressed...**

Yes, absolutely. At first, I expected to live, at most, a few years. In fact, I have seen friends die of the same illness. Since the Lord has given me a few more years (more than twelve years have passed since that moment!), I thought I would give my small contribution in the field of ongoing formation of the confreres, creating a blog and sharing formation material with them. As long as my situation allowed it, I offered to collaborate with some groups, giving my testimony and cultivating friendships.

**You once said that your wheelchair has become a pulpit for you.... What did you mean by that?**

I truly believe that my wheelchair is the pulpit God has given me to proclaim the Word. I believe that our 'cross' is the most appropriate place to proclaim the Word. I see myself as the prophet Jonah in the belly of the whale, leading me where God wants me to go. I sail in the sea of life, between its two shores. From one eye of the whale, I look at life on this shore, from the other eye I glimpse the other shore that awaits us, in the mist of faith and hope.

**Every time I think of you, I see a serene and smiling man. Where does this joy of yours come from?**

From the serenity that has accompanied me since the beginning of my illness, and this serenity is a gift from God. I am sure



*Father Manuel João Pereira Correia (second from right), in Togo.*

of it, because I was quite worried about health problems, which I did not lack in the mission. Every day, I ask the Lord for a smile.

**As of 2018, you are completely paralysed. How do you experience dependence on others?**

It is my way of living my vow of poverty: being in need and having to ask for everything! But it is also a way of cultivating gratitude for every little thing. Besides thanking God for all the people who generously help me, I always try to reciprocate with a smile on my lips and a blessing in my heart. After all, it is very easy because everyone loves me and pampers me!

**You are motionless, yet you manage to communicate with others, as you do now with me.**

Yes, I communicate mainly with my eyes, the only part of my body that I can still move. With my eyes I write, thanks to a computer with special software that ‘reads’ the movements of my eyes. One of the many wonders of technology!

**How do you live your missionary vocation?**

I love life and I like to say that life is beautiful! I try to transmit this sense of wonder to the people around me. I continue to be interested in and follow the life of our world, society, Church and mission. I do this out of passion and to continuously update my blog ([www.comboni2000.org](http://www.comboni2000.org)).

**Sometimes people who experience illness and suffering feel sorrow and anger towards God. What is your relationship with God today?**

In sickness I discovered God’s generosity! For some years, it

impressed me that the Lord visited me like a thief. I felt it was a painful visit. Spontaneously, I asked him not to visit me like a thief, but to come like a friend, and knock on my door, even as an inconvenient friend, to the point of forcing me to open it, either out of friendship or force! When the Lord visited me with illness, I spontaneously exclaimed: “Lord, you are a thief!” Every time, he took something away from me. Then, I discovered that he is a very special thief: He never takes anything away from us without leaving us something more precious!

**What would you say to people who have lost hope and are unhappy in their suffering and illness?**

I would say that life is always an opportunity! Since the beginning of my illness, a conviction has accompanied me: life never closes one door without opening another. But we are often so stubbornly attached to this closed door that we do not realise that another one is opening in the meantime. In the beginning, illness was for me like a dark wall that completely cut off all horizon perspectives. The conviction that life is always an opportunity led me to look at this wall with different eyes and to glimpse a door – hitherto invisible to my eyes – that offered me a new vision of life, deeper, wider and more beautiful, I dare say! Naturally, faith helped me in this process. Of course, there are particularly tragic situations that are difficult to accept and handle. For the believer, it is the hour of hope and faith in the triumph of life, of which the cross and death are the gestation. To the non-believer, I would say to trust the instinct of the beauty of life. This, too, is a path of hope that leads us, albeit unconsciously, to Life!

*Interview by Br Tomasz Basiński  
Comboni missionary*

# Sister Mary Lonergan, R.I.P.

Sr. Mary Lonergan was one of us, Comboni Missionary Sisters, here in Chiswick. In fact, she had been here in Chiswick since about 1997. In many ways, Mary was rather quiet, and she was a rather private person. She was well known to many people, particularly those with whom she had contact through donations. She was in charge of the Sisters' economy for many years, perhaps about twenty, and she took her job seriously and responsibly.



*Liturgy of the Celebration of the Requiem Mass*

It was in the last few years that we could see the toll that her ill-health was having on her. It was gradual, but slow. Mary faced all with stoicism, never giving in to self-pity or bad humour.

Sr. Mary Lonergan was born on 1st December 1941 to a devout Catholic family in Clonmel, County Tipperary, Ireland. She was the fourth child of six – one boy and five girls. She had met the Verona Sisters (as we used to be called) when two of our Sisters went to her town, Clonmel, to speak about the missions abroad and the apostolate of the Sisters. After leaving secondary school, Mary applied to join the Convent, was accepted, and three years' later she made her first Profession on 3rd May 1964. Her elder sister, Frances, had already joined the same convent. And lo and behold, another of her sisters, Magdalen, also joined a year later in 1962. Three of them! Frances later decided to leave, but Mary and Magdalen remained.

What was the reaction of their parents? They accepted all these callings in faith as a gift from God. Mary was good at school, and she was quiet. She had friends and they were good friends. Later, in the convent, Mary trained as a nurse and midwife and was missioned to Uganda. She was to spend nearly thirty years there in our Hospital in Kalongo Hospital in northern Uganda. Her sister Magdalen is still with us here in our community in Chiswick. Magdalen also trained as a nurse and midwife, and was missioned to Kenya, then as a family counsellor in the Catechetical Office in Dubai.

Mary kept in touch with a wide range of people, both from Uganda, Italy, and also here in UK. She loved talking about her time in Uganda when she was working with Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli (Comboni Missionary Priest and Doctor) whose cause for canonisation is going ahead.

