

# COMBONI MISSION

*Spring 2026*



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# COMBONI MISSION

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IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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## From the Editor

This Spring edition of *Comboni Mission* arrives in homes and parishes during the time of Lent. Many of us were raised in the Lenten spirit of self-denial, small sacrifices as the correct way preparing for the feast of Easter. Yet as we live in a world at times in a state of turmoil and divisiveness it is increasingly urgent to be

one with a suffering world of wars, migrants, homelessness, corrupt politicians. The words of the prophet Isaiah resound in our ears as he calls us to discover the real meaning of fasting!: "Is this not the fast I choose:... Share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house" Is. 58. A clear call at this time of Lent as we pray and show our solidarity with those who suffer. This is the fast that pleases God!

I invite you to read the obituary dedicated to our deceased confrere, Fr Benito RIP who passed away after suffering an aneurism at his community in London. Fr Benito gave over 28 years dedicated service to the London province and was engaged as a lecturer of theology at the London missionary institute. A life of faithful service and love. **pages 4-5.**

Many of our readers will have known Fr John Clark, another Comboni colleague, through the columns of our magazine. Fr John, owing to debilitating immobility, has now retired to a care home. We wish him a peaceful retirement and acknowledge his massive contributions to the ministry over his 50 years of priesthood. We believe that Fr John will continue to supply us with his thoughtful words! Happy retirement Fr John. **page 21.**

Faced with increasing climate catastrophes causing widespread harm and suffering to millions of earth's inhabitants, the Church and society have been alerted to work to care more for the earth and to treat it like a mother with respect. Pope Francis set out the road for saving the earth in his pastoral letter 'Laudato Si'. Fr Javier took part in the climate conference in Belem, Brazil and together with the Comboni family and people from around the world, at the COP30 assembly, to work to bring about urgent solutions in the way we treat the earth. **pages 13-14**

Well, let's hope 'Comboni Mission' will bring you good informative reading and encourage you to continue being also a missionary disciple! Finally, I would like to extend to all our readers and benefactors a most happy and blessed Easter!

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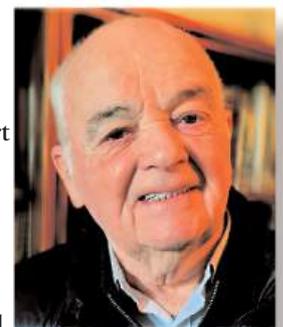
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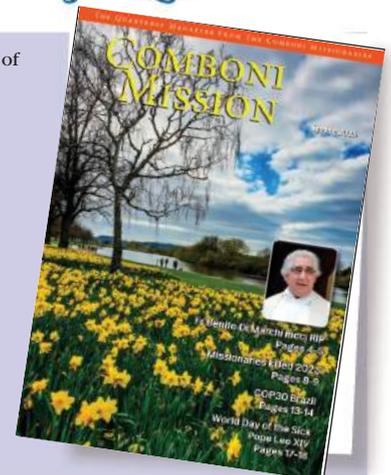
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J. John



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# Celebrating the Life of Fr. Benito De Marchi mccj RIP

Fr. Benito De Marchi was born in Urbania, province of Pesaro, on the 29th of May 1942.

Requiem Mass  
for the repose of the soul of



**Father Benito De Marchi mccj**  
May 29<sup>th</sup> 1942 - December 10<sup>th</sup> 2025

Church of St. Edward the Confessor - Golders Green  
Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026  
11:30 a.m.

*Celebration of the requiem mass*

Life did not start gently with him. When he was just four or five years old, he lost his mother. His father later remarried and had more children. So very early on Fr. Benito learned about loss — and about resilience. Perhaps that is where his deep sense of humanity first took root.

His vocational journey also began early. He entered the diocesan seminary in Pesaro but soon felt called elsewhere and joined the Comboni Missionaries. After completing his novitiate in Gozzano in 1963, he was sent to Rome for the scholasticate, studying theology at the University of



*Ordination of Fr Benito*

Propaganda Fide (also called the Pontifical Urbanian University). This period marked the beginning of a life-long dedication to intellectual inquiry.

He spent his first year of theology in the house of San Pancrazio, and in September 1964 moved to the new Generalate House in Via Luigi Lilio.

He was ordained a Priest in 1967 in his hometown of Urbania.

After ordination to the priesthood, the Superior General at the time, Fr. Briani, asked the newly ordained priests where they would like to be sent. Fr. Benito asked for permission to continue studying theology — right up to a doctorate. And while others were sent off to the missions, Fr. Benito stayed in Rome... for the next ten years.

He read endlessly, researched deeply, and thought profoundly. What he found more difficult was reaching conclusions. His doctorate progressed slowly... very slowly... until his superiors gently — but firmly — encouraged him to finish and head to the missions. He did finish, and with excellent results.

This pattern: always thinking, always searching, rarely concluding was something that accompany him all his life. He would stay up late reading, studying, and producing — never quite done.

Eventually, missionary life did call, and in 1977 Fr. Benito was sent to Malawi. His first assignment was to the Mission of Gambula and in the final year in Malawi, stayed in the newly built mission of Mthawira Parish in the outskirts of Blantyre. During his early years in Malawi, a tumour was discovered in his chest. He returned to Italy for treatment, underwent surgery, and fully recovered. As soon as he could, he went back to Malawi to continue his mission.

He taught Liturgy at the National Theological Seminary in Zomba, Malawi, for 6 years.

His teaching, however, was ambitious. His theology was rich, deep, and complex. In 1986 he was assigned to the London Province to teach in the Missionary Institute London.

Before formally joining the Missionary Institute London, he also spent a year in Malta teaching missi-

ology at the Malta Theological Faculty. Later, from 1987 to 1991, he served as a formator for the students training to become priests at Elstree.

In Malawi, Fr. Benito also discovered a deep love for nature. He became very keen in gardening and planting flowers everywhere. Creation mattered deeply to him — he was also passionate about making wine.

Beyond titles and assignments, Fr. Benito was above all a theologian. He never stopped reading, studying, and reflecting on the meaning of mission. His homilies and talks were passionate, inspiring, and deeply concerned with the Church, society, and the world.

He was actively involved in ecumenical prayer and in building strong friendships with the local Church and the people of Borehamwood. He was also involved for many years and greatly appreciated in this parish (St Edward the Confessor, Golders Green).

Fr. Benito was deeply engaged in theological reflection in our congregation through the European Group of Theological Reflection (GERT), was writing articles for magazines, was a member of various commissions in the order and for many years, responsible for ongoing formation in this Province.

Wherever he went — Malawi, Germany, England, Italy — he formed deep and lasting friendships. People mattered to him. He was likeable, sociable, and genuinely enjoyed being with others. Some friendships lasted a lifetime. Friends from Prato, from his years in formation, stayed always in touch right to the end (a friendship that lasted over 60 years) — caring for him and often sending “cantuccini” biscuits. Relationships were his true treasure.



*Fr Benito had a great passion for teaching theology*

He loved buying books. Many books. Far more books than he could possibly read. But he was happy knowing they were there, just in case.

He often complained about his health and his various illnesses. But if you engaged him in conversation, the complaints quickly disappeared. He became animated, interested, and funny — fully present. And, as many of us know, red wine had remarkable healing powers. It cured almost everything.

He often spoke with gratitude about the trip to Mexico and the visit to the sanctuary of our Lady of Guadalupe, a memory he cherished deeply.

