Laudato Si’ - bringing hopeful fruits to the poorer nations!

(Pages 20-21-22)
Advent, then Christmas, but it seems the opposite – Christmas and perhaps, to just remind us, arrives Advent! Yet for us Christians, the Four Weeks of Advent are indeed a time of waiting and preparation for Christmas – the Birth of the Child Jesus.

While with threatened shortage of lorry drivers and consequently toys and turkeys and all Christmassy things might be found missing on the shop shelves – we hope not for the kiddy’s sake – but it doesn’t stop us celebrating the real Christmas – the Birth of the Child Jesus.

Streaming and zooming of live Christmas Masses will be still be with us but it will not hinder or better our gathering as a big family in Church to welcome in joyful song and to celebrate the real Christmas – the Birth of the Child Jesus.

Wishing all our readers and friends – A Blessed, Prayerful Advent and a truly Real Christmas in the Company of the Child Jesus!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From the Editor - The Birth of Jesus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to know the Combonis</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation with the Church in South Sudan</td>
<td>6-7-8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectio Divina</td>
<td>10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Kent on Elephants</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission to the Last Breath</td>
<td>13-14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poem - Noel</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let the festival of the Christmas season begin soon</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comboni Sisters 150 years</td>
<td>18-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Heart Church and Laudato Si’</td>
<td>20-21-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Provincial Assembly</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Prayer for Friends and Benefactors</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comboni Mission • Winter 2021
In this edition of ‘Comboni Mission’ we welcome Fr. David Bohnsack mccj to our London Province. He comes from a wide experience of ministry and seems a good fit for his appointment at our parish of St. Joseph in Roehampton in the diocese of Southwark. We wish Fr David a most fruitful and happy ministry.

Fr David writes………

I feel my missionary journey is something of God writing straight on crooked lines. I was born in Chicago and grew up in a small town in Wisconsin, Jefferson, the youngest of three, I have one brother and one sister. I was baptised in the Lutheran Church and it wasn’t until in college, studying art and design that I began to reflect more seriously about what I believe which ultimately led me to joining the Catholic Church. I was always keen on following social issues of the day, something I learned from my parents, and it was during my first “real” job designing the landscaping for a complex of new condominiums that the situation of homelessness became prominent to me. I began volunteering at a homeless shelter and soup kitchen in downtown Chicago and that is where I met the Comboni Missionaries. There were students studying theology who occasionally came to help out at the shelter. There was also a community of Comboni Sisters in that neighbourhood who occasionally came to the shelter and were active in the nearby parish. We struck-up a friendship and my interest in the Church’s mission was kindled.

This was also the moment of the untimely death of my mother which made me contemplate deeply the meaning of my life. My thoughts of helping out the missions turned to the desire of becoming a missionary myself. In reflection, I feel it may have been my mother and her Catholic, Irish roots that gave me that final push.

I entered the Comboni formation in the fall of 1986 and finished my studies in Rome. I was ordained on August 6th, the feast of the Transfiguration in 1994 and I witnessed a transformation also in my family members, many who had not understood my decision to become a missionary priest, afterwards becoming great supporters. In the first place was my father, who from the beginning was not in full agreement. At the celebration after my ordination, someone came up to my dad and said, “You are very lucky, there are not many fathers who can say their son is a priest”. His response, “Especially a staunch German Lutheran father!” I cherish that answer, from him who became my greatest advocate.

I was first sent to Egypt for two years studying Arabic, in view of working in Christian-Muslim relations. I then moved to the Sudan where I spent 10 years in a parish of Darfur. The parish was huge, from my centre in the town of Nyala, I would travel 500km to the north and another 500km to the south visiting 136 villages where Christian communities were forming. The humanitarian situation became increasingly worse, but it was countered by a great receptivity to the Gospel. There were Easter celebrations with no less than 2,000 adult baptisms in the parish some years!

As Saint Comboni mentions, the first mission is like the first love and so much of what I experienced and lived, of the faith I witnessed in the people there, is forever inscribed in my heart. I see that it was a time of providence, those who had lived in very remote places, never having contact with the Church, escaping war in the south of the county, were coming to settle on the outskirts of villages in the west where we missionaries were visiting and, in a few cases, where we had not yet visited. One day a man came to the church compound in Nyala for example, he said he was a catechist who had prepared a group for baptism, could we please come. I had never heard of his village before and so, together with two other catechists of the parish, he showed us the way. We stayed with them two days, examining everyone in the community, nearly 300 adults, to see that they knew the basics of...
the faith, which they did. The surprise for me was on the day of baptism, when the catechist who had come to search me out, was the first in line to be baptised as he was not yet Christian. He was one of the few who could read, he came across a catechism written in his language of Dinka and had taught it to all the others!

From Sudan I took part in an organised sabbatical we call the “Comboni Year” in Mexico, followed by a 5-year period of service in my home province of North America. In practical terms it was impossible for me to get a visa to return again to the Sudan and my sights turned to Latin America. In 2011, to mark my 50th year, I made the 850km pilgrimage to Santiago Compostela in Spain, after which I left for Ecuador, the town of St. Lorenzo along the northern border with Colombia. This area has a particularly interesting history, predominantly Afro-descendants who had escaped to the mainland from a shipwreck off the coast and so they were taken from their homeland but had never been enslaved. It remains however a challenging and violent area with illegal mining destroying the environment and constant homicides due to the cross-border trafficking of drugs, arms and human trafficking too is prevalent. I never celebrated so many funeral masses, some months there were more than 30!