In Chiswick we often had younger Comboni Sisters coming from abroad; Mary was always willing to help them fill in documents, as well as introducing them to various new things they found in UK. She was a wise person and was often called upon to give advice on how to use gadgets and how to mend them, plus many other things. She was certainly a useful person to have around.

Unfortunately, in 1997 she was diagnosed with cancer and had several surgeries. Mary never grumbled about her health issues and faced everything with calm and serenity. She never felt sorry for herself. This was something we all admired in



*Sr Magdalen with her sister Sr. Mary*



Sr Mary (far right back row) with other English sisters in Gulu, Uganda 1972

Mary! God bless her. She faced all with courage. In fact, her 'Calvary' was long, far longer than any of us had expected.

Mary had the continuous support of her close family who came to see her quite often: her two sisters Kitty and Breda, and their families. We Sisters were always pleased to see them as we realised how much it meant to Mary (and Magdalen her sister with us).

We would also like to express our appreciation to the doctors

and specialists who treated her in Charing Cross Hospital on several occasions, as well as the District Nurses and Carers who showed great care and love – every day and several times a day as well. Thanks also to the Priests of the Parish - always very supportive and understanding.

Last but not least - God bless us all, the Sisters of the community - who watched and cared for Mary day and night in recent weeks and months.

And we thank the Lord for the grace of knowing and loving our Sister Mary.

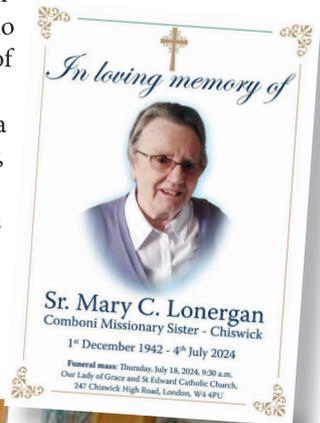
Mary's funeral came two weeks later: a solemn Mass in our parish church in Chiswick. We, Sisters, were all there, together with many parishioners, plus some family members who had travelled from Ireland and Germany.

It was a sombre occasion because we felt the heaviness of the moment. Four Comboni Missionaries concelebrated. They gave a wonderful testimony to the catholicity of our missionary calling. They hail from Ireland, Eritrea, Italy and Mexico. Our Sisters too are from various parts of the world.

Sr. Mary was buried in Chiswick New Cemetery alongside our other deceased Sisters from the past, dating from the 1960's until now. Many names, many memories and precious people; Sisters who had given their lives for the service of the missions abroad.

The convent in Chiswick hosted a reception afterwards for family, friends and well-wishers.

We are asking the Lord to show us his mercy and grant eternal rest to Sr. Mary - and peace and good will to all of us, still on our journey to Him.



Sr Magdalen (centre) with family members at Chiswick for the funeral

# Clare's Moment of Madness

**Clare Beahan an active member of the Comboni Sacred Heart Church at Sunningdale recounts her adventure at skydiving to raise funds for the Nekamte school project in Ethiopia. A wonderful feat for a wonderful cause!**

**W**hat would make an 84-year-old grandmother want to dive out of a plane at 12,000ft? In my case an undiminished sense of adventure and a desire to try something I have always thought looked amazing. It all started unbelievably at a vineyard. I was on a wine tasting visit with my Zoom friends from Sacred Heart Church (SHC). We meet once a week on Zoom for a chat and go on trips together. At lunch we were talking about fundraising for Nekamte, a project to build a school in Ethiopia and I casually asked if they thought a skydive would be a good fundraiser. "Oh yes" they cried, "but who would do it?!" "I would" I replied. I hasten to add I had not yet had any wine. Then the hard work started.

I asked my three children if they would do it with me, but only my younger daughter Emma agreed as she wanted to raise money for Cancer Research being a Cancer survivor herself. Our first job was to find a venue and settled on Headcorn Airfield as it is in Kent where Emma lives. Regarding practicalities I had to get a medical certificate which my GP provided free of charge as his contribution, but with the observation, "yes you can do it but I

think you are nuts" Then the setting up of a just giving page and Fr David, Priest in Charge at Sacred Heart Church, produced a poster of me to promote my fundraising adventure.

Thanks to the generous support of the Church congregation, the Bowls Club, neighbours and family and friends I have managed to raise £4000 for the school.

Now for the jump, Sunday April 7th the first date. As it approached, I had little flutters of excitement then owing to bad weather it had to be cancelled! So, we re-book for Sunday May 19th, Pentecost, thinking that surely things would I go right this time. The Zoomers set out to support us, we get a text changing our jump time by 2 hours but all was not OK. On arriving at Check - in we were told the aircraft had a fuel leak so our jump was cancelled again and we were asked to re-book. The Holy Spirit must have been taking care of us. On to June 16th, once again bad weather in the form of very high winds stopped our jump. Fortunately, this time we hadn't left home before the decision to abort the flight was taken. We set another date, Saturday 3rd of August but on that morning, I received a text



Poster advertising the event

message: there is low cloud, and they can't say if it will be possible and suggest we rearrange again! Emma and I decided it was time to put up a fight I was 83 when I started this adventure and now, I am 84, I made the point time was of the essence. I phoned Headcorn and after considerable insistence we were told they would contact us when jumping started which they did later that morning. It was agreed that we should make our way to Headcorn and hope for the best. Unfortunately, our supporters decided not to make the 2-hour journey because of the uncertainty of it happening and this turned out to be a lucky omen.