Today, we give thanks for Fr. Benito: for his searching mind, his generous heart, his humour, his friendships, his teaching.

May he now find the answers he was always searching for.

*And may he rest in peace.*

# An Easter Quiz

- Compiled by Mrs Catherine Ware & Fr David Bohnsack mccj



**1.** With origins going back to medieval times, this traditional Easter fruit cake is lighter than Christmas cake and is decorated with distinctive marzipan balls on its surface. How many marzipan balls traditionally adorn the top of a Simnel cake, and what do they represent?

**2.** Eastern Orthodox and Western churches occasionally celebrate Easter on the same day, though this is uncommon. Recent examples include 2017 and 2025. The date difference occurs because the two traditions follow different calendars. What calendar do the Eastern Orthodox churches use to calculate Easter, and when will both next celebrate on the same date?

**3.** According to the Gospel of John, Pontius Pilate had an inscription placed above Jesus on the cross reading 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,' written in three languages. What is the Latin acronym for this inscription, and in which three languages was it written?

**4.** According to the Gospel of Luke, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples leaving Jerusalem. He walked with them, explained the scriptures, and was only recognized when he broke bread with them. Who were the two disciples and to which town were they travelling?

**5.** According to the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus taught his disciples before ascending into heaven from the Mount of Olives. The Church commemorates this event with the Feast of the Ascension. How long after the resurrection did this event occur, and on which day of the liturgical calendar is the Ascension traditionally celebrated?

endar is the Ascension traditionally celebrated?

**6.** The three holiest days in the Catholic Church calendar commemorate Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection. What are these three days called collectively in Latin, what name is given the first of these days and what symbolic gesture is enacted?

**7.** In the Catholic liturgical calendar, Lent brings a noticeable silence to the Mass.

Which two joyful hymns disappear until Easter?

**8.** Long before chocolate eggs filled the shops, Easter eggs were hand-decorated and hidden for children at royal Easter celebrations. Which British monarch helped make this tradition popular in Britain?

**9.** The Protestant Elizabethan regime was suspicious of Catholic traditions, so in 1592 the London Clerk of the Markets banned bakers from selling what treat except on Good Friday, Christmas, and at burials?

**10.** On which northern English city would you find Avenham Park, famous for its annual Good Friday tradition of egg rolling down its steep grassy slopes?

- 1.** Eleven marzipan balls, representing Jesus's disciples excluding Judas (the betrayer)
- 2.** The Julian Calendar, and 2028
- 3.** INRI (Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum), and the inscription was written in Latin, Hebrew and Greek
- 4.** Cleopas and an unnamed disciple, and they were traveling to Emmaus
- 5.** 40 days after the resurrection, and the Ascension is traditionally celebrated on the Thursday in the sixth week of Easter
- 6.** The Paschal Triduum, and the first day is Maundy Thursday, when the washing of feet is enacted
- 7.** The Gloria and the Alleluia
- 8.** Queen Victoria
- 9.** Hot Cross Buns
- 10.** Preston (in Lancashire)

## Answers

# The Third Day

*The women at the tomb. iStock credit: ZU-09*

Peter looked across at us; we were all bewildered by the message the women had brought. They had seen an angel come down out of heaven and roll the stone away from the tomb. As they ran back with the message Jesus met them. Peter spoke for us all, 'This is such idle nonsense, seeing an angel, meeting Jesus. Do you women think he would come to you first! We are his disciples, surely, he would appear to us first.' We all nodded in agreement. The women repeated their story. 'No, no, no,' we kept saying. But Peter had his head bowed and a perplexed look on his face. Suddenly he pushed past the women who were still shouting, 'We have seen Jesus! He's alive! alive we tell you.'

I followed Peter, raising the dust as I sought to catch him. My mind was in a turmoil.

I was the only one of us disciples who had seen him die; and this image was filling my mind as I ran. 'He's dead, he's dead.' These words were so loud I thought my head would burst. Then I recalled his words to us at the Passover supper. 'In a little while you will not see me, and then another little while you will see me and your joy will be full.' It's now the third day and the women claim to have seen him. I thought of the raising of Lazarus and the words of Jesus to Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

I caught Peter and went ahead. I bent down and saw the linen cloths lying there, hesitant to go in.

Peter pushed past me and entered the tomb. I heard him gasp and followed him into the tomb.

There was no sign of a body; and if they had removed it, why would they leave the burial cloths?

I began to be filled with a joy and whispered to myself, 'He's alive, he's alive, my Jesus is alive!'

Peter turned to me and he could tell by my wide eyes and huge smile that I believed the women even though I had not seen him yet. Peter still seemed perplexed when we left the tomb. We hurried back to tell the other disciples. We spent the day together in the upper room. We were afraid of the Pharisees so we locked the door; for



word must have reached them and no doubt they were looking for the corpse of Jesus. We talked, we argued, the women still insisting that he had appeared to them. At times we just sat in stunned silence, broken only by one of us recalling the past years; the healings, the miracles, the walking on the water, Lazarus was mentioned more than once. We began to question the women:

'If you saw him, then what did he look like? What

about the nail marks were they still there! Was he like an angel? Will we recognise him?' Mary Magdalene cried out, 'I saw him; I thought he was the gardener; but when he called my name my eyes were opened and I knew it was Jesus! Oh, that I could see him again!'

It was evening now and we had drunk much wine, and some were falling asleep when suddenly.

Jesus appeared and the door was still locked! He showed us his hands and his side; sure, enough the marks were still there; but his face shone with a glorious light. Some of us wept; some could not stop touching him and he was laughing and we were so filled with joy. Then he spoke, 'So Peter you and your brothers were upset that your sisters saw me first.' Peter held up his hands and showing some embarrassment and slight self-mockery said, 'Well you know Lord we always thought we were the special ones.' Jesus smiled and said, 'Of course you are special, but you are all my special ones; besides I wanted to see if you would listen to my sisters; and you all failed miserably; now you will trust them more. And now, peace be with you. As the Father has sent me so I am sending you;' and he breathed on us and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whoever sins you forgive they are forgiven. I have others to see; but before long you will see me again.'

Then he disappeared from our sight. We stood stunned and some of us were gazing at the locked door that he had just passed through; but a joy filled each of us as we cried out:

**"HE IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN".**

# Missionaries killed in 2025

**Seventeen missionaries and pastoral workers across the world were killed in 2025. 10 priests, two seminarians, two catechists, two religious sisters and one layman lost their lives whilst going about their daily lives of service to Christ and his Church.**

The causes of these attacks were seldom due to religious differences; more often than not, they were the result of the violence, poverty and injustice being experienced locally.

Some of the killings appear to be revenge attacks on missionaries who had stood up to local criminal activities or who had spoken out against the ill treatment of the vulnerable in their communities.



The report by *Agenzia Fides*\* on missionaries killed in 2024 did not include the name of **Fr Tobias Chukwujekwu Okonkwo**, a priest and pharmacist who was attacked whilst driving in southeastern Nigeria, on the evening of 26 December 2024.

(Image: Nigerian Voice)

**Mathias Zongo** and **Christian Tientga**, two catechists, were travelling by motorbike with two other catechists when they were killed by a group of armed men on 25 January in Burkina Faso.



**Fr Grzegorz Dymek**, 58, was killed by an intruder on 13 February during an attempted robbery of the substantial charity funds that had been raised by the parish in Poland. The perpetrator was found on the scene and arrested. (Image: Parish of Our Lady of Fatima, Kłobuck)



**Fr Donald Martin**, 44, priest of the Archdiocese of Mandalay, was the first Burmese Catholic priest killed in the conflict that has plagued Myanmar. On 14 February his mutilated body was found by parishioners in the grounds of the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes where he was the parish priest.