My thoughts of Africa and a desire to return there never left me, and in 2014 I was assigned to Chad. I was once again in a parish covering a vast territory of 400,000 square kilometres. My centre was in the town of Abeche, in the northeast of the country, it actually extended to the border of Sudan and connecting to what was my parish of Darfur! Many Muslims escaping the war in Darfur came to Chad around 2003 and still live in camps there today. I was invited to visit a camp one day and in asking how many people lived there, was told there were 90,000! That is but one of the many refugee camps in Chad. There is an estimated 240,000 people who have not been able to return to their homeland in Darfur due to the continued unrest in the area.

In Abeche there is a youth centre in the church compound set up with a library offering various activities, lectures and classes open to both Christians and Muslims. The Christians in this area of the country make up only 1% of the population! That actual dialogue exists with our Muslim brothers and sisters is debated and I’ve experienced the difficulty to organise a meaningful day of “leaders” (priests, imams and pastors) to come together for a moment of sharing. With Christian and Muslim youth however, those in their teens and early twenties, we have been able to organise and encourage encounters where they share their hopes and dreams for a better future together with original poems and songs as well as performing skits that can touch sensitive issues with humour. Despite the many difficulties in dialogue with Islam, there are small steps being taken in Chad, of sharing and of mutual respect, not grand undertakings that “make the news” but that none the less have an effect and are important.

I am now entering another phase of my missionary journey arriving in the London Province, I come with enthusiasm to face new challenges, sharing my faith, as well as knowing something more of the lands of my ancestors.
The Comboni Missionaries were invited by the Bishop of the Diocese of Malakal in 1998 to accompany Catholics who live scattered in the villages of the Fangak region in the Sudd, the wetlands and marshes of the Nile. Our young Christian community, whose first generation of believers are still alive, is extremely hospitable and generous. In order to keep the parish together, we missionaries visit people regularly in their villages. We walk on foot because there are no roads and accordingly no vehicles. The most distant chapels are up to four days away from the parish centre. The parish’s territory is about five times the size of the administrative region of Greater London. Paths that are not used disappear within a few weeks in the constantly growing vegetation. During half the year, the waters of the Nile and the rains flood the region, which is as flat as a disk. There are no hills except termite hills. On our hikes, we cross waters that reach up to our necks. Tropical diseases are part of everyday life and safe drinking water is rare.

We Comboni Missionaries serve a parish in Unity State, whose centre is in Leer, the birth town of Nuer opposition leader Riek Machar. Right at the beginning of the civil war, the town was captured by militias fighting for the Dinka government. In 2015, the militias locked more than 60 men and boys inside an overseas shipping container on our church plot who then suffocated to death.

Surveying a destroyed church

(Acknowledgement: Society for the Study of the Sudans (SSUK))

Fr Gregor Schmidt MCCJ

The Reconciliation Work of the Church in South Sudan

Fr Gregor Schmidt MCCJ

The Comboni Missionaries
death. From the point of view of outsiders, this amounts to a war crime committed by militias against Nuer civilians including children. The South Sudanese Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SSCBC) has had difficulty gaining influence on the warring parties because many bishoprics have been vacant. In addition, ethnic belonging is still a strong aspect of the identity of Catholics and of Christians in general, as it is among church leaders. This difficult tension between cultural and faith identity, the ecumenical South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), of which the Catholic Church is a founding member, has helped prepare a path towards national reconciliation.

At the local level of the parish, we find ourselves in the unlikely situation that the national war has reached only the fringes of Fangak County. With the exception of the county capital New Fangak, other areas have not been directly affected by battles or displacement. This is due to the isolation of the area that is created by the Nile swamps and thus the lack of road connections. In our diocese, in whose territory much of the fighting and destruction has taken place, our parish is the only one that has not had to be closed in all these years. In all the other parishes of Malakal Diocese, the work was stopped for several years. Still, every Nuer family in our parish has lost relatives in the war. Because the ‘enemy’ breathes down their necks, but is still reassuringly far away, our reconciliation work looks different from that of a parish in which there are mixed hostile groups.

I am working on the side of the losers. Although the Nuer of my region wish to get rid of the current government, it is a blessing from the point of view of the Gospel to belong to the marginalized (cf. Lk 1,51-53). In order not to be misunderstood, I add that those South Sudanese controlling the government are not worse people than others, but they simply have more opportunities through their control of better weapons and Uganda’s military aid. Apart from the first year of fighting, when the opposition had some victories and committed terrible crimes among the Dinka, the war has mainly taken place on territory where people who support the opposition parties traditionally live i.e., not in the Dinka homelands. In addition to ethnic cleansing of minority tribes in the Greater Equatoria Region, there has also been expulsion and confiscation of land by the government, which settles its own loyal people there. Even though fighting has not (yet) taken place in our parish area, it is an enormous challenge to preach love of one’s enemies in such a context.

Sometimes I get asked by European Christians why South Sudanese Christians don’t just follow the word of Jesus and forgive their enemies. That suggestion is easily expressed but only because those persons do not have a real enemy.
who seeks to kill them or destroy their livelihoods. I myself am a foreigner in South Sudan and because my own life is not threatened by anybody, I do not superficially demand love of one’s enemy from Christians of my parish as this would be to ask something that I do not have to implement myself. 4 Personal communication. A South Sudanese Comboni Missionary from Nimule confirmed this in regard to his home area. Instead, I have made the suffering of the Nuer my own suffering and make no demands.