Emma and I arrived just before 1pm, checked in and were sent straight for our briefing. Things were looking positive at last. There are electronic boards around



*Above: A carefree Clare in mid-air*

*Left: Support group Chris, Kate, Rosie and Charlie lead the cheers.*



First sight was a cloudy white and it was very cold and noisy. There was no real sensation of speed although we were falling at 120mph. I felt exhilarated. On falling through the cloud the next thing, I felt a huge tug up as the parachute opened, then it was a wonderful panorama of the countryside with the bonus of a rainbow, and I felt in awe and humbled by the beauty of it all.

fastened my harness to his and made sure my goggles were tight. Then take off, Oh the excitement, I wasn't daunted at all as we seemed to climb fairly quickly to 12,000 ft. Perhaps, at this point I should have been praying but my whole attention was focussed on the exit which suddenly opened. Three people went out before me, one of whom was my camera man, so I had to follow quickly after, which Henk made sure I did.

Slowly we drifted down and then as we reached the height of the treetops, Henk asked me to prepare for landing by raising and extending my legs and we gently touched down and it was all over.

the venue to show when you are likely to be called. Only 2 flights ahead of us. We saw the flight before us, take off and the jumpers flutter down. Hurrah we are next and then Oh No! a Tannoy announcement, rain clouds are approaching there will be a delay.

Our small support group of my son, daughter in law and grandchildren arrive and it is now about 2:30 pm so we wait and wait nerves jangling, Won't it happen? Suddenly about 5:40pm, action all stations! Time to scramble, we are called to the meeting point to be fitted with overalls and harness and then we had to practise the landing by being strung up on a bungee like a baby in a bouncer. Then before we knew it, we were walking out to the plane, a short inelegant climb into the interior which was very small with only two benches one each side. You had to straddle the bench and Henk my dive buddy



*Clare with daughter Emma proudly showing their achievement certificate*

# Pope's Mission Day message: October 20.

## 'Go and invite everyone to the banquet' (Mt.22: 9)

In his 2024 World Mission Day Message, Pope Francis says that the Church's mission is directed towards all peoples and requires the participation of every baptised Christian.



Pope Francis invites everyone

iStock: piola666

In the text, the Pope reflects on the Gospel parable of the Wedding Banquet, where the king tells his servants "Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find".

### 'Go and invite'

"In the king's command to his servants," Pope Francis writes, "we find two words that express the heart of the mission: the verbs 'to go out' and 'to invite'."

The Pope reflected on each of these words in turn.

"Mission," he said, "is a tireless going out to all men and women, in order to invite them to encounter God and enter into communion with him," just as Jesus, "the Good Shepherd and messenger of the Father, went out in search of the lost sheep".

Turning to consider the king's exhortation to "invite", the Pope said that "here we can see another, no less important, aspect of the mission entrusted by God."

"As we can imagine," he said, "the servants conveyed the king's invitation with urgency but also with great respect and kindness."

Christians today, the Pope stressed, should do the same: they are called to preach the Gospel with "joy, magnanimity and benevolence that are the fruits of the Holy Spirit within them."

### The marriage feast

The reference to the marriage feast, meanwhile, the Pope said, brings to mind two other dimensions of mission: the eschatological (that is, the dimension having to do with the end times) and the Eucharistic.

The king's banquet, Pope Francis said, stands in for the heavenly banquet: "it is an image of ultimate salvation in the Kingdom of God."

Referring to the fact that many early Christians believed the Second Coming of Christ to be imminent, the Pope said that, for them, "missionary zeal had a powerful eschatological dimension. They sensed the

urgency of the preaching of the Gospel"

"Today too", he stressed, "it is important to maintain this perspective."

At the same time, however, the Pope noted, the next life is "anticipated even now in the banquet of the Eucharist".

Thus, he said, "the invitation to the eschatological banquet that we bring to everyone in our mission of evangelization is intrinsically linked to the invitation to the Eucharistic table, where the Lord feeds us with his word and with his Body and Blood."

### 'Everyone'

The final portion of the Pope's message concerned the fact that the king extends his invitation to 'everyone'.

"This is the heart of mission," Pope Francis stressed, "that 'all', excluding no one."

Christ's disciples, he said, "have always had a heartfelt concern for all persons, whatever their social or even moral status." He noted that, in the parable, the king orders the servants to gather "all whom they found, both good and bad", as well as "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame".

And, Pope Francis stressed, "the mission for all requires the commitment of all." This implies, he said, that, in order to become more truly missionary, the Church must also become more synodal: "Synodality is essentially missionary and, vice versa, mission is always synodal. - (fraternal collaboration)".



Mission is of all

iStock: Kutredrig

# MOZAMBIQUE:

## ‘Wreckage is all that’s left’ in wake of Islamist insurgency



Source: Aid to the Church in Need

A bishop from Mozambique has described the “painful” suffering of Christian communities attacked by extremist militias responsible for thousands of deaths.

Bishop António Juliase of Pemba Diocese told Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) that as soon as it became possible to visit Christians targeted by Islamist terrorists in regions affected by the armed conflict, he “departed immediately”.

Bishop Juliase wrote that he “managed to celebrate Mass and administer the Sacrament of Confirmation in the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Nangololo” - with the faithful gathered around the ruins of a church that “had been destroyed and vandalised” during an attack in 2020. He added: “Everywhere I went we celebrated Mass this way, in the open, among the ruins of the churches... It is very painful to see the ruins of buildings which, for so long, were an expression of people’s faith. Now, not much is left besides the

wreckage.”

Violent clashes between insurgents seeking to establish a hard-line Islamic state and the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces have been ongoing in Cabo Delgado Province, northern Mozambique since October 2017.