(Image: Mandalay Archdiocese)

**Br Andrew Peter**, a 21-year-old seminarian, was murdered by kidnappers who abducted him and Fr Philip Ekweli from the presbyter of St Peter's Catholic Church in Nigeria on 3 March. Fr Ekweli was released by the kidnappers on 13 March and the news of Br Peter's death was released on 17 March.

**Fr Sylvester Okechukwu**, parish priest of St Mary Tachira Church in Nigeria, was kidnapped from his home on the evening of 4 March and his lifeless body was discovered the next day.



**Srs Evanette Onezaire and Jeanne Voltaire**, Religious Sisters belonging to the Little

Sisters of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, died on 31 March in Haiti. They had been working in the local school and were killed by armed gang members whilst taking refuge in a pupil's nearby home.

Devastatingly, everyone died in the attack.

(Image: lenouvelliste.com)



**Fr Arul Carasala**, originally from India, had been serving in Kansas in the United States since 2004.

The parish priest was shot and killed on 3 April in his presbytery by an elderly man unknown in the parish. Fr Arul, a dean and member of the Bishop's council, had helped many missionary priests become accustomed to the local culture before serving in the Archdiocese's parishes.

(Image: Archdiocese of Kansas City)



**Fr Alloyce Cheruiyot Bett**

was shot on 22 May at the end of Holy Mass in a small Christian community in Kenya. The murder was carried out by several gunmen who fired shots, one of which hit Fr Bett in the neck, killing him instantly. Fr Bett was known for denouncing cattle theft and other banditry in the area. (Image: Agenzia Fides)

**Fr Luka Jomo**, a parish priest in Sudan, was killed by a stray bullet that took his life and that of two other young people on 13 June.

**Fr Godfrey Chukwuma Oparaekwe**, a parish priest in Nigeria, was killed while attempting to mediate a family dispute on the evening of 17 June.

**Br Emmanuel Alabi** was one of three seminarians kidnapped during an attack on the minor seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Nigeria on 10 July. Whilst the other two seminarians were later released, Br Emmanuel, who had been wounded during the attack, died as a result of the forced march imposed on him by his kidnappers. The news of his tragic death was confirmed on 5 November.

**Fr Augustine Dauda Amadu** was killed on 29 August during a burglary of his presbytery in Sierra Leone. He was committed to helping disadvantaged youth and families, with his sermons against corruption and crime earning him great respect. According to parishioners, this also created enemies in certain circles.

**Fr Matthew Eya**, a parish priest in Nigeria, was killed on the evening of 19 September. His vehicle was ambushed by armed men whilst he was travelling back to his parish.

**Fr Bertoldo Pantaleón Estrada**, a parish priest in Mexico, disappeared on 4 October. He was found murdered on 6 October.

**Mark Christian Malaca**, 39, a teacher at St Stephen's Academy in the Philippines, was shot on 4 November by unknown assailants in the village where he lived.

*\* This information is based on the report published each year by Agenzia Fides, the news agency of the global Missio network and includes all Catholics who are involved in the Church's pastoral activities and were killed in violent circumstances.*

Please join us in giving thanks for the work and witness of these missionaries. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.  
**Amen.**

# Brazil “The forest

The late Pope Francis said: “Let us listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. The indigenous people of the Amazon remind us that we are not masters of nature, but part of it.”



iStock. Credit : drmakkoj

In the beating heart of the Brazilian Amazon, 305 recognised indigenous peoples live, custodians of a millennia-old knowledge of the world’s green lung and its balance. They speak 274 languages, and according to official Brazilian data, 13.8% of the South American giant’s territory is now declared “indigenous land.”

Unfortunately, the challenges of defending these lands and their

inhabitants from landowners, multinational interests, and fires (95% of which are intentional) are numerous and commonplace, as evidenced by the more than 500 Catholic missionaries active in this territory.

Sister Sharena Ferrão, a Missionary of the Immaculate Conception in the community of Santa Rita do Weill, in the diocese of Alto Solimões on the border between Brazil, Colombia, and Peru, serves the Tikuna people,

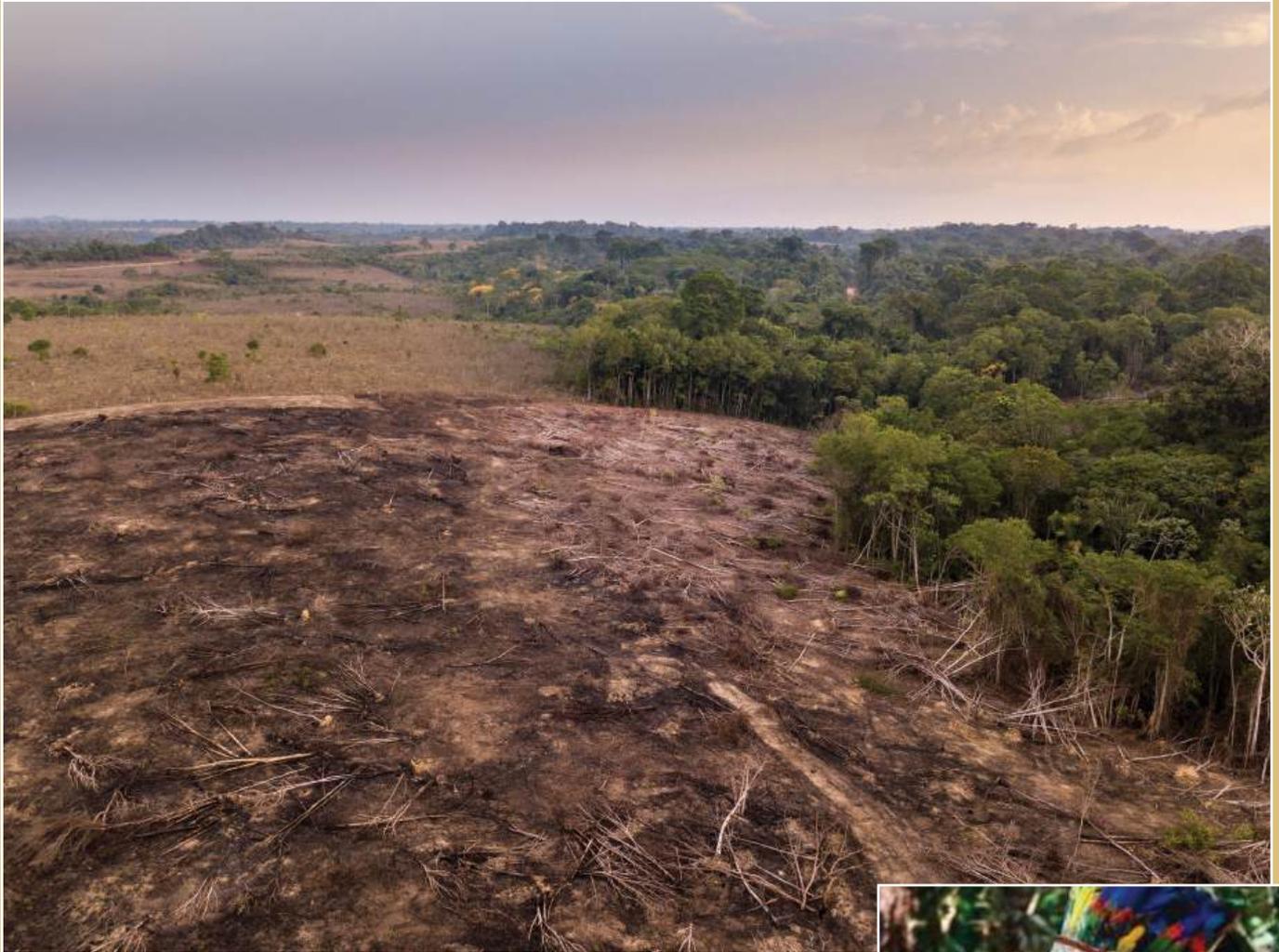
addressing the many challenges associated with drug trafficking and human trafficking, especially of women and children. The present time of the indigenous people living in the Brazilian Amazon is a complex interweaving of hopes and wounds, of redemption and resistance, as evidenced by the village of Três Unidos, the beating heart of the Kambeba people, an ethnic group originally from the border regions between Brazil and the Andean countries who settled here, about an hour and a half boat ride up the Rio Negro from Manaus, the capital of the Amazon. The community of Três Unidos is a positive example of how indigenous traditions can be preserved and enhanced. Here, the village women run a community restaurant, Sumimi, which serves dishes prepared with local ingredients. The idea for its creation came from the Tuxaua, the indigenous leader, Waldemir Silva, or Triukuxuri, as he is called in the Kambemba language.

