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Comboni

Mission Newsletter

Superior General Teresino Serra on the spirituality of mission

by Katie Walker

When the Most Rev. Teresino Serra, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, visited the North American Province in April, he issued a simple challenge to the priests and brothers of the institute he leads.

“The Christian must live as a person constantly in love,” Father Terry told them, “and I am in love with the missions.”

The native Sardinian is passionate about his job. Superior General since 2003, Father Terry has mission experience in Kenya, Mexico, the United States and Italy. He brings an infectious enthusiasm to his post, said North American Provincial Superior, Fr. Louie Gasparini.

“While he carries on the mission of the previous administrations, he brings a new vision to the needs and realities of today’s world,” Father Louie said.

The trip to the United States was a homecoming for Father Terry. As his first missionary assignment, he spent seven years teaching at the Comboni Missionaries’ Sacred Heart Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio and Sacred Heart Novitiate in Monroe, Michigan. He holds a Masters of Education from Xavier University and studied at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary under Daniel Pilarczyk, now Archbishop of Cincinnati.

While here, Father Terry led a spiritual retreat for the Comboni Missionaries, met with Archbishop Pilarczyk and visited Mission Centers around the Province.

The *Comboni Mission Newsletter* had a chance to sit down with Father Terry before the retreat:

Q. How did you come to realize you had a vocation as a missionary priest?

A. The real idea came in college. Two missionaries came to me and talked of their experiences in Africa. The adventure they were talking about wasn’t the thing that caught me, but the way they were

talking about their mission and the people they ministered to. They started writing to me—personal letters—and eventually I started listening.

Something happens in the heart and minds of those who listen. It is difficult to describe, but my mind thought things it never thought before and my heart felt things it never felt before. Something struck me.

Q. What keeps you so passionate about your work?

A. After the first sermon I made, my mother said: “My son, your sermon was very good, but I

(Continued on page 2)



In April, the priests of the North American Province gathered for their annual spiritual retreat. This year, however, was special. The Comboni fathers welcomed Superior General Teresino Serra (3rd row, 4th from left) who led them in their spiritual exercises.

Superior General Teresino Serra on the spirituality of mission *(Continued from page 1)*

didn't understand anything. When you talk, talk to the simple people, don't use big words, speak with your heart." When you have something in your heart, you can't keep it in. St. Daniel Comboni taught us that love for mission comes from the heart. He was the same missionary in Africa as he was in Italy. You have to be in the mission all the time. You have to educate the mind, heart and will. The mind, to always think about mission. The heart, in order to always love mission, and the will, in order to always desire mission.

Q. What challenges do missionaries face today?

A. In the past, the missionary was accepted as a good friend. But things have changed. In Africa today, it is almost a crime to be an outsider, or foreigner. However, the beautiful part is good people around the world know how to distinguish the person who goes for religious purposes from the adventurer. They know we are really going to serve. Today, we are like John the Baptist. We prepare the way, but we have to leave space and room for Christ—who is the local clergy.

Q. How is God calling us to restructure our mission vision to meet the needs of today's world?

A. Today, the encounter of the mission has changed. Mission fifty years ago was very different, but this is a different age with different challenges and we must have the courage to face it, to adapt.

Before, it was somehow easier to go and talk about God, to preach, to baptize—to save the people. Now we are called to go, to stay with them, and to wait. To share with them all kinds of experiences. You can talk with your tongue, or you can talk with your life.

CMNL welcomes the Comboni Missionary Sisters!

A message from Sr. Mary Luz Aguilera, cms, Provincial Superior

On behalf of the Comboni Missionary Sisters, I am pleased to announce that we are now collaborating with the Comboni Missionaries and Comboni Lay Missionaries on the *Comboni Mission Newsletter*. We are excited to join this effort as a way to increase our mutual cooperation and hope this

new endeavor will further our ability to spread the news of our ministry in the world. Many friends of the Comboni Missionary Sisters will receive this newsletter for the first time. We hope you find it interesting. Let us hear from you. Be assured of our prayers for you and your families.

Mission is done in two ways. The first was to dry the tears of the people who were weeping. That is over. Now we are called to stand and defend the people. We must ask who is making the people cry. Some criticize that we are doing politics, but not to speak of political problems is to not talk. We have to stop the hand of the dictator who is making God's people cry.