More than 5,000 people have died and hundreds of thousands have been displaced as a result of the fighting.

The bishop told ACN: “Everywhere there is fear and uncertainty about the future. There is still great suffering. Many people are still living in camps for the internally displaced, though with less humanitarian assistance nowadays.

“Without safety, people are afraid to go and work their fields, which are often a few kilometres away from the villages, as they are afraid of being attacked”. He added that food “production is low” because of the fear of further attacks, “which leads to hunger, because people don’t produce enough food, and also because the other

services don’t work properly”.

Bishop Juliase highlighted: “It is through faith in God and the hope that one day this war will end, that these people manage to endure their suffering. My experience during this visit was comforting, because despite the great difficulties people are living with, they are strong in the Faith, and the Lord has blessed them with his grace.”

ACN’s support in Mozambique includes emergency aid, pastoral assistance and counselling for IDPs (internally displaced persons), as well as formation and subsistence support for priests and religious.

Bishop Juliase concluded: “I am so grateful to all those who support us and allow us to be close to the people.

“Aid to the Church in Need has helped our priests in this way, so that they can provide spiritual support to those who suffer, and I would like to express my thanks to all those who have contributed, making this possible.”



# Holy Land church leaders appeal for rapid ceasefire to end suffering and avert larger war

## CHURCH NEWS

The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem have expressed their grave concern over the heightened tensions that place the entire region on the precipice of full-blown war and appeal for a negotiated agreement for peace.

In a joint statement on Monday, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, express their need to “once again” voice their grave concerns over the dire direction the war have taken.

They note that “despite repeated calls for the de-escalation of violence from ourselves and the international community, the situation in our beloved Holy Land has only continued to deteriorate.”

“Millions of refugees remain displaced, their homes inaccessible, destroyed, or beyond repair. Hundreds of innocents are weekly killed or severely wounded by indiscriminate attacks. Countless others continue to endure hunger, thirst, and infectious disease. Among these are those languishing in captivity on all sides, who additionally face the risk of ill-treatment from their captors. Still others, far from the battlefields, have suffered unchecked attacks against their

villages, pastures, and farmlands,” the statement says.

The signatories note that throughout all this, ceasefire negotiations have dragged on interminably. “The leaders of the warring parties seemingly more concerned with political considerations than bringing an end to the pursuit of death and destruction,” they write.

The Church leaders go on to note that these “repeated delays, coupled with other provocative acts, have only served to heighten tensions to the point where we stand at the precipice of a full-blown regional war.”

Thus, they say, again they “implore the leaders of the warring parties to heed our calls and those of the international community (UNSC Resolution 2735) to reach a rapid agreement for a ceasefire resulting in the end of the war, the release of all captives, the return of the displaced, the treatment of the sick and wounded, the relief of those who hunger and thirst, and the rebuilding of all public and private civilian structures that have been destroyed.”

The Patriarchs and Church leaders also call upon political leaders, “in concert with the international community, to

take up without delay diplomatic discussions addressing longstanding grievances between them, leading to concrete steps that promote a just and lasting peace in our region through the adoption of an internationally legitimate two-state solution.”

In their statement, the Patriarchs and Church leaders do not neglect to express special concern for Christian communities in the conflict zone: “These include those taking refuge in Gaza at St Porphyrios Orthodox Church and Holy Family Catholic Church, as well as the courageous staff of al-Ahli Anglican Hospital and the patients under their care.”

“We pledge to them our continued prayers and support both now and at the conclusion of the war, when we will labour together to rebuild and strengthen the Christian presence in Gaza, as well as throughout the Holy Land,” they write.

Finally, they issue an appeal “to Christians and all those of goodwill around the world to promote a vision of life and peace throughout our war-torn region, recalling Christ’s words Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).



## Interview with Fr John Paul Pezzi as he sets out once more for a new mission challenge at 79 years of age!

On 25 August, two Comboni missionaries left for the mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Italian Father Gian Paolo Pezzi (pictured), who will be 79 years old in December, and the Peruvian doctor Father Hernán Romero Arias, 69. We asked Father Gian Paolo, who has worked in a dozen countries on three continents, how he feels when he sets off on another mission. Here is his answer.

**W**hen I set off on a new mission, questions always come to my mind. Why leave again? This anchor awakens a childhood memory in me. I was seven or eight years old when the tiny bar in the oratory of the village opened, and it was mission day. I had committed myself in catechism class to give my tip for the missions. The young people in the bar were so effective with their advertising that they managed to sell me the



first lemonade of my life. When I stood in line with the other children, I could only put an empty hand in the offering basket. I confessed my “betrayal” to the priest and expected a lecture. In his gruff but fatherly tone, he told me: “It happens to everyone that they are a little cowardly in life. Remember when God asks much more of you.” These words stayed with me until I wrote in my first article during my studies that being a missionary is only a radical response to the call of baptism: “Are you renouncing the temptations of the world to live in the freedom of the children of God? Do you believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, in the Holy Spirit, in the Church, in the communion of saints, in the forgiveness of sins, in the resurrection of the flesh, and in eternal life?” To live this profession of

faith, says St. Teresa, means that we deceive ourselves if we are “slow and miserly to give ourselves completely to Him”. Being a missionary is part of every baptized person, it is baptism that sends us out into the streets of the world to witness to faith in the Risen Christ and makes us evangelizers. And that sometimes means a “rigorous self-separation” from what we love and appreciate most.