We pray for the dead and bless the wounded who are taken to our hospital ward. On certain occasions, our Nuer Catholics pray at Mass in the language of the Dinka in order to set a sign for national reconciliation. At the local level
of clan conflict, traditional reconciliation talks go hand in hand with Christian prayer (insofar as the clans are Christian). Our active parishioners are noticeably less inclined to use violence than the average Nuer. The ecclesial life is like a shelter where a new, peaceful lifestyle is maintained. The Catholic Church is known and loved for the fact that differences of opinion are settled without violence. In contrast to traditional festivals and gatherings, weapons and alcohol are not allowed at church festivals and on church grounds. Anyone interested in this ‘alternative lifestyle’ can join us. A traditional feast often runs the risk of ending in bloodshed because youth (men) injure or kill each other; either a previous attack needs to be revenged or a new dispute needs to be started under the influence of alcohol. Furthermore, in our sermons and conversations, we shape the idea of inviolable human dignity because every person is an image of God. ‘Dignity’ cannot be adequately translated into Nuer. As an illustration, we explain that everyone must respect other persons deeply, even if they are women or strangers of another tribe. The stories of Jesus in the gospels help to underline this message.

As a missionary, I make the Gospel that presents God as a merciful Father, known to the people. A disciple of Jesus is called to imitate the Father and love the neighbour, even the enemy (cf. Eph 5:1-2; Lk 6:27-36). This message is about a change of mentality so that it is no longer ethnicity or the clan that defines whom one can and cannot trust. The Gospel and the Bible clearly show what constitutes a just, honest person. This should be the benchmark for building a just and peaceful society. A peaceful and conciliatory attitude must be exemplified in everyday life. This is the strength of the Church and the missionaries. We live with ‘our’ people and suffer with them. Jesus Christ changed and converted people by loving concretely and making Himself the servant of all. We missionaries strive to learn the language and culture and walk their paths both literally and figuratively. People honour this and they are ready to open themselves to the perspective of the Gospel because we have opened ourselves to their perspective. Patience is needed. Jesus explains that the Kingdom of God grows like a tree, slowly but steadily.
Introduction:
As we approach Christmas, I would like to suggest the texts of Luke 1:5-25 and 1:26-38, for our reflection. They deal with the visit of the Archangel Gabriel to Zachariah and to Mary, announcing both the coming of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the birth of John the Baptist. We will concentrate our attention on the reactions and consequences of answers of these two main protagonists of the Gospel, Zachariah and Mary, by way of comparing their similarities and differences in their responses to Gabriel. As we do so, what would it be your reaction if God reveals his plans contrary to yours?

1. Read: read the text of Luke 1:5-25; 26-38. slowly and listen attentively with the ‘ear of your heart’. What word, sentence or phrase stands out for you? [spend 2 min of silence]

2. Reflect: read the text again and pay attention to what touches you; why is it meaningful for you. What thought or reflection comes to you. [spend 2 min of silence]

3. Respond: read the text again but this time respond spontaneously to the word of God. In other words, dialogue with God on what comes from within you. What gift does this text lead you to ask for from the Lord? [spend 2 min of silence]

4. Stay with the Word: read the text a final time and rest in the word. Allow God to speak to you in deep silence. Do not say anything just listen to God’s words. What is He saying? [spend 5 min of silence]

5. Take now the word, sentence, or phase, into your daily life/activity; allow it to become part of you. Always listen to it, reflect on it, pray over it and rest on it as time allows during the day. Then allow the Word lead you to action.

Conclude your ‘Lectio Divina’ with the ‘Our Father’...

Reflection: The Angel Gabriel made an unexpected visit to Zachariah and Mary; both were living ordinary lives fulfilling their own responsibilities and obligations. On the one hand, Zachariah, a high priest regarded as righteous and law-abiding man from the order of Aaron. He was doing his morning and evening duties in the temple as it was the custom. He was chosen that day by lot. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience since a priest could not perform the task again until all the others of his line had done so. So, there is no coincidence here, God was at work in that choice to make his divine intervention. On the other hand, Mary does not hold any position among the people, she was young living in a world where age and gender matters. She was busy preparing her wedding as she was betrothed to Joseph, she may have been busy designing and making her wedding dress, helping her mother baking bread, packing up her belongings and thinking about a thousand and one things. She had already made up her mind about her plans to marry Joseph and to live the rest of her life with him. In the middle of her many activities there was a space for God’s intervention through the visit of his angel.
Central Message: “Zachariah do not be afraid; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must name him John.” … “Zachariah said to the Angel ‘how can I be sure of this?’

“Mary do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.” … “Mary said to the angel ‘how can this come about since I am a virgin.”

Main points:

a) “Zachariah do not be afraid; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must name him John.” … “Zachariah said to the Angel ‘how can I be sure of this?’