Q. What qualities would you wish to see in the next generation of missionaries?

A. The first quality would be obedience to their vocations, which come from God. The second is love, you cannot live without love. The third is prayer, of talking to the Lord about his business. Mission is the business of God. Some people don't like when I talk of prayer, but mission is not a social adventure. Both action and contemplation are very important. As St. Daniel taught us, prayer is the strength, the omnipotent instrument. Without it, our life becomes some kind of social work. If you want to love and serve the poor, you have to spend a lot of time with the Lord in prayer. It gives you strength and a real love for those who are often not loveable. It's not loveable to stay in these places, humanly speaking, but why do we stay? The answer is what I see in our

missionaries—a strong spirituality that gives us the courage to stay. I can see a difference between those missionaries who get tired and always want to change, and those who never want to go on vacation.

Q. Is there any special message for the people of the North American Province?

A. The United States was my first experience as a priest, and I enjoyed being here in the evangelical and physical sense. The people made it very easy for me. I found sincerity in their proposal to help in the mission. I remember especially the Ladies' Auxiliary—I saw in them a deep missionary spirit. They were deep in their faith and their belief in our vocation as the Comboni Missionaries. Their missionary spirit encouraged me and after the end of the fourth year at the seminary, I told myself that if I am going to show them a missionary spirit, I have to go to the missions. So I was sent to Africa. But the first experience is something like the first love—it stays in your heart for a long time. The Americans have many defects but they have one great virtue—when they believe in something, they give themselves completely to what they believe in. ▼

A Note from the Provincial...

The visit of Superior General Teresino Serra took place during the Easter Season while we were still reading of the different appearances of the Risen Lord and the life of the first Christian communities. “The disciples were all together when Jesus appeared in the midst of them.” “Peace with you.” “He showed them His hands and feet... He ate with them.” “I am in your midst as one who serves you.”

Father Terry’s deep spirituality and passion for the missions, embedded in a personality gifted with an extraordinary sense of humanity and realism, helped us to live the resurrection joy. During a week-long retreat, Father Terry’s visit was not a surprise like that of the Risen Lord to His Disciples, because it was scheduled and expected, but it was filled with similar graces.

Our retreat had the participation of nearly all the Comboni Missionaries working in United States and Canada, and all of us felt the joy of being an integral part of the Comboni Missionary family that Father Terry represents and guides. Behind Father Terry’s warm smile, pointed humor, and calm, relaxed

demeanor we could detect the well-concealed burden of the service we have called him to carry by electing him as our leader.

His messages were direct, to the point, dressed with his special sense of humor, and filled with joyful trust. I felt that behind every retreat talk there was a person, a situation, an experience or a place to which we could all relate. It was as if everyone could hear him “in his native language.”

We are called to do this with integrity of life, together as a community, open to collaboration with anyone who loves the mission and with a deep respect for the people we are called to serve.

—Superior General Teresino Serra

He reminded us, in a fresh, new way, of our calling to mission—the mission of God who sees the suffering of the people, hears their cry, comes down to be with them and leads them to freedom. We are

called to continue that mission in the style of St. Daniel Comboni, with a lifelong commitment to the marginalized and rejected in places where no one likes to go. We are called to do this with integrity of life, together as a community, open to collaboration with anyone who loves the mission and with a deep respect for the people we are called to serve.

Father Terry reminded us that this is not an easy task in our changing world and in our challenging times. Fewer vocations to consecrated life and diverse geographical and cultural origins among our seminarians demand a revision of formation programs. The decreasing number of the members and their advancing age call for a humble focusing on the needs that are specific to our Comboni calling. We find that we must entrust some of our previous commitments to the local dioceses or lay ministries.

Far from a feeling of discouragement, we were left with a deep sense of trust in the fact that our mission is primarily God’s mission. Our renewed commitment to collaboration among ourselves: religious, lay and benefactors at provincial and continental levels, widens the horizon and draws on a greater pool of resources.

The visit of Father Terry carried a bit of the flavor of that biblical journey to Emmaus. Weren’t our hearts burning as Father Terry conveyed to us his passion for the missions and, through the history of our Institute, his love for St. Daniel Comboni and the people Saint Daniel loved?

Thanks, Father Terry. Your visit has been a gift to us. ▼

—Very Rev. Louis Gasparini



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Award-winning

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Hillary's wish—educating African orphans

Given the opportunity to have any wish come true, one mission-minded teenager in Springfield, Ohio, has decided to join forces with the Comboni Missionaries to fulfill the wishes of children half a world away.