An initiative supported by the Sustainable Amazonas Foundation-Fasche promotes community tourism in this part of Brazil. “The time of cutting down trees to make

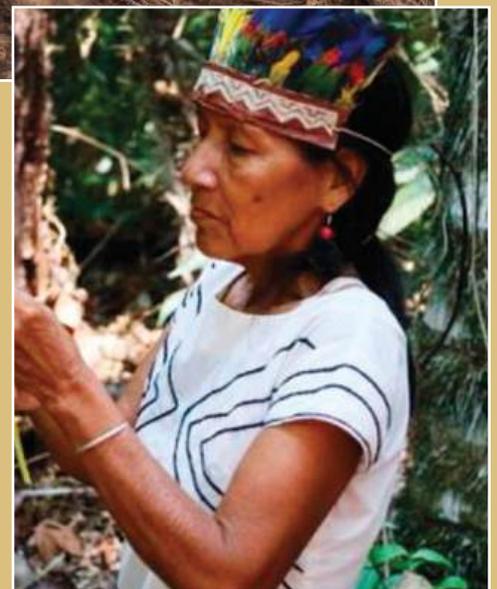


Brazil. An indigenous mother with her daughter: “We want to prepare our children for education and protect nature.” Photo Repam

# speaks our language”



*Illegal deforestation. iStock credit : Paralaxis*



*Brazilian indigenous woman. “Our culture is passed down in songs, stories, and the names of plants” Photo: John Cardozo*

way for camps is over. Today, what we want is to prepare our children for education and to help protect nature,” explains Waldemir, whose daughter, Neurilene Cruz, Miskui in the indigenous language, is a nurse who works in the local clinic, but also cooks at Sumimi and represents her people at the largest international food fair in the Amazon. Education, however, is the priority of the Três Unidos community, where the local school offers an education that integrates the official curriculum with teaching the Kambeba language and traditions, with an approach that strengthens the cultural identity of

indigenous youth while preparing them to face the challenges of the modern world.

While the Kambemba of Três Unidos number just a few hundred, the Tikuna, with over 50,000 members, are one of Brazil’s largest indigenous groups. They live in the Alto Solimões region, the river that joins the Rio Negro to form the Amazon. They are located between the cities of Tabatinga and São Paulo de Olivença, in one of the most isolated and biodiverse areas of the South American giant, but also most threatened by the expansion of criminal gangs trafficking cocaine, as well as



Golden lion tamarin. *iStock Credit: VLIET*

illegally mined gold and timber.

Traditionally fishermen, farmers, and artisans, the Tikuna maintain a social structure based on the extended family, but have long faced violence from settlers and economic and environmental threats to their communities. Consider the infamous “Capacete Massacre,” when 14 indigenous people were killed by ranchers 37 years ago. This massacre shocked public opinion and led to the inclusion of laws protecting indigenous peoples in the 1988 Constitution.

Today, the Tikuna are experiencing a significant cultural revival, with bilingual schools, the production of translated books, and young graduates returning from Manaus to their communities to work in the health and justice sectors. But their cry of alarm remains strong, as indigenous leader and teacher, Luísa Tikuna emphasises: “We don’t want to survive, we want to live with dignity, with our voice, our language, and our land.” “Born again in School”, in the language of the forest, could be the slogan of Maria Utxi, teacher and spir-

itual leader of her community, located near Jordão, in the state of Acre, bordering Bolivia. “The forest speaks our language. Our culture is passed down in songs, stories, and the names of plants. If we lose this, we lose ourselves,” she explains, alongside João Kaxinawá, a 16-year-old student who, thanks to a bilingual education project introduced by the Comboni missionaries, reveals: “I spoke almost no Portuguese when I arrived at the village school. But there I learned to write in my own language and also in the language of the ‘whites.’”

Today, there are 3,400 schools in indigenous territories in Brazil, but for every story of rebirth, there are many of pain. The Yanomami people, on the border with Venezuela, have experienced a real tragedy in recent years. In 2022, the denunciation of a lay missionary, Giovana M., brought to public attention the devastation caused by the invasion of illegal gold miners, the infamous garimpeiros. “I saw children with ulcerated skin, malnourished, women who had been

raped, entire villages contaminated by mercury,” Giovana recounted in a testimony sent to the Brazilian Episcopal Conference.

Thanks to her denunciation, the images of the skeletal bodies of Yanomami children shocked the world, and since 2023, President Lula’s new government has initiated health interventions and evictions, but the wounds remain deep. “It amounts to low-intensity ethnic cleansing,” denounces Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa, one of the most authoritative voices of the indigenous movement. “They treat us as obstacles to development, but we are the forest. Without us, it too will die,” he adds. A clear concept that Pope Francis emphasised in 2019 at the Amazon Synod: “Let us listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. The indigenous people of the Amazon remind us that we are not masters of nature, but part of it.” A phrase that aptly sums up the late Pope’s vision, which unites ecology, social justice, and spirituality, but is also a warning for the future of humanity as a whole, not just the world’s green lung and its original inhabitants

# Forum of the Comboni Family on Integral Ecology

**(Responding to the cry of the poor and of the earth)**

**T**hirty-nine representatives of the Comboni Family from around the world — priests, sisters, lay missionaries, secular missionaries, and other collaborators — gathered in Belém, Brazil, for the Forum of the Comboni Family on Integral Ecology, held alongside COP30. (COP is the annual Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

**Belém, Brazil | November 11–18, 2025**

**By Fr Javier Alvarado mccj**

Holy Eucharist, giving thanks for the gift of creation and praying for the grace to protect and care for it.

Divided into various groups, participants took part in a wide range of activities related to faith, ecology, and social justice held in parallel with

interreligious forum hosted at the Anglican Church of Belém, where panellists highlighted the urgency of ecumenism as a platform for effective climate action.

- Stating that nature has been desacralized and reduced to an object of exploitation, with a strong call to place care for creation at the heart of interreligious dialogue.