The visit of the angel of the Lord disturbed Zachariah and made him fearful. But the angel immediately dispelled his fear by assuring that his prayers have been heard by God. But which prayer? Maybe the prayer for the salvation of Israel made in unison with the people waiting outside or for the son he hoped to have one day. The assurance of the angel opened for him great expectations. What would be the result of his prayer then? So, the angel announced to him the unthinkable “your wife will bear you a son” and the angel explained how and why Elizabeth would conceive, what name will be given and what mission he is to carry out. Mind you, the couple was old and childless and so the message was of great news. Zachariah responded then “how can I be sure of this?” It reminds us of Abraham’s and Sarah’s responses: they both laughed because they were well on in years and barren (cfr. Gen. 17:17; 18:12). One may think that Zachariah being a priest would have been familiar with similar stories whereby God provided a child to childless couples. So, what he is asking is not how this is to happen, but how is he to know it, how he can be sure of it. Practically he is asking for a sign or a proof, meaning that he is questioning the integrity of the messenger. Gabriel then had no alternative but to reveal his credentials that he is the messenger of God and that his message is utterly reliable and will come true. As a consequence of his lack of faith, Gabriel makes him temporarily dumb until the birth of John the Baptist. This sign can be interpreted as what John will become, the voice that cries out in the Desert “prepare the way of the Lord!”.

b) “Mary do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.” Mary too is deeply disturbed, terrified and confused, wondering about what the greeting could mean. Gabriel reassures her by his words “do not be afraid” because God has chosen you. Then Gabriel delivers his message that she is to conceive and bear a son and that she is to name him Jesus describing his mission too. Mary then questions the angel “how can this come about since I am a virgin.” Her response is not of a doubt but a technical one, she is asking the process with which it will take place since she hasn’t got any sexual relationship with any man. She is not asking for a proof like Zachariah, but simply asking to get direction about how to proceed with her engagement. Then the angel explains the manner of the conception of the child “the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most high will cover you with his shadow.” Once Gabriel explained to her how it is possible (1:35), Mary’s response of acceptance (1:38) tells us where her heart is when she says, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” She is willing to go ahead with the plan. Mary therefore accepted the words of the angel, Zachariah didn’t. The consequence of Mary’s reaction is that she has won God’s favour and through her yes has saved the world giving birth to Jesus our Lord and saviour. The reassuring words of the angel are also for us, we need not fear, for the Lord is always with us in every moment of our life, in every situation in which we found ourselves, in our shortcomings of our journey etc.; we need to trust in the presence of the Lord who is near to us, he is upon us. Let us ask Mary to show us her way.

Some questions to help in our reflection

1. How would you react at God’s call to carry out his plans?
2. What are you afraid of that impedes answering God’s call?
3. What did you learn from Mary’s answer to the Lord?

“Lectio Divina”, a Latin term, means “divine reading” and describes a way of reading the Scriptures. Open ourselves to what God wants to say to us.

Any Questions? Keep in touch!

Contact me at: ruben@comboniyouth.org
Father Rubén Padilla Rocha
I think we all know what the saying about the invisible ‘Elephant in the Room’ means: something important has been ignored.

The missing elephant, in our political, economic and campaigning world, is the money spent on military use and production. Competition for resources is fierce, yet the world now spends almost two trillion, (not billion) dollars annually on its military - not on global health, or food production, or education. Isn’t that quite shocking?

Sadly, military expenditure goes up not down. It is now 9.3% higher than it was in 2011 and 2.6% higher now than in 2019.

Much of this military expenditure, and the activity it involves, means greater quantities of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere and higher global temperatures. War itself contributes to climate change through the entire cycle - ore extraction, manufacture of weaponry, massive amounts of fuel needed for trials and training, the use of fuel and explosives in military operations of all kinds, and extensive rebuilding of devastated infrastructure following conflict. I could go on.

This elephant gets much less notice than it should. Little mention of it, I find, in the minutes of various organisations working to tackle the climate crisis. This may have something to do with the political restrictions of legal charitable status. Lord Deben, who is chair of the national Climate Change Committee, which has much that is positive to say about reversing the climate crisis, avoids any link with militarism. (A former Secretary of State for the Environment, Lord Deben also advises the Catholic Church on these issues.)

At present there is no obligation on nations to count military emissions (estimated by Scientists for Global Responsibility to be about 6% of global greenhouse gases) nor to include them in reduction targets. In 2021, NATO agreed to ‘significantly reduce’ military greenhouse gas emissions. That did not prevent Britain sending an aircraft carrier all the way to Japan to impress China and ‘improve’ our international global standing. Nor did it prevent the British decision earlier this year to greatly increase the number of British nuclear warheads.

It is high time that the military Elephant was made visible and asked to sit down and join in the discussion about our global future.

Military expenditure, military production and its consequences, military emissions, and the entire assumption that military methods solve our problems, must be part of the Glasgow agenda. Was it?

Our global climate insecurity won’t and can’t be solved with guns and bombs.

I am a Vice-President of CND, Pax Christi, and the Movement for the Abolition of War. Am also a past-President of the International Peace Bureau. I was an active Catholic priest for nearly 30 years and have now retired but remain involved in the life of my local parish.
Bro. Elio Croce

The sun is setting at Lacor Hospital in Northern Uganda. Brother Elio makes his way home after a long day’s work. He is worried about the dreadful news coming from Europe. A virus from China is infecting thousands of people and claiming hundreds of victims. The virus is spreading rapidly. Brother Elio still has vivid memories of what happened in 2000 when the Ebola virus struck Northern Uganda causing hundreds of deaths.

Lacor hospital was hit hard. The doctors and nurses were among the first to die. He knows the new virus will soon appear in Africa. He wonders how he can prepare for the virus, but details are still lacking. Going to his room, he turns on the old wireless that has been his companion for so many years.