Hillary LeMelle is sixteen years old and battling Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare cancer of the bone and soft tissue. When the Make-A-Wish Foundation, an organization that grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions, offered to grant Hillary any wish, she first thought of a trip to Hawaii with her parents and four brothers and sisters. Then, after visiting a friend in the hospital, Hillary decided she would find a way to put the money to better use in the service of others.

In an April 24 presentation at the Comboni Missionaries' Provincial Headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, Susan McConnell, CEO of the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Greater Ohio, Kentucky and Indi-

ana, presented Hillary a check for \$3,600. Hillary then entrusted the check to the Most Rev. Teresino Serra, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries. The funds will be used for the education of orphaned children in Africa.

"I'm so excited the money is going to a good place, I know how much I value my education, and I know this is something these children can use through their whole lives."

—Hillary LeMelle

"I know that with this gift, you are bringing freedom to these children in Africa," Ms. McConnell told Hillary as she presented the check.

A junior at Catholic Central High School in Springfield, Hillary is an ordinary teenager looking forward to the prom and scouting out

colleges. She is interested in drama and recently starred in the school play as Belle in "Beauty and the Beast." But she has an extraordinary spirit and a history of service to others. She is raising a miniature horse named Sunshine to be a therapy animal for children in hospitals, and she and her family sponsor a child in Guatemala.

This history is what drew Hillary to the Comboni Missionaries. While on a trip to Italy two years ago, the LeMelle family met Comboni Fr. Richard Kyankaaga. Father Richard spoke to the family of his work among the children of Africa, many of whom have been orphaned by the AIDS pandemic. He told them about 75 children to whom he is struggling to give an education.

"I'm so excited the money is going to a good place," Hillary said. "I know how much I value my education, and I know this is something these children can use through their whole lives."

Father Teresino congratulated Hillary on her generosity and mission spirit.

"You have helped us believe more deeply in our vocation as missionaries," he told her.

"Missionaries come in all shapes and sizes. They may be religious or lay, men or women, young or old, but all are easily recognizable by their courage, dedication to service, and their great love for God and humanity," said Provincial Superior Fr. Louie Gasparini. "Thank you, Hillary, for setting an example of true mission spirit. You are an inspiration to all." ▼

—Katie Walker



Hillary LeMelle presents Superior General Teresino Serra (middle) and Comboni Fr. Peter Ciuciulla a check for the education of African orphans.

Forgiveness in action—Trujillo, Peru



Theresa May has been working as a Comboni Lay Missionary in Peru with her husband Ralph and daughter Hannah since September 2005. Theresa has been spending much of her time working as a youth minister and catechist in the parish. Ralph, formerly a farmer from Idaho, has been teaching English and agricultural classes. Here is another report from Theresa.

With the Peruvian government considering the death penalty as punishment for convicted terrorists, I thought it would be interesting for my Bible study group to reflect on the morality of this punishment in light of the Scriptures. I admit, I wondered what the ladies



Theresa May (far right) listens as a woman in her weekly Bible study reflects on the Scripture reading.

would think of the topic. We rarely talk about large scale social issues. We mostly talk about daily life.

The women I meet every Wednesday afternoon all work in their homes and take care of their families. The majority of them can't read and their day consists of going to market, cooking, washing clothes and

caring for their children, spouses and extended family. They cook on dirt floors using firewood and charcoal briquettes.

They work hard and seem grateful for the opportunity to sit for a bit every Wednesday at 4 p.m. and reflect on the Word of God.

That afternoon we read the Scriptures for the coming Sunday. I told the ladies how I'd been in Lima the week before and about the anti-death penalty protest I'd witnessed. They were largely silent. Were they confused, I wondered? Did they understand my words?

The first woman to share spoke of her nephew who was murdered six months before. Another woman, who always comes to the Bible study with her mother, Rosa, began to share about her older brother. A number of years ago, the brother stumbled into their home, stabbed by a knife. He died in Rosa's arms. In both cases, they know who the killer was, but neither person was ever "brought to justice."

With moist eyes, I asked Rosa how she felt about the person who killed her son. My question seemed to surprise her. She quietly talked of the sadness and pain of her son's death. They were enough, she said. She didn't need to carry bitterness of hate and lack of forgiveness as well. Everyone nodded in silent agreement.

Another mother in the group spoke of one of her children—a gang member. She knows he is responsible for violence. I began to realize that violent death touches the life of every person in the group. Everyone agreed that violence for violence only brings more bitterness and hate.