### **And here is the second ritual question that I don't always dare to answer: Why do you leave when there is so much need here too?**

When I returned home after my expulsion from Burundi, my first mission, I found myself in a remote village in the Roman hills. The elderly priest looked ascetic, the congregation consisted of poor peasants, the lunch was meagre, and the young clergyman who was there showed signs of impatience. Finally, the pastor pulled out a larger sum and said: “This is my personal contribution, which is in addition to that of the parish”. The young man's eyes widened so much that he drew the elderly pastor's attention to it: “What we give to others,” he explained, “is not a gift, but a reversal. If you want to receive, you have to give”.

We were not far from the splendour of the Vatican, and these words reminded me of what Paul VI wrote in his encyclical “The Proclamation of the Gospel.” “When the most unknown preacher, missionary, catechist proclaims the Gospel, passes on the faith, administers a sacrament even when he is alone, he performs an act of the Church,” he acts in the name of the Church. The evangelized Church sends out to evangelize, transmitting the mandate she has received to proclaim the Gospel. A mature Christian community is open to the world, its interior life – prayer, listening to the Word, fraternal love, broken bread – acquires its full meaning when they become witnesses, when they become the proclamation of the Good

News. There is the same logic in the words of this parish priest as in Paul VI and in the message that Pope Francis repeats: the missionary sets out precisely because there is so much need here. He does it in the name of the church, especially his Christian community, perhaps his remote village somewhere. Since he does not go to do his work, but that of the Church, to speak not his words but the words of the Christian community, he affirms that it is only by giving that one receives, that one is forgiven by forgiving, that one is raised to eternal life by dying.

### **And here is the question that a nun with whom I worked at the University of Esmeraldas asked me bluntly: it may be true what you say, but isn't it a bit crazy to leave at your age?**

We were once a crowd of altar boys who were already dressed for the solemn Mass when the deputy parish priest entered the sacristy with a missionary. He called us together and asked, as if he were doing it on our behalf: What do you need to be a missionary? That young Comboni missionary whom I met almost thirty years later as an old man in Africa answered: He needs nine degrees of madness and one degree of holiness. To which the priest replied in his joking tone: “Then take these boys, they almost all have the nine degrees of madness. It will be up to you to increase the degree of holiness in them.”

Friendship with those who leave reminds us, on the one hand, that the missionary obligation belongs to every baptized person, even if not everyone can leave, and on the other hand, it makes us aware that it is the prayer of the Church and of the Christian community that makes a certain human folly, necessary for the adventure of proclaiming the Gospel, become more holiness. Foolishness in the eyes of the world, but wisdom and power in the hands of God.

# SUDAN

**War in Sudan and the ongoing sufferings of the Comboni Missionaries with the people in Sudan. We hear from The Comboni missionaries as they are obliged to leave El Obeid mission to move to Kosti**

**Last Saturday, 20 July, our three confreres of the community of El Obeid have left the mission in order to reach Kosti. This decision has been taken by the provincial superior, in light of the recent developments of the war, particularly the fall of Fula (West Kordofan), as well as Sennar an Sinja. As a matter of fact, the area of conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the regular army is expanding rather than shrinking, with serious consequences on security and mobility.**

**A**long with our confreres, also the last religious who were in El Obeid have left too: four Missionaries of Charity and two Sisters of the Sacred Heart. In the town there are now only the bishop and three diocesan priests, with the few Christians who have not yet left.

We accompany with our prayers our confreres in Sudan and ask from the Lord the grace of the end of all fighting.

## **A letter of the El Obeid Community**

*“Those who are sowing in tears will sing when they reap” (Ps 126:5)*

At the end of June, we were all immersed in pastoral activities in El Obeid. We had also planned first communions and confirmations in two chapels, to be administered by the bishop, Mgr. Yunan Tombe Trille Kuku Andali: in Yaybat, on 7th July,

and in the church of St Daniel Comboni, in the Hai Salaam locality, on 14th July. Meanwhile, the Comboni community in El Obeid was busy with catechism classes in Tayba and helping diocesan priests in ministry in the Cathedral parish.

The situation in El Obeid had not changed from the previous months: electricity was still out; there was a shortage of water; prices in the local market showed no sign of decreasing but continued to





Map of Sudan showing El Obeid. iStock : PeterHermesFurian

skyrocket; and people were struggling to survive.

Things, however, had changed elsewhere. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had intensified their military operations near the town of El Fasher (600 km west of El Obeid) and occupied the town of El Fula (300 km south-west), thus coming to control all communication routes not only to the Nuba Mountains, but also to Kosti, Kadugli and El Nahud, three locations already under their control.

After taking control of Wad Medani (620 km east of El Obeid and 200 km south of Khartoum), the RSF also sought to control the communication routes with South Sudan. In recent days they have pushed as far as Sennar (100 km south of Wad Medani) and Sinja (66 km further south).

The question arose: how long would it take the RSF to attack and take El Obeid?

The provincial superior, Father Diego

Dalle Carbonare, who was keeping an eye on the situation through constant contact with us, seeing the degeneration of the situation, began to consider our possible departure from El Obeid.

Based on the assumption that the RSF were gradually closing every possible avenue of communication and concerned about our safety, after consulting the Provincial Council and the General Council, on 30th June he gave us the order to move from El Obeid to Kosti as soon as possible. Those in charge of the sisters of the Sacred Heart and the Missionaries of Charity also decided to do the same.

On 1st July, we met with the bishop and the other priests and religious present in El Obeid, to plan the handover of the parish, and to study together how to complete some previously planned important pastoral events.

We decided that the departure would take place on 18th July. However, due to

the rain, we were forced to wait until Saturday 20th July. At 7 a.m. we all met in the square in front of the Cathedral to say 'see you soon' to Bishop Yunan and the priests.