- Underscoring the positive role of NGOs and civil society organizations



*Comboni group in Belém*

where countries assess progress and agree on actions to address climate change).

More than a meeting, the Forum was a profound expression of communion: with the peoples of the Amazon, with the Church, and with all those committed to building a world where justice, peace, and the integrity of creation walk together.

The Forum opened with prayer, followed by a brief introduction outlining its purpose and mission. Group discussions and moments of sharing set the tone for collective reflection and discernment. The first day concluded with the celebration of the

COP30.

Among these were:

- An international symposium: “The Catholic Church at COP30,” where religious leaders, scientists, and representatives of Indigenous peoples reflected together on pathways toward ecological conversion.

- The “Cúpula dos Povos” (People’s Summit), a vast gathering of more than a thousand associations and popular movements working for social and environmental justice. Debates emphasized that the energy transition must guarantee human rights, workers’ rights, care for nature and social well-being for all.

- The “Tapiri,” an ecumenical and

in promoting climate justice, combating environmental racism, and ensuring popular participation—thus fostering a spirit of partnership.

Some of us participated in a “debate on mining and the extractive economy”. Panellists strongly condemned corporate practices that displace communities and devastate ecosystems, criticizing in particular the rush—especially by countries of the Global North—for minerals used in military industries and so-called “green” technologies, often at the cost of justice and environmental integrity.

A significant moment was our participation in VIVAT International (to



*Procession of Martyrs*

which the Comboni Missionaries are members) an organization dedicated to transformative advocacy, justice, peace, and sustainable development at the United Nations. Its celebration was marked by joy, prayer, and gratitude for its prophetic mission in defending human rights.

The week also included powerful public witness events in the streets of Belém:

- “Procession of Martyrs”, honouring religious and civic leaders (like Chico Mendes, Sister Dorothy Stang and others) who gave their lives in the struggle for justice and peace in Amazonia. The procession concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist at the Basilica Sanctuary of Our Lady of Nazareth
- “Walk and Vigil of Prayer for the Earth,” organized by the ecumenical and interreligious Tapiri.
- “Global March for Climate Justice”

on Saturday, November 15, during which thousands of people — estimated at around 70,000 — filled the streets of Belém, over a five-kilometre route lasting more than two and a half hours. Participants advocated for the rights of Indigenous peoples of the Amazon, fair land distribution, and a just transition to renewable energy.

Civil society organizations, interreligious movements, and numerous Church groups were strongly represented. The Church’s presence was particularly visible, with participation from the Laudato Si’ Movement, REPAM, Rede Igreja e Mineração, the Anglican Diocese of Belém, the Franciscan Family, and the Comboni Family. Several bishops and cardinals from the Philippines, Africa, Latin America, and Europe also joined, underscoring the Church’s commitment to stand with Indigenous peoples and the poor, who are most affected by climate change.

The final two days of the Forum

were dedicated to deeper reflection and discernment. We began with a moment of prayer, enriched by reflections on the life and witness of the Comboni martyr Fr. Ezechiele Ramin and the Pope Leo XVI’s message to the Churches of the Global South gathered at Belém, followed by the sharing of experiences from the previous days.

There was a strong sense of hope. The visible involvement of religious groups, the participation of the indigenous people, engagement of Church movements were seen as signs of life and growth.

Monsignor Léonard Ndjadi Ndjate, a Comboni missionary and auxiliary bishop of Kisangani DRC, during the celebration of the Eucharist, invited everyone to commit themselves to building a better world grounded in Gospel values.

The proposals that emerged from the Forum call for a renewed commitment to Integral Ecology through personal and communal ecological conversion, formation, spirituality, advocacy, and simple lifestyles. As well as walking together as Church, strengthening collaboration, communication, and shared initiatives within the Comboni Family, and making these commitments visible trusting that such efforts will bear fruit in response to the urgent signs of our time.

The Forum concluded with a closing Eucharist presided over by Fr. Raimundo Rocha mccj, who encouraged all participants to move from being mere spectators to becoming active collaborators in the Lord’s vineyard.



*Defending indigenous peoples*

# Mission In Sri Lanka

By Sr. Graça Almeida, CMS  
(Portugal)



Comboni Sisters with school children.

Comboni.org

## Set my dreams free.

By a 10-year-old child

*I heard the sweet sound of voices,  
children's voices  
picking, picking, picking tea  
dangerous work  
I couldn't help them.*

*I have many skills, give me  
a chance.  
help me advance.  
let my talents be seen.  
Let my prayer be blessed.*

*I hear the children,  
picking leaves for tea.  
I say, take them to the  
school room.  
set their dreams free.*

The Comboni Missionary Sisters first arrived in the city of Talawakelle, Sri Lanka, a socialist democratic republic in southern Asia (Indian Ocean), in 2012, at the request of the Bishop of the Diocese of Kandy, José Vianney Fernando, who had met them during a visit to Dubai some time before. He asked the Sisters to be present among the Tamil people to carry out an educational project.

## Education in the land of Ceylon's 'green gold' plantations

"Children are God's greatest gift to the world. We must care for them, educate them and protect them," says Roshina, one of the pupils at St Patrick's School in Talawakelle in Sri Lanka. The education of the children that was supported by the family has been changing with the immigration of young parents who left for abroad leaving their children with the grandparents. When after a few years the parents do not return or stop sending

money, the children stop studying and the grandparents, being elderly, do not have the strength to work.

There are also children who were born into poor families and have lost both parents. They would like to go to school to fulfil their ambition of developing their skills. But many end up working in small tea shops, wine shops or markets; others sell fruit and vegetables along the main road.

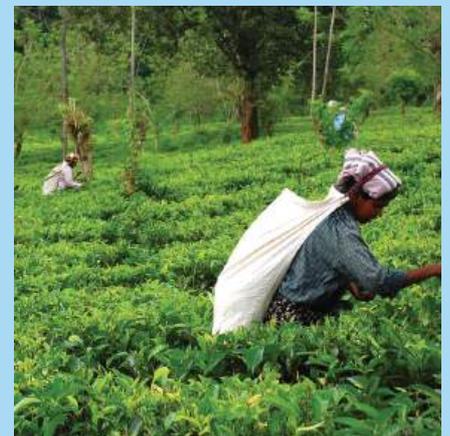
There is a high risk for a child who cannot attend school to be dragged into the life of the street. Once there, he faces the dangers of being misled by bad company, taken into alcohol and drugs. Often these children come to be seen as criminals, but if they had been able to attend school, they could be the most capable people of making the world a more wonderful transformative place.

The Comboni Sisters are present with a strong belief that education is the most powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and the stigma of slavery. It means helping to empower families to stay together so that neither young people nor their parents must leave home.

## When wealth enslaves

It was only in 2003 that the Tamil people obtained the right to citizenship. Despite this legal recognition, they continue to suffer economic, political and social discrimination.

Behind every cup of tea enjoyed in the Western world are the lives of thousands of women. Sunburnt and anaemic, they can be glimpsed in the



Tamil tea workers in the plantation.  
iStock credit: vicspacewalker

tea plantations in the central highlands of the island of Sri Lanka, in the Indian Ocean, picking valuable leaves with their wicker backpacks on their shoulders. Most are of Tamil ethnicity, subjected to very long shifts under the scorching sun, with no rights, poor housing and no rest.

Rain and a cold, humid climate favour the cultivation of the highest quality tea, but it is thanks to the delicacy of their hands that Sri Lanka ranks fourth in the world in terms of production after China, India and Kenya. Unfortunately, it is an industry based on greed with low pay, around £2.70 for 18kg of tea leaves that they collect.