Bro. Elio Croce first went to Uganda in 1975. He has spent forty-five years in Africa, first as technical director of Kitgum Hospital and then, starting in 1985, of Lacor Hospital.

Bro. Elio has shared all the events affecting the Acholi people. For them and with them, he built hospital buildings, dug wells, and set up technical and agricultural projects. He shared with the Acholi people the terrible decades of the guerrilla war and buried their dead. He has lost count of how many kilometres he travelled throughout the area driving his old Toyota.

Bro. Elio was always attracted, moved and upheld by his faith in Divine Providence, an unrelenting and solid faith that was the indestructible nourishment of a life given totally for the African people. His was a world of building-sites and workshops for carpentry and mechanics and the maintenance of the electrical medical equipment.

During the war years, when no supplies were available, everything had to be made on the spot. Bro. Elio was very capable. He knew how to do things and how to teach others, but he insisted on having everything done properly. By so doing, he helped in the development of the local area. Many were trained at his school, learning a trade and acquiring the mentality of work as an art form. At his urging, many small activities were established. His workers worked hard and well, becoming independent.

They knew they could count on Elio. Many pursued their studies thanks to him. His simple and concrete manner was sometimes sweetly rough though totally honest, with no frills and the experience of a life dedicated to Africa that seemed to exude from the man in dust-covered sandals, challenged and won over (often for life) anyone who approached him. He left no one indifferent; there was always an encounter with his choice of life and a feeling of being at one with him, even when people disagreed with him. Brother Elio, a survivor of massacres and Ebola, was taken to heaven by Covid 19 on 11 November 2020, at the age of 74 years.
Father Bascarán, wearing the shoes of the mission

He is known by everyone for his long hair and sandals as he walks the streets of Salvador de Bahia in Brazil. Wearing the ‘shoes of the mission’ for him meant being on the side of the poor and humble people. It meant keeping one’s feet firmly on the ground, in the dust of the roads that bring home the situation of the people. As he walks, he sees the small boys playing football. They see him and kick the ball to him. He controls it perfectly and skilfully passes it back. The sound of music is coming from one of the houses. He knows that tune; he has played it often.

His two great interests: football and music. As a young man, Spanish Father Carlos Bascarán Collantes was a professional footballer and fascinated spectators with his skills. Some believed he would have a wonderful future playing for one of the teams in the La Liga Española. His musical talents were also well known, and his guitar was always by his side. His presence was always a celebration. Cheerful and enthusiastic, he made friends easily, especially with the youth and especially through his music. He would say to the young people: “You must always be in harmony and sing the right notes to be together without being afraid of making mistakes. Music brings us together and makes us feel more like children of God and members of our communities. Music always carries with it love and liberation”.

For six years, he was the provincial superior of the Comboni Missionaries in Brazil. His colleagues remember him well: “Those were complicated and difficult times for him. His critical attitude towards the civil and religious authorities led to clashes but he was always spontaneous and sincere”.

A man of great ideas, both during and after his mandate he gave new vigour to the province both in the field of formation and missionary animation, while aware of the limits. He would say: “The mission is like a performance of a symphony. The music is perfectly written but the musicians are limited and often out of tune. However, this does not mean we can’t try to play perfect music”.

Brazil had been struck by the Coronavirus for several months, reaping thousands of victims and infections. During all that time, Fr. Carlos refused to stay indoors but went to visit the communities, offering advice and support. It was important that people should see their priest among them in those difficult times. For some days he had not felt well and was taken to João Pessoa Hospital suffering from the virus. To date over 600,000 have died from the virus. Much of the blame has been laid at the feet of President Bolsonaro for indifference and lack of immediate action to curb the pandemic.

He died late in the afternoon of Tuesday 22 September 2020. He was 77 years of age and had spent forty of them walking the side streets of Brazil in his dusty missionary sandals.
Father Aranda Nava, Sharing life

The sound of gunfire is coming closer. Billowing smoke can be seen in the distance. The area has become a battlefield between the government forces and the rebels. The missionaries realise it is time to go.

They gather their few possessions and start walking towards the Ugandan border. Amid the many dangers and ever-present fears, Father Aranda writes: “After walking for days, we reached the Bidi Bidi refugee camp. Living like refugees is a new experience for us as a missionary community. We have left our mission of Kajo-Keji in South Sudan and now we are with our people who live in the refugee camps in the north of Uganda. Like them, we are homeless people and refugees”.

Mexican Father José de Jesús Aranda Nava first went to Sudan in 1984. His main apostolate was the training of the Comboni postulants in Juba and Khartoum. In 1992, he was expelled with other Combonis by the Muslim government of Khartoum, in Sudan. Once back in Mexico, he worked in the formation of future missionaries as well as in missionary animation. He is remembered as a man who was always smiling. He would always speak enthusiastically of his missionary work in Africa.

In 1999, he returned to Africa and devoted himself to the formation of young missionaries first in Sudan and then in Kenya. Lastly, in 2007, he arrived in the parish of Kajo Keji, South Sudan. There he worked tirelessly training catechists and managing a number of schools for boys and girls.