This simple "uneducated" group of women knows all about the morality of the death penalty. I walked into this Bible study thinking we would be talking about a large scale social issue and we wound up talking about daily life. ▼

—Theresa May

Comboni priest releases new book

The concept of St. Daniel Comboni—*save Africa with Africa*—shines out strongly in a book for Hispanic catechetical formators by Comboni Father Luigi Zanotto. Titled "*Vayan y Crean Comunidad*" (Come and Form Community), the book has as its primary purpose the formation of catechetical leaders among the United States Hispanic community.

The first part of the book was published in 2006. It has been in use in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles where deacons in formation, coordinators of liturgy, adult catechists, etc. have completed the course. This completion serves as a means of obtaining their

basic certification in the practical aspects of catechesis.

The second part of the book will be presented to the public by Fr. Luigi in Los Angeles on June 23. Its content is primarily Biblical and addresses such topics as Christology, Scriptures, Sacraments and Morality.

The book is written specifically for Hispanics living in the United States. It is an example of how the Comboni Missionaries are helping U.S. Hispanics today, namely, through empowerment so they can be leaders among themselves, can have their own voice, and can evangelize among themselves.

Fr. Luigi hopes the book will be adopted in others dioceses, especially where the Hispanic population is expected to grow tremendously over the next 10 years.

Fr. Luigi comes well prepared to write his book. He worked several years in Latin America, served as National Director for Catechesis in Mexico and as Executive Secretary of the Conference of Mexican Bishops' Biblical Division. He has a doctorate in Pastoral Theology with a specialization in catechesis.

For further information, call or email Father Luigi Zanotto at (973)744-8080, luigizb@yahoo.com. ▼

Around the Continent

"St. Comboni Fest" in Chicago

Come one, come all! The Comboni Mission Center in La Grange Park is pleased to announce the "St. Comboni Fest" to be held on Aug. 25, 2007. Comboni Fr. Angelo Biancalana, the Superior of the Mission Center, noted "St. Comboni Fest" is actually the annual picnic, but the name change "better emphasizes the work of the missionaries and honors our founder, whose work we continue."

The event will expand on last year's successful live and silent auctions and will include tickets to sporting and cultural events, weekend getaways and fine dining evenings at area restaurants.



Picnickers at the Comboni Picnic enjoy good food, good times and good friends.

The fest opens at noon and an outdoor Mass will be celebrated on the patio of the Comboni Mission Center at 3 p.m. Live entertainment will include singing by Nino Folino and D.J. Jams by Giovanni. As always, food and beverages will be bountiful and there will be children's games and bingo under the tents.

Exciting changes in Monroe, Michigan

- On April 21, the Auxiliary was honored to have the Most Rev. Teresino Serra, the Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries, in Monroe for a short visit. Father Teresino, accompanied by Provincial Superior Fr. Louie Gasparini, thanked the Auxiliary for their prayers and reminded them that they are a very important

part of the Comboni family. Each member also shared special thoughts and memories of their time with the Auxiliary.

- Ladies Auxiliary President Terrie Noland has decided to step down after 21 years of service. Terrie put her heart, soul and endless hours of work and dedication into the Auxiliary. Newly-elected president Barb Heising was installed at the May Crowning Mass and meeting. Serving with Barb is Shirley Noland as Corresponding Secretary and Recording Secretary. Barb will remain as treasurer of the group and will also continue as editor of their semi-annual newsletter.

41st Annual Dinner Dance in Chicago

The Comboni Missionaries of Chicago will host their 41st annual Dinner Dance on Saturday, Nov. 10, 2007.

The event, which will be held at Alta Villa Banquets in Addison, Illinois, will bestow the Comboni Spirit Award on Mr. Phil Stefani.

Steve Fiorentino, co-chair of the Comboni Dinner Dance Committee, said, "Phil is one of the most successful and respected restaurateurs in the nation, but he is being honored for his commitment to his Children's Foundation and his love and contribution to the work of the Comboni Missionaries."

Frank Cesario, the other co-chair of the 2007 Committee said "we expect the event to sell out quickly this year. We have live entertainment provided by both Nino Folino and D.J. Loris Giannoni, who together should satisfy all musical tastes."

For information please contact the Comboni Mission Center in La Grange Park at (708) 354-1999.



Members of the Ladies Auxiliary of Monroe meet with Superior General Teresino Serra during his April visit to the North American Province.