It is a story of ancient and modern slavery of entire families, which has been going on for two centuries, when English colonisers deported slaves from southern India to cultivate the fields of Ceylon, where the camellia sinensis bushes took root excellently.

## Being a Christian amid a Hindu population

In a country where Catholics make up only 6% of the population, it is



*School children setting off happily to classes, iStock credit : urf*

necessary to learn to live one's Christianity among a Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim majority. School is a privileged place to discover that ethnic and religious differences, rather than being a threat, can reflect the country's richness and plurality.

In the context of Talakawelle, in the diocese of Kandy, the Christian community relies on St Patrick's parish as the pillar that sustains the faith of approximately two thousand

families, spread across more than fifty communities. This small minority of Catholics recognises that the call to faith strengthens them. They live with deep conviction that Christ's proposal is like a small mustard seed that fertilises the earth. It becomes a tree and produces good fruit for food and shelter for all who intentionally decide to approach it.

## Pioneers of change in an interfaith project

From what is considered the tea capital, Hatton, in the diocese of Kandy, Sr. Lorena Morales, a Comboni missionary from Costa Rica, tells us about Hindu and Christian women, among other denominations, becoming pioneers of change through the interfaith project they have created. With a view to improving the living conditions of families, the project provides English language learning and communication skills that promote self-esteem and self-confidence, facilitating new employment opportunities outside the tea plantations. Beyond language teaching, the missionaries pay visits to the families in the tea plantations and develop small activities for children in the different states. Sr. Lorena concludes: 'This opens dialogue about life, encounter and action among women of various religious cultures and of social status. This is implemented both in Christian and Hindu communities. We want to help improve people's lives with a presence of compassion and love, generating encounter and harmony among them.'

*A message from the Sisters to parents :  
"Children are God's gift to the world. In ancient times people looked after their children and took care of them but now some people are careless and do not take care of their children. They do not give protection and love to them.*

*In this present time some parents are going to foreign countries to work while leaving their children with their grandparents. After some years go by the parents do not return and they stop sending money.*

*So, without money children are unable to study and their grandparents, being old, don't have the strength to work.*

*Similarly, there are children who were born into poor families and have lost both parents. They would like to go to school, and they would like to get an education. They have many ambitions in their lives. But all these things are like a dream for them.*

*Some children are working in small tea shops, wine shops and markets while others are selling fruit and vegetables near the main road.*

*While they are growing up, they don't develop good abilities, and they do not learn the difference between right and wrong. When the children realise that they cannot go to school wrong things creep into their brain. Many keep company with bad people. This kind of people will encourage them to take drugs; to drink liquor and they will abuse them by sending them to sell drugs.*

*In the future these children will be perceived as the number one villain of the country. It is not their fault. It is the fault of the parents. Not only parents also us.*

*Please encourage your children to study. Don't spoil your child's life. They are the future generation and only they can make the future wonderful."*

# Message of Pope Leo XIV for the 34th World Day of the Sick 2026

11 February 2026

**R**eaching out, healing wounds, taking charge and caring for those who suffer: these are the "concrete gestures" identified by Leo XIV in the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which "the hallmark of active love" is "compassion."

(Excerpts from Pope Leo's message).

## **The Compassion of the Samaritan: Loving by Bearing the Pain of Another**

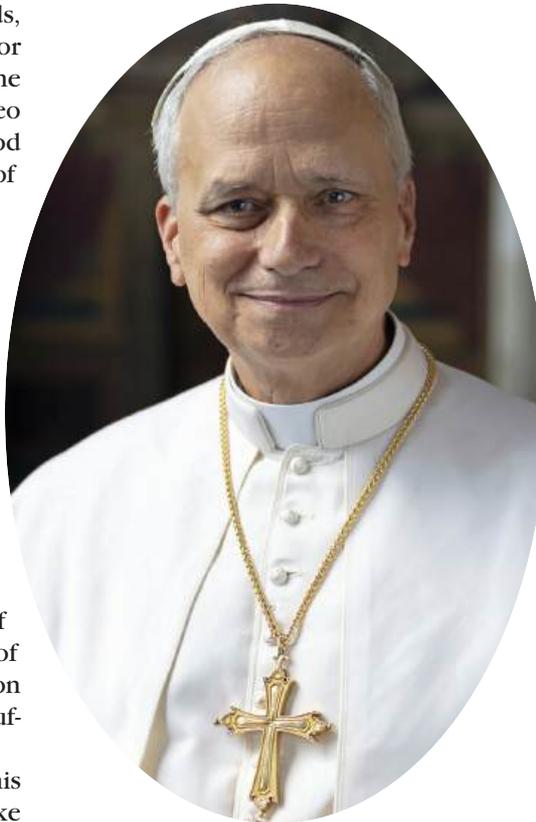
*Dear brothers and sisters!*

The XXXIV World Day of the Sick will be solemnly celebrated in Chiclayo, Peru, on 11 February 2026. For this occasion, I wanted to present the image of the Good Samaritan, ever timely and necessary for rediscovering the beauty of charity and the social dimension of compassion, and to focus attention on those in need and those who suffer, such as the sick.

We have all heard and read this moving text from Saint Luke (cf. Luke 10:25-37). To a lawyer who asks him who is our neighbour to love, Jesus responds by telling a story: a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by robbers and left half dead; a priest and a Levite passed by, but a Samaritan took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn, and paid for his treatment. I wanted to offer a reflection on this biblical passage, using the hermeneutic key of the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti, by my beloved predecessor Pope Francis, where compassion and mercy toward those in need are not reduced to a mere individual effort, but are realized in relationships: with our needy brothers and sisters, with those who care for them, and, ultimately, with God who gives us his love.

**The gift of encounter: the joy of giving closeness and presence**

We live immersed in the culture of



*credit: Vatican.  
Pope Leo XI*

speed, immediacy, haste, but also of waste and indifference, which prevents us from approaching and stopping along the way to look at the needs and sufferings that surround us. The parable tells us that the Samaritan, seeing the wounded man, did not "pass by", but had an open and attentive gaze for him, the gaze of Jesus, which led him to a human and supportive closeness. The Samaritan "stopped, gave him closeness, cared for him with his own hands, paid out of his own pocket and took care of him. He gave him [...] his own time". Jesus does not teach who our neighbour is, but how to become a neighbour, that is, how to become close ourselves.

In this regard, we can affirm with St. Augustine that the Lord did not want to teach who was the neighbour of that man, but to whom he had to become neighbour. In fact, no one is neighbour to another until he approaches him voluntarily. Therefore, he who had mercy became a neighbour.



**'Reaching out, healing wounds, taking charge and caring for those who suffer: these are the "concrete gestures" identified by Leo XIV in the parable of the Good Samaritan'**

Love is not passive, it goes towards the other; being close does not depend on physical or social proximity, but on the decision to love. For this reason, the Christian becomes close to those who suffer, following the example of Christ, the true divine Samaritan who approached wounded humanity. These are not simple gestures of philanthropy, but signs in which we can perceive that personal participation in the suffering of others implies giving ourselves, it means going beyond the satisfaction of needs, to ensure that our person is part of the gift.

This charity is necessarily nourished by the encounter with Christ, who gave himself for us out of love. St. Francis explained this very well when, speaking of his encounter with the people with leprosy, he said: "The Lord himself led me among them", because through them he had discovered the sweet joy of loving.