To avoid RFS controls, we chose to take the desert road, from El Obeid to Doem (Ed Dueim), a town 130 km north of Kosti. The journey was good, until a few kilometres from Doem, when, already close to the Nile, we encountered an interminable series of marshes that put a strain on the car's engine. It was impossible to continue the journey. We were forced to wait until late Monday morning, 22nd July, when the mechanic managed to patch up the engine.

We did not encounter any problems in reaching Kosti. We were stopped several times at checkpoints, but we were always allowed to proceed with the journey. The local authorities continue to control the territory in their own way, but it is clear that the nation is without real authority. The military commanders themselves do not trust the information they receive from their colleagues.

On Monday afternoon, we reached Kosti, and after undergoing an onerous series of administrative formalities, with repeated document checks, we were able to embrace the confreres of the local Comboni community.

We left El Obeid with the decision to return as soon as the situation allows us to do so. Only the local clergy remained in El Obeid: Bishop Yunnan, Fr Abd Allah Hussein (Vicar General), Fr Charles Anikia and Deacon Karlo Luka. We are confident that the difficult and painful decision taken will help the Church of El Obeid to grow and set up a new way of proclaiming the Gospel.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus sends his disciples to proclaim the Good News carrying only a staff, a tunic and a pair of sandals on their feet (cf. Mk 6:8-9). The message behind this order is obvious: the true power of the Gospel is the Cross of the Risen Lord.

We believe that the mission belongs to God and that he – and he alone – will carry out his plan of salvation. We are merely humble servants of the Kingdom of God. Our joy comes from knowing that we are collaborating to make the seed of the Word bear fruit.

**Kosti, 25th July 2024**  
The Comboni community of El Obeid  
of the Kosti mission – Sudan



Migrants are not always welcomed: cf Mt 25 v.35  
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# international migrants day

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The title for the message of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) 2024 is “God walks with His people”. The day will be celebrated on Sunday, September 29, 2024 within the Catholic Church. The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DPIHD) is promoting a communication campaign in preparation for the WDMR2024 in which it invites all people of goodwill to organize initiatives with migrants, refugees, and vulnerable people.

## MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE 110th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES 2024

Dear brothers and sisters!

Last 29 October marked the conclusion of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This session allowed us to deepen our understanding of synodality as part of the Church’s fundamental vocation. “Synodality is mainly presented as a joint journey of the People of God and as a fruitful dialogue between the charisms and ministries at the service of the coming of the Kingdom” (Synthesis Report, Introduction).

Emphasizing the synodal dimension al-

lows the Church to rediscover its itinerant nature, as the People of God journeying through history on pilgrimage, “migrating”, we could say, toward the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 49). The biblical narrative of Exodus, depicting the Israelites on their way to the promised land, naturally comes to mind: a long journey from slavery to freedom prefiguring the Church’s journey toward her final encounter with the Lord.

Likewise, it is possible to see in the migrants of our time, as in those of every age, a living image of God’s people on their

way to the eternal homeland. Their journeys of hope remind us that “our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20).

The images of the biblical exodus and of migrants share several similarities. Like the people of Israel in the time of Moses, migrants often flee from oppression, abuse, insecurity, discrimination, and lack of opportunities for development. Similar to the Jews in the desert, migrants encounter many obstacles in their path: they are tried by thirst and hunger; they are



Migrants: God walks with his people

© Vatican Media

exhausted by toil and disease; they are tempted by despair.

Yet the fundamental reality of the Exodus, of every exodus, is that God precedes and accompanies his people and all his children in every time and place. God's presence in the midst of the people is a certainty of salvation history: "The Lord your God goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you" (Deut 31:6). For the people who came out of Egypt, this presence manifested itself in different forms: a pillar of cloud and fire showing and illuminating the way (cf. Ex 13:21), the meeting tent that protected the ark of the covenant, making God's closeness tangible (cf. Ex 33:7), the pole with the bronze serpent assuring divine protection (cf. Nm 21:8-9), manna and water (cf. Ex 16-17) as God's gifts to the hungry and thirsty people. The tent is a form of presence especially dear to the Lord. During David's reign, God chose to dwell in a tent, not a temple, so that he could walk with his people, "from tent to tent and from dwelling to dwelling" (1 Chr 17:5).

Many migrants experience God as their traveling companion, guide and anchor of salvation. They entrust themselves to him before setting out and seek him in times of need. In him, they find consolation in moments of discouragement. Thanks to him, there are good Samaritans along the way. In prayer, they confide their hopes to him. How many Bibles, copies of the Gospels, prayer books and rosaries accompa-

ny migrants on their journeys across deserts, rivers, seas and the borders of every continent!

God not only walks with his people, but also within them, in the sense that he identifies himself with men and women on their journey through history, particularly with the least, the poor and the marginalized. In this we see an extension of the mystery of the Incarnation.

For this reason, the encounter with the migrant, as with every brother and sister in need, "is also an encounter with Christ. He himself said so. It is he who knocks on our door, hungry, thirsty, an outsider, naked, sick and imprisoned, asking to be met and assisted" (Homily, Mass with Participants in the "Free from Fear" Meeting, Sacrofano, 15 February 2019). The final judgment in Matthew 25 leaves no doubt: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (v. 35); and again "truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me" (v. 40). Every encounter along the way represents an opportunity to meet the Lord; it is an occasion charged with salvation, because Jesus is present in the sister or brother in need of our help. In this sense, the poor save us, because they enable us to encounter the face of the Lord (cf. Message for the Third World Day of the Poor, 17 November 2019).