On the feast of Saint Daniel Comboni, he wrote on Facebook: “Comboni Day: 10 October 2020. The holiness of Comboni is lived out in communion with suffering humanity. Saint Daniel lived his holiness in solidarity with the suffering and the ill-treated. In the course of our history, the sons and daughters of Saint Daniel Comboni have sought to follow the path of holiness, sharing the daily life of their suffering brothers and sisters. We have great people who are fine examples of making common cause with the people: Father Giuseppe Ambrosoli, Father Ezekiel Ramin and many more. Today, we are called to share in holiness, the life of so many people who are faced with the crisis of the Coronavirus pandemic and its consequences. We are in communion with the migrants and refugees, the populations in areas of conflict and war. Let us carry in our hearts the burden of suffering of the Church and the sad situation of the environment and all creation. Pray for peace and brotherhood between our people and South Sudan”.

He was urgently taken to Lacor Hospital in Gulu where he was admitted with the Coronavirus infection. He died on 4 November 2020. He was 68 years of age. His dream was to be a missionary in Africa. This dream of his came true and he not only lived as a missionary in Africa but also died and was buried in the land he loved.
Noel we call Thee Holy Night

by Fr David Bohnsack mccj

Noel we call thee holy night
Humble presence of the divine
True love could give no greater sign
Infinite breath, width, depth and height

The Prince of Peace and Lord of Might
Draws near, unexpected storyline
Noel we call thee holy night
Humble presence of the divine

Wonderful Counselor bringing light
Of which no darkness can confine
Word made flesh all glory be thine
We stand in wonder at the sight
Noel we call thee holy night
Christmas 2021 has fast approached us. The run-up to it has definitely been colourised by climate change issues raised in COP 26, catastrophic storms that have caused much havoc and great suffering all over the planet. On top of all this, we are worried about germs, infections, contagion and the effects of the universal pandemic COVID 19 that continues to grow. There is no doubt about it everyone looks forward to a brighter Christmas this year. It is at this festive season that we want to experience some taste of joy and happiness with members of our families and friends, isn’t it?

Christ was born, a little baby boy gently laid upon a bed of straw in a manger at Bethlehem. I often wonder what colour the straw was. Could it have been green? I doubt it. God only knows. But this year we badly need a Saviour who will bring humankind to their senses about its treatment of Mother Nature and all her offspring. As guardians and protectors of fresh life, we are called to treat every new-born creature – both human and non-human, with extremely delicate care and attention.

Popularly, green has come to indicate concern for maintaining a respectful healthy climate through the elimination of greenhouse gases in avoiding the excessive use of fossil fuels. Green can also stand for hope. The birth of any child signals the hope of a future blessed with health and prosperity. It guarantees the continuation of the human race and a family generation.

The upbringing of the Infant Jesus called for the meticulous dedication of both Mary and Joseph. Jesus was educated to respect all of God’s creation. At His birth He was immediately brought into contact with the things of nature the very moment of Our Lady’s confinement on the bed of straw, the breath of the surrounding animals, the bright lights of the shining night stars, the smell of the shepherds and their sheep. Even the angels had their voice in. He must have had a smile on His face amid such a diverse environment. Throughout his life the imagination of Baby Jesus would later be profoundly immerged in the world of nature. After his birth Jesus would use various parables about human beings, the animal world and the life of nature. After all, isn’t it He the Creator of heaven and earth?

As we wait for a better future in 2022, with positivity in mind, tenacious solidarity in effort, and voices of faith and gladness, let’s focus on renewal, going forward as we meet the glaring challenges of the day. Celebration is the name of Christmas Day. We have every reason in the world to remember with joy the day God came down to earth among us. Emmanuel. God is with us today and forever. Let us rejoice and throw the sadness of 2021 away.

Let The Party Of The Christmas Festival Begin Soon

Fr J. Clark mccj
There is no better time than autumn to speak and reflect about changes and transformation. I love looking at the trees in our parks in London in this season of the year. Silently the trees go through a natural mutation of their leaves from green colour into yellow, pink and red. After this the trees will get rid of the leaves completely to shut down for winter until they dress up again with the colours of spring.

“That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.”
Shakespeare, Sonnet 73

Learning from the trees and the natural renewal of nature, especially in a time when Climate Change has become a major concern in today’s world, it can give us the wisdom for the need to accept the processes of death and life as something necessary in God’s plan to “make new everything”.

Towards the Event of 150 Years
As Comboni Missionary Sisters we are living in a great season of our history, which I compare with the transformation of the colours that we see in the leaves of our trees in autumn. It was in 2018 when Sr Luigina Coccia, the General Superior of the Institute, launched a three-year spiritual programme offered to the sisters in the entire Congregation. Her invitation was that they took an inner journey of renewal, passing through three progressive stages of revisiting the Charism inherited from Saint Daniel Comboni and to arrive together to a “new understandings of our being Comboni Missionary Sisters, today”. Luigina letter 25th May 2018. Alongside, with a personal and communitarian spiritual renewal, it is essential that the way of administrating and the physical buildings are revised if the renewal is to happen. The dynamics for change are that we become conscious that something is dying to give life to the new. But the new is not new until it becomes visible in what we choose as a priority in our style of life and in our structures. “Look, I’m doing a new thing: now it springs forth. Can you see it? Isaiah 43:19

As we journey toward commemorating 150 years of the Foundation of our Institute - 1st January 2022 - we still need to reflect on how to make that riv-

Celebrating 150 years and journeying together

150
1872-2022
Years of Grace Flowing from the Comboni Charism
Dedicated to the People Most in Need on the Periphery of Society

By Sr Graca Almeida, Comboni missionary
er of fresh water that is still flowing from the Comboni Charism to give life into the future.