The gift of encounter is born from the bond with Jesus Christ, whom we identify as the Good Samaritan who brought us eternal salvation and whom we make present when we bow before our wounded brother. Saint Ambrose said: "Since no one is closer to us than he who healed our wounds, let us love him as Lord, and let us also love him as our neighbour: for nothing is as close as the head to the members.

We also love the one who is an imitator of Christ: we love the one who suffers for the poverty of others, because of the unity of the body".

Being one in the One, in closeness, in presence, in the love received and shared, and enjoying, like Saint Francis, the sweetness of having met him.

### The shared mission in caring for the sick

St. Luke goes on to say that the Samaritan "felt compassion." Compassion implies a profound emotion that drives action. It is a feeling that wells up from within and leads to commitment to the suffering of others. In this parable, compassion is the hallmark of active love. It is neither theoretical nor sentimental; it translates into concrete gestures: the Samaritan approaches, heals the wounds, takes charge, and cares.

But be careful, he does not do it alone, individually, "the Samaritan looked for a landlord who could take care of that man, as we are called to invite and meet in an "us" that is stronger than the sum of small individualities".

I have witnessed, in my experience as a missionary and bishop in Peru, how many people share mercy and compassion in the manner of the Samaritan and the innkeeper. Family members, neighbours, healthcare workers, those involved in pastoral care, and so many others who stop,



*Our Lady, Health of the Sick* iStock credit: ribeiroantonio.

approach, care for, bring, accompany, and offer what they have, give compassion a social dimension. This experience, realized in a network of relationships, transcends mere individual commitment

Let us raise our prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick; let us ask for her help for all those who suffer, who need compassion, a listening ear, and comfort, and let us implore her intercession with this ancient prayer, which was recited in families for those living with illness and pain:

*Sweet Mother, do not distance yourself,  
do not turn your gaze from me.  
Come with me everywhere  
and never leave me alone.  
You who always protect me  
as my true Mother,  
grant that the Father, the Son, and  
the Holy Spirit may bless me.*

I cordially impart my apostolic blessing to all the sick, to their families and to those who assist them, to health workers, to people involved in health pastoral care and in a special way to those who participate in this World Day of the Sick.

**LEO PP. XIV**



*Sick pilgrims attend mass at Lourdes* iStock credit : rustamark

# Vatican News

## UNICEF says about 17 health facilities have closed across the country, leading to the suspension of associated nutrition services (AFP or licensors)



**South Sudan: Almost half a million children in danger of malnutrition**

With the violence escalating, UNICEF reports that more than 450,000 children are currently at risk of acute malnutrition in South Sudan. The organization's representative in the country appeals for “rapid, unimpeded, and safe access for humanitarian aid and workers to reach highly vulnerable displaced groups.”

*By Kielce Gussie*

UNICEF has reported that more than 450,000 children are currently at risk of acute malnutrition due to the ongoing violence in South Sudan. The internal conflict has led to mass displacement and the interruption of critical health and nutrition services in the Jonglei State.

### **Dangerous situation for children**

According to reports, since the beginning of 2026, the escalating violence in the Jonglei State has displaced some 250,000 people, particularly in the northern and central parts



of the state.

The UNICEF representative in the country, Noala Skinner, explained the organization's deep concern for the women and children who are being directly impacted by the violence. “We know that these areas have the highest levels of malnutrition among children, and we know that malnourished children without treatment are 12 times more likely to die”, Skinner said.

She made an urgent appeal to all the parties involved to end the con-

flikt and work to establish “rapid, unimpeded, and safe access for humanitarian aid and workers to reach highly vulnerable displaced groups.”

### **A system on the brink**

Moreover, the conflict has severely limited access to emergency aid. Humanitarian agencies have been unable to reach vulnerable populations due to restrictions on travel by river, air, and road.

In the Jonglei State, six counties have already run out of or are about to run out of food supplies, which is a vital need for the numerous severely malnourished children there.

UNICEF has reported that about 17 health facilities have closed across the country, which has led to the suspension of associated nutrition services. Consequently, there have been 10 cases of looting of health and nutrition supplies — half of which took place in the Jonglei State.

Even with the difficulty accessing the areas most in need, UNICEF is responding to the crisis by sending water purification equipment, buck-

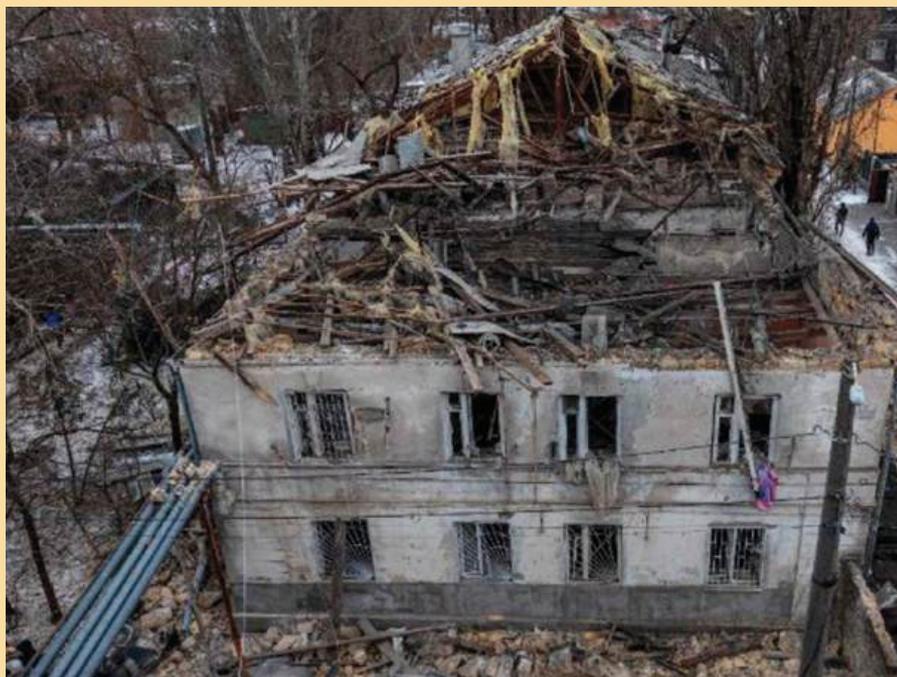
*Women wait to receive cash assistance during a World Food Programme transfer distribution center (AFP or licensors)*

ets, and soap to Duk County in Jonglei, where there is the threat of a cholera outbreak.

The town of Akobo in the Jonglei State has also received supplies like malaria treatment medicines, food for malnourished children, and emergency health kits to treat more than 10,000 people.

# Vatican News

## Pope calls for prayers for Ukraine, renewed commitment to nuclear disarmament



**P**ope Leo XIV asks for prayers for the people of Ukraine, who continue to suffer the consequences of war exacerbated by freezing temperatures, and appeals for a renewed international commitment against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, as the New START treaty is due to expire.

Pope Leo XIV renewed his appeal for prayer and solidarity with the people of Ukraine, who continue to suffer the consequences of the conflict, and highlighted the need to renew the “New START treaty” against nuclear proliferation that is due to expire.

Speaking during the General Audience, the Pope said, “I urge everyone to support our brothers and sisters in Ukraine with prayer, as they are being severely tested by the consequences of bombardments that have once again begun to strike energy infrastructure as well.”