Dear brothers and sisters, on this day dedicated to migrants and refugees, let us unite in prayer for all those who have had

to leave their land in search of dignified living conditions. May we journey together with them, be "synodal" together, and entrust them, as well as the forthcoming Synod Assembly, "to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a sign of sure hope and consolation to the faithful People of God as they continue their journey" (XVI Ordinary General Assembly Synthesis Report: Proceeding Along the Journey).

#### Prayer

*God, Almighty Father,  
we are your pilgrim Church  
journeying towards the Kingdom of  
heaven.*

*We live in our homeland,  
but as if we were foreigners.  
Every foreign place is our home,  
yet every native land is foreign to us.  
Though we live on earth,  
our true citizenship is in heaven.  
Do not let us become possessive  
of the portion of the world  
you have given us as a temporary home.  
Help us to keep walking,  
together with our migrant brothers and  
sisters,  
toward the eternal dwelling you have  
prepared for us.*

*Open our eyes and our hearts  
so that every encounter with those in need  
becomes an encounter with Jesus, your  
Son and our Lord.  
Amen.*



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# SANCTUARY

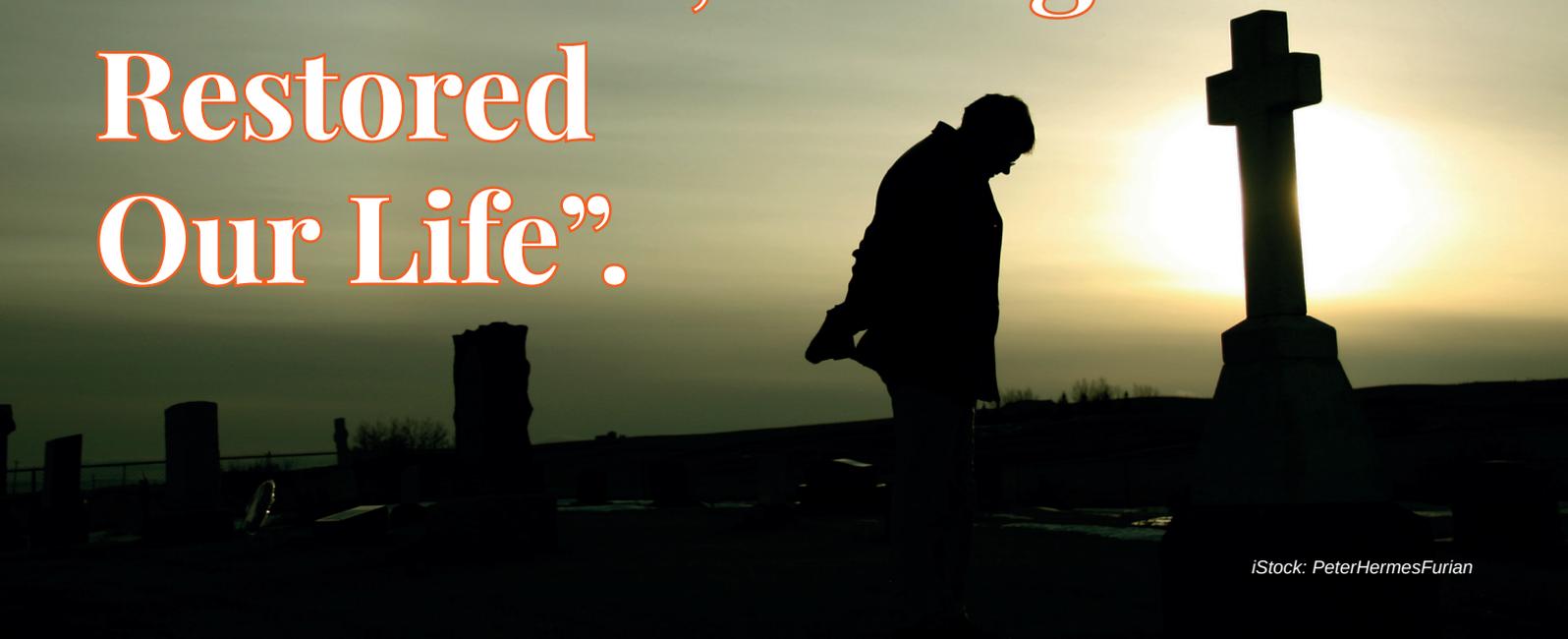
By Harvey Martin

In the silence of the empty church  
I gaze at the locked door of the tabernacle.  
Jesus is inside.

Outside I can hear the quiet hum of distant traffic.  
People driving past on their last minute  
shopping before the weekend break.  
They are unaware of the miracle that  
is hidden in the Sanctuary.  
The world carries on oblivious  
to the bread of the presence.  
It's not that they ignore Jesus;  
they simply do not know.  
Some walk their dogs, some cycle.  
Perhaps somewhere in the galaxy  
an astronaut gazes down at the Earth,

in awe and wonder;  
or mother and father are taken up  
in the birth of a new born.  
None consider the living bread hidden away.  
Perhaps an astronomer has just  
discovered a new star.  
He does not know the Creator  
of the Universe sits hidden in the marble box  
at the centre of the altar.  
The Bread of the Presence;  
the Bread of Eternal Life.

# “Dying You Destroyed Our Death, Rising You Restored Our Life”.



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## A brief reflection for the month of the Holy Souls

**N**ovember, the month of the holy souls. We are asked to remember the souls of the faithful departed in our prayers. All our parishes carefully prepare their prayer lists of names and intentions. It is a good and wholesome thought to pray for our deceased relatives and beloved friends.

Death is one of the greatest mysteries we all have to face, no one knows exactly the when and how when death will come knocking on the door. We have even been taught special prayers for a happy and good death: “Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you. Amen.