It is not mere coincidence that Sr Luisa Coccia is the present General Superior. She is very much in tune with Pope Francis Spirituality. She also wants to bring into our broken world a new way of being brothers and sisters, to bring forth a mission that cares for the environment and to respond to the modern peripheries of our society. This is a particular time that asks to pass from dreaming a new mission into the implementation of the changes that make that mission a reality. It requires the courage of a prophet to make big decisions about the Congregation while being fully aware that a better future depends on today’s actions. A missionary congregation that wants still to be at the service of the poor must also generate a new passion of joy for commitment in the religious communities capable to attract the young generations to embrace that same wonderful vocation. We will see the impact of the renewal in a reduced membership that intentionally embraces the sacrifice and the cross that was for the Founder and the first Comboni Sisters the driving force and the source of creativity for the mission to take the heart of Jesus to the people most in need in the peripheries of society.

We are not alone on this journey
The world is in rapid transformation

The mission of a Congregation like ours has a special mandate from the Church to take the richness of the Gospel to the most remote physical, human and geographical situations that would not otherwise be reached. We know that this mandate, more than ever, requires a light structure and great courage to be able to continuously adapt to the fast changes of time. I see a great opportunity to value the little missionary endeavours done by small religious Comboni communities to interconnect with the rest of the world. And because we have learnt that all is interconnected, let’s live the grace to become that yeast that leavens the mass of today’s society and take up a mission that brings that global fraternity that Pope Francis wants for the world.

While being attentive to the “ambitious” resolutions for Climate Change that the leaders of the nations are expected to make on the occasion of the COP26 in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November 2021, we know that more often than not are the little actions in everyday life that make the change happen. The passage of the Gospel in Matthew 10:42 comes to my mind: there is a promise of a great reward for a glass of fresh water to the least of our brothers and sisters. This reminds me of my time in Ethiopia in the eighties when I worked in the Sidamo region, a place where fresh drinking water was a luxury to be found in any household. The symbol of a glass of clean drinking water means a welcoming missionary heart that the passerby would bless with the words: “God reward you!”

In time of change we hold to the prophetic words of Comboni who seeing the reality of the mission stated that we are “hidden stones” in the great building of humanity and in the Church in continuous transformation.
We were pleasantly surprised to have a good turnout at our *Laudato Si’* event held in response to Pope Francis’ exhortation to Care for our Common Home in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. Our community at the Sacred Heart has been following Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* over the past months led by Dr Sarah Gardner and Sister Patricia Mulhall (csb).

To raise awareness of Pope Francis’ teaching and to acknowledge the season of creation, we invited young and old to join together in an afternoon of dialogue, fun quizzes, craft and praise, reflecting on our Care for God’s Creation.

Our welcome desk and hall were decorated with Creation Artwork and messages of Hope from the Marist School, Sunninghill. Erin Banbury and Joao Rodrigues were on the registration table at the entrance, welcoming everyone and ensuring they all had a name badge.

The event was opened by Fr Julio and Sarah Gardner who reminded us all of our study so far and briefly described the agenda for the afternoon and what we expected of each age group.

Our guest speaker was John Paul de Quay from our own Diocese of Arundel & Brighton. John Paul is creative director of The Journey to 2030, a lay-run campaign that supports the Catholic Church and its community in responding to Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* [https://journeyto2030.org/about/](https://journeyto2030.org/about/). The campaign is co-ordinated by the Ecological Conversion Group (ECG) co-founded by John Paul and supported by the Diocese. John Paul gave a powerful and very interesting talk in which he described the impact Pope Francis has had on world leaders with his publication *Laudato Si’* and the ongoing commitment of the Pope to see that promises are made and kept. He highlighted the plight of the world’s poor who suffer the most from the effects of climate change, their farmland being turned into dust bowls from drought, forcing them to become refugees and move on to be able to feed their families. He reminded us that this situation has come about because, as Pope Francis highlights, we have put ourselves at the centre of the universe as being more important than God, our neighbour and our planet. This attitude leads to our morals and ethics being subject to our personal convenience. Instead, when we return to restoring God at the centre, we realise that we are both dependant on and are part of nature, and

On the afternoon of Sunday 3 October, Sacred Heart Church, Sunningdale invited their congregation to come together to consider and reflect on the environmental and socio-economic challenges taking place on our planet. Pope Francis has written about these issues in his encyclical *Laudato Si’* and a key aim of this event was to introduce the church community to some of Pope Francis’ messages about the crisis facing God’s Creation and to encourage them to respond.

*Report by Alice de Lima & Sarah Gardiner*
inter-dependant with our global brothers and sisters. This change of vision is captured in Pope Francis’ call to Ecological Conversion.

After John Paul’s talk, we moved to the church to explore the Creation in Crisis Trail displayed on pillars throughout the nave and side chapels. The Trail of 15 stations depicted key elements of the ecological and environmental damage being perpetrated on our world: the Greenhouse Effect & Arctic Ice, Carbon Dioxide & Ocean Warming, Energy Demand, Methane, the Challenges facing COP26, Deforestation, Plastic Waste on Land and in our Oceans, Clothing in Landfill, Fair Prices for Coffee Farmers, Pesticides & their effects on Wildlife, Food Waste, Prawn Farming & the loss of Mangroves, Loss of Biodiversity and Surfers Against Sewage. Each station included a brief description of one of these issues, a painting or collage created by the young children the previous week illustrating the point, a poem or a prayer of reflection and suggested actions.