He went on to express his gratitude for concrete gestures of

*A damaged residential building struck by a Russian attack in Odesa, Ukraine (AFP or licensors)*

solidarity, and thanked the Catholic dioceses of Poland and other countries “which are working to help the population endure during this time of intense cold.”

### Expiration of New START

The Pope then turned his attention to international security, recalling the “New START Treaty,” signed in 2010 by the Presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation, which he said is due to expire on Thursday.

Highlighting that the agreement represents an important step in limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons, Pope Leo reaffirmed his encouragement for all constructive efforts in support of disarmament and mutual trust.

“I issue an urgent appeal that this instrument is not allowed to lapse

without seeking to ensure a concrete and effective follow-up,” he said.

The current situation, he continued, “demands that everything possible be done to avert a new arms race that would further threaten peace among nations.”

The Pope stressed the urgency of moving beyond a logic rooted in fear and mistrust. In its place, he called for a shared ethic capable of guiding decisions toward the common good, “so that peace may become a responsibility and a heritage safeguarded by all.”

*“I issue an urgent appeal that this instrument is not allowed to lapse without seeking to ensure a concrete and effective follow-up.”*

### What is New START?

The Pope’s appeal to limit nuclear proliferation comes as experts express concern that the end of New START could lead towards a dangerous and costly arms race between the world’s biggest nuclear powers.

New START, (the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), which was initially agreed upon in 2010 and extended for five years in 2021, limited US and Russian deployed strategic nuclear weapon arsenals. The treaty defines strategic nuclear weapons systems as those that are “intercontinental in range.”

The Treaty limited the number of strategic nuclear weapons for the United States and Russia. It also required regular short-notice, on-site inspections and biannual data exchange between the two countries.

# From the Banks of the Clyde to the Banks of the Tyne

*The tenderness of care in  
the hands of the LITTLE SISTERS of the POOR*

By Fr John Clark mccc



Fr John Clark

**O**n Monday 9th January, 2026, after a car journey of some two hours, accompanied by Fr. Javier and a friend, Luis Garcia, we arrived at St. Joseph's Home, Westmoreland Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

I had been living and working in the Comboni Glasgow Community for over ten years since I left Amazonia, Brazil. It was here in Newcastle that I would have to hang up my boots as a 50-year-old Comboni, now become a retired member of the small London Province.

Throughout my entire life of 80 years God and His Blessed Mother have always been very good to me.

Daily acts of kindness  
abound in plenty:

Kindness-expressed with  
total dedication and service.

Kindness-with a smile on the  
face.

Kindness-with good manners and deep respect.

Kindness -with a delicate touch of tenderness.

As I am starting another way of life

I am reminded of those words of Psalm 22/3,

"The Lord is my shepherd, nothing I shall not want".

Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me  
all the days of my life.

With enthusiasm and  
knowledge that I will be  
well looked after by St.  
Jeanne Jugan's daugh-  
ters with the best care  
possible, I look forward  
to the future.

His goodness and  
kindness shall follow me  
all the days of my life.

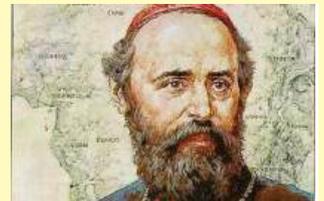


Photo : St Daniel Comboni :  
credit comboni.org



St Jeanne Jugan credit :  
ncregister.com

# 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,*

Thank you again for your most helpful magazine which informs us in detail so much about what is happening in the mission fields of the Comboni missionaries. It is a most excellent and detailed read.

Keeping you all and our brothers and sisters throughout the world in my prayers.

I enclose a small donation.

God bless you in this New Year 2026!

With Christian love

*Jane  
Macclesfield.*

*Fr. John,*

Your letter is so awe inspiring, and the whole off the articles and Novena Prayers, and your article on National Relics Tour 2025 was truly inspiring also, it must make you so happy and proud to know that people like myself read all the Comboni Mission articles.

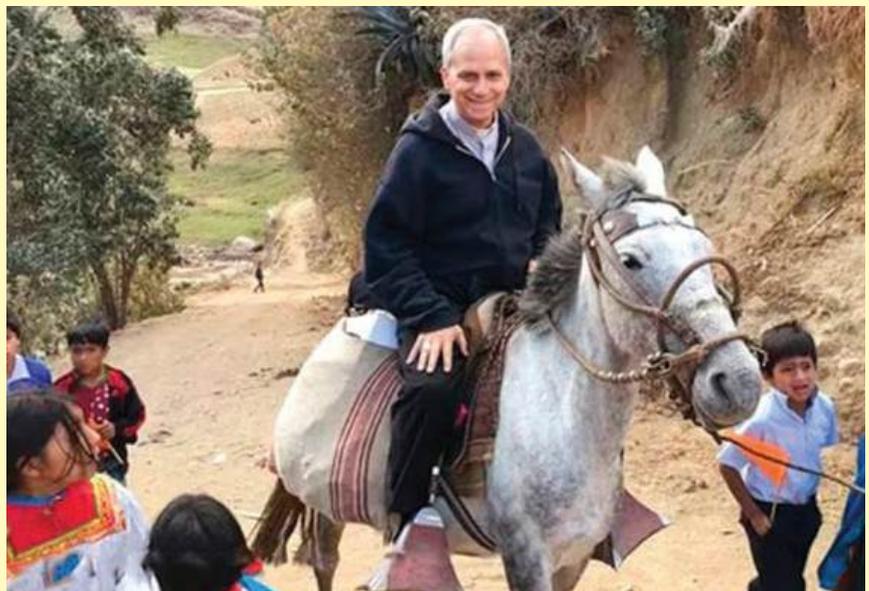
God Bless and keep up the great work that you all do.

Regards  
*Gordon*

*Dear Fr. John,*

As 2026 commences I was reflecting on the needs of the world with hope for better times ahead in so many countries that are torn apart by war, famine and environmental disasters.

Reading the 'Comboni Mission' winter edition helped me. This was not only from your encouragement and reminder of how we journey together in gratitude and hope in your editorial but in the beautiful Christmas



*Photo : Pope Leo in Peru : credit comboni.org.*

Novena along with the regular stories of missionaries' quiet, unassuming faith and work in the name of Jesus helping the poor and vulnerable. I really appreciated

'On a Mission from God' about our new pope Leo XIV. Pope Leo XIV has spent a lifetime walking and ministering to the people in Peru. It gives us the example to follow such an inspirational example and continue to pray for him in his present ministry.

With every blessing for 2026

*Adrian Finn.  
Halifax, Yorkshire.*



Jesus goes up to Jerusalem

J.-J. T

## The Road to Jerusalem

He rode no charger but a humble beast,  
While palms waved wild in crowds that could not  
know  
How soon their fickle joy would be released.  
Yet on He rode toward inevitable woe.

What weighed upon His mind that dusty day?  
The Father's will, the cross He must ascend,  
The friends who'd flee, the one who would betray?  
Still, moved by love, with purpose to the end.

We each will find our own Jerusalem:  
A bitter cup, a pain we're called to face.  
The crowds may thin, and every voice grow dim.

But Christ has walked this lonely, aching place.  
He walked our road, and by that conquered grave,  
Gave life to us, the King who rose to save.

**BY FR DAVID BOHNSACK MCCJ**



*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.



*Contact your mission office in Leeds (for England and Wales), Dublin (for Ireland) or Glasgow (for Scotland) and ask for details and application forms.*



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