When we pray for the happy repose of the souls of the ones we love at a mass for

the dead, the priest ardently prays:” may so ...and...so rest in peace and rise in glory. “We say these words knowing full well our lord destroyed the stigma of death by rising from the dead on Easter Sunday morning. At death life will be changed, not ended. Indeed, death is just the beginning of eternal life.

We all fear death a little. At least because of the uncertainty of the time and way we shall die. We belong to God. We have come from his hands into this world. “Whether we live or whether we die. We are the lord’s,” says St. Paul. This was the man whom Christ had transformed since the flash of the blinding light of Damascus. Let’s concentrate on living well and leave our dying in the very capable hands of Christ the Risen lord of heaven and earth.

Simplicity of an open heart  
What gives insight and won't deceive  
The Holy Souls whom we bereave  
We know with God are set apart

Live life as if you're making art  
The Saints expound, so you retrieve  
Simplicity of an open heart  
What gives insight and won't deceive

Each day we're given a fresh start  
As sins are bestowed a reprieve  
Pardon's not something we achieve  
It's freely given when we impart  
Simplicity of an open heart

by Fr David Bohnsack mccj

# You Write



**Thank you once again for your most welcome letters. It reminds us that some people do read our missionary magazine! Reading today is becoming less and less a daily pleasure.**

**To encourage you all our readers: to let us know your thoughts and opinions, I will post here my address so that your comments come directly to our office!**

**Editor, Verona Fathers - Email: [jdcomboni@gmail.com](mailto:jdcomboni@gmail.com)  
London Road, Sunningdale SL5 0JY#, Berks, England**

Dear Fr John

I felt I must write to you and congratulate you on your two articles: Fr. Anthony Wolstenholme RIP on page 8; Bloodshed, Deaths and Broken Hearts – a very moving article – Hearts grieved by pain and the grief of suffering – it touched my heartstrings. Yes, tears must hang in the heart of Jesus as he looks down on Gaza and the West bank. I also appreciated the

lovely photo of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart Montmartre.

Also much appreciated the 'A seven-year-old questioning God' by Harvey Martin.

I just love the Comboni magazine and once again thanks for sending it

*Anne Marie Allen,  
Cheltenham*



Children in Gaza plead their cause

iStock



St Daniel Comboni

Dear Father,

A few months ago, we received a visit from a Comboni missionary at our Church here in Bognor Regis, when he delivered a most informative homily on the life of St Daniel Comboni and the subsequent work of the Comboni missionaries.

I picked up a booklet about the life of St Daniel and remained impressed by his perseverance and dedication. A truly humble servant of the Lord.

May God be with all your missionaries working in dangerous and difficult missions and let us thank the Lord for all the saints like St Daniel Comboni who continue to inspire us all!

*Yours sincerely, Elizabeth Anne Darby.*

Dear Comboni Missionaries,

I was visiting St Thomas' Church in Darlington last Sunday where I had the pleasure to listen to Fr. Melaku speak about your missionary work. His words were inspiring and I wish to send a donation to help further good works in the Lord's name. God bless you all.

*Anne Lenane, Norfolk*

Dear Father,

Thank you for sending the magazine so regularly. It really does offer an insight into the always dangerous and difficult life of a missionary in today's volatile world. Much appreciated.

*With many thanks and good wishes Peter O'Sullivan*

Dear Father,

Please accept this offering towards your Comboni mission magazine.

I got to hear of the Verona fathers (Comboni Missionaries) when I was a child in Ireland many years ago as Fr Dominic Morley, himself a Comboni Missionary, was our neighbour and he came to visit our school near Knock informing us about his work. There were eight of us in the family and my

mother enrolled us all in the Verona Father group just before she died some years ago.

God Bless your good work

*Loretta Heather  
Trowbridge.*

Dear Fr John,

We would like to thank you for the Comboni magazine which we always enjoy reading especially the summer edition with the Sacred Heart novena which we prayed. It was so nice that the print was so big and easy to read. We read the Messenger magazine also but yours was such a great help.



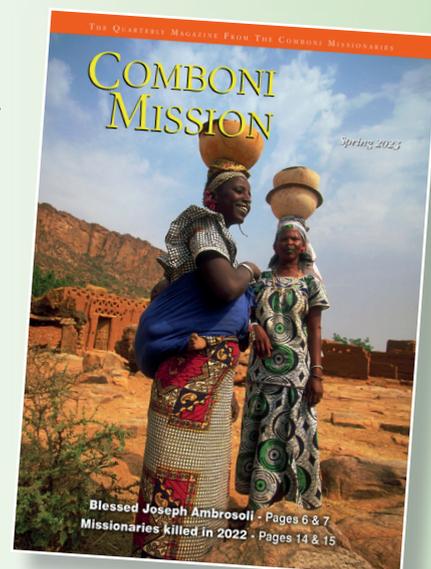
Sacred Heart

Our thanks and prayers are with you.

*Sincerely, David & Rosemary Gardner*

Dear Verona Fathers,  
Thank you so much for your inspired readings over many years. A beautifully produced magazine.  
Please keep up the good work! Our donation is attached.

*Rosemary & Gordon  
Traynor, South  
Molton*





*Don't Forget your Deceased Loved Ones  
in this Year's November Masses.*

*Why not have them remembered the whole year round, too!*

# The Holy Redeemer Perpetual Mass Guild

Holy Mass is celebrated every day for all members, living and dead. Quality Membership Certificates in full colour, mounted in beautiful folders, make an excellent gift, or a gesture of condolence, or simply a reminder of spiritual union with our missionaries. Certificates will, on request, be sent directly to those you wish to receive them.



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