The event organisers had devised fun quizzes to help all age groups engage with the Trail. Intriguing questions about everyday activities and changes in environments often at vast distances from where the activity took place, revealed the links between our modern behaviour or technology and its detrimental effect on the environment, for example, the melting of the polar ice cap and aviation emissions.

It was wonderful to see young and old really engaged in reading and discussing the topics, making notes and answering the questions set for us. So much information was new to us. We have had our eyes opened to the disturbing way we humans are treating our habitat. It is being brought home to us what a huge impact it is having on the poor and our wildlife. Raising awareness that our creation is in crisis was one of the main purposes of the event.

Also, during the month of September the congregation had gathered a collection of food items to be dispersed to a local food
We were all made aware of the saying – “live simply so that the poor can simply live.”

As we reconvened after a delicious tea of home-baked cakes and loose leaf tea (no paper or plastic waste – many teabags contain plastic!), we paused to consider the timescale within which our behaviours, our lifestyles need to change in order to prevent the current pattern of global warming from increasing by more than 1.5°C by 2050. This date, now less than 30 years away, seemed an age – a lifetime away for the teenagers, whose lives are changing daily as they journey through their school years. But the adults observed that periods of 10, 20 years can disappear in a flash and that a timescale of less than 30 years for taking action to constrain future warming within 1.5°C is an enormous challenge. To achieve it, we will all – as Pope Francis says – need to cooperate, to act together and now.

This sobering reflection was followed by lively discussions of the quizzes used to reveal the links between everyday items or choices and environmental change. For example, what is the link between Foxes glacier mints and British Airways, and it isn’t the sweets that are handed out in flight. Teenagers joined these table discussions and questioned the older people about how energy efficient they keep their houses and how they are influenced when purchasing energy by using sustainable sources. Each table was asked to evaluate their answers to the quiz on ‘How Green is Your Household’, and to pledge one action to help save our damaged world. Commitments to using less water, making fewer trips on aeroplanes, not wasting food, and using less fossil fuel were put forward.

It was at this point that the adults were held to account by the teenagers. Most of them were far more aware of the environmental problems we face than the adults had expected and they were keen to know what the adults had learned during the afternoon and how this would impact their behaviour in the future.

The ways in which they could influence their parents’ behaviours was also discussed and the teens were keen to pursue making positive changes in their households. There were challenging questions and lively exchanges about the impact that our individual actions might make, faced with the enormity of the climate change problem. But we reminded ourselves that most regime and lifestyle changes have started with a few individuals working together to bring about change. Our discussions were broad and wide-ranging reflecting the complexity and interconnectedness of our everyday lives and global environmental change. It’s fair to say everyone learned something and all committed to making positive changes going forward.

A suggestion that we meet again in a few months’ time to measure our progress was well received.

The children came in from the craft room upstairs to present the prayer boats that they’d made with Krista, Nuala, Jackie, Norma and Ruth, asking God to save our world and saying how they were going to help. They read out their sweet little prayers which were hung on a display tree with lights and taken into the church so the Sacred Heart community could read them. These prayer boats will be taken to Glasgow by a group young people from Christian Aid and presented to world leaders at COP26.

The afternoon’s learning and discussions were brought to a close with a short liturgy service of singing, interspersed with reflections on the environmental message in the hymns and prayers read out by a young boy and girl and a more senior member who spoke of the contrast in pace of life compared to her youth. She led prayers for the success of COP26 in Glasgow in November. Fr Julio, who had accompanied the singing on guitar, adopted his more familiar role of Pastor, leading us in the Lord’s Prayer and bestowing a blessing on us before we moved outside for the tree planting.

The last event of the day was getting Erin and Joao to plant an oak tree seedling, which was donated by the Marist School, in the front garden of The Sacred Heart Church to mark the occasion. This was carried with suitable pomp and ceremony with everyone giving advice whilst letting the youngsters do all the work!
Our first Assembly since May 2019 in a gathering to spend time together: reflecting, praying and enjoying one another’s company.

It was the moment to welcome newcomers to the London Province: Fr. Julio Ocana, and Fr David Bohnsack and Fr Mario Cerda. Apologies for absence came from Fr. John Fraser, due to ill-health, and Frs. Ruben Padilla and Felipe Castrejana.

Daily morning prayers were celebrated and in the evening Vespers and the Celebration of Holy Mass.

Reports were heard from the various secretariates, editor’s report, website reports, appeal organisers from England, Scotland and Ireland and finally Community reports from each House.

Throughout the three days there were lively discussions dealing with our ‘Six-Year Plan’, detailing and revisiting our commitments, Report from the Province to the XIX General Chapter next year and many other urgent topics.

It proved to be a fruitful encounter and inspiring hope as we move ahead coping with the pandemic setbacks.
Peace and Good Tidings of Christmas and a Blessed New Year to all our Friends and Benefactors

Hidden in what seems ordinary
God of wonderment awe surprise
The humble see not those thought wise
Manger becomes sanctuary

Newborn babe with mother Mary
Joseph joyful with tearful eyes
Hidden in what seems ordinary
God of wonderment awe surprise

Good news making the heart merry
Star of Bethlehem in the night skies
A plan only God could devise
So truly extraordinary
Hidden in what seems ordinary