Lay Missionaries—Updates from La Grange Park, Illinois

- Director Paul Wheeler and Associate Director JoAnne Harbert went on site visits to Peru and Guatemala this spring. They spent a few days with Ralph and Theresa May in Alto Trujillo, Peru and met several of the May's friends in the neighborhood. It was rare, in fact, to meet someone Ralph May didn't know! It was a time of assessing work and mission options for the new lay missionaries who will complete the Orientation Program this fall.
- A Discernment Weekend was held in late March. Five applicants came to La Grange Park and met for interviews and discussions on mission and discernment. These applicants were at various stages of discernment. Some feel called to join, but do not feel it is time, while others are eager to join this fall. For all, the weekend was a time of prayer and attention to God's call.
- The 2007 Lay Missionary Orientation Program is set to run from Sep. 10 to Dec. 16. The number of candidates has not yet been finalized, but please keep these candidates, their work, and the people the lay missionaries serve in your prayers! ▼

St. Cecilia Church: A diverse community and a welcoming parish

Every Sunday more than 300 votive candles flicker and cast long shadows in front of the century-old statues, paintings and stained-glass windows of St. Cecilia Parish in Los Angeles.



St. Cecilia Church.

Comboni Fr. Joseph Forlani, co-pastor of the parish, jokes that their brand new furnace is never used—they heat the place on body heat and candle power alone.

In an age when many churches are closing their doors or consolidating, Comboni-run St. Cecilia is bustling with filled pews, enthusiastic parishioners and young life. On Sundays, there are more than 1,000 people at each of the two Spanish Masses and an additional 1,000 between the morning and evening English Masses.

And the more than 300 children enrolled in St. Cecilia's School speak to the bright future of the parish.



Comboni Fr. Xavier Colleoni celebrates Sunday Mass at St. Cecilia.

But while the number of parishioners keeps growing, Father Joseph and co-pastor Comboni Fr. Xavier Colleoni have the challenging task of uniting the parish's different ethnic groups.

St. Cecilia's community is made up of three main groups—Hispanics, African-Americans and Nigerians. They are united through Parish and Pastoral Councils and as a result, there is cooperation in the use of space and a growing emphasis on a parish life that draws on both unity and diversity.

Another issue the pastors face is catechizing the large Hispanic immigrant population of the parish. Many of the immigrants, while they have a rich spiritual tradition and a strong family life, have very little religious education.

This is what makes St. Cecilia a true missionary outpost. Father Joseph and Father Xavier, with combined mission experience in the United States, Colombia, Ethiopia and Europe, are up to the task.

"These people are getting up at 5 a.m. and working two or three jobs," Father Xavier said of the immigrant families. "They have very little time to learn about their Catholic faith."

In order to address this, the priests often reach out to the whole family, starting with the children as they prepare to receive the sacraments. They also make themselves as accessible to the parishioners as possible. There is no telephone answering machine at St. Cecilia. They pick up the phone—no matter how late.

"You don't want your parish to become an office, open at a certain hour, closed at a certain hour," Father Xavier said. "We must



The Hispanic community at St. Cecilia has a special devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

follow Christ's example of mercy and seek out opportunities for exhorting people to follow the faith. If you give the idea that you are open to the people, then you need to listen."

Despite the need for religious education, the Hispanic community brings a treasury of devotion to the parish, and many have strong connections to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Solidad and the Black Christ.

North American Provincial Superior Father Louie Gasparini sees these beautiful Hispanic devotional practices as well as the emphasis on family life as marks of a strong faith.

"In Latin America, there is such an emphasis on the family," Father Louie said. "We in the United States can learn so much by imitating this powerful force for strengthening our parish communities."

St. Cecilia is a triumph of diversity and a place ripe for evangelization among a spiritually rich community. ▼

—Katie Walker

Childhood: lost and found in Kenya

Watoto Wetu Children's Centre in Nairobi

The kids at the Watoto Wetu Children's Centre elementary school in Nairobi, Kenya are just like kids in North America—they go to school, their favorite class is recess, they study their lessons and they take field trips to the big city.

But unlike most kids in North America, many of the children at Watoto Wetu are orphaned and HIV positive, some have AIDS, and almost all are wracked by the unimaginable poverty that permeates the filthy slums of Nairobi, one of the largest cities in Africa.

The school, located in the downtrodden Kariobangi neighborhood, serves 247 children between the ages of seven and 15.



Fr. Paulino Mondo spends much of his time with the children of the Kariobangi neighborhood.

Comboni Fr. Paulino Mondo serves the Parish of Kariobangi and ministers to the estimated 20,000 children who live there. One of the schools he directs is Watoto Wetu.

But while life and school work continue at the Watoto Wetu Centre, where the children are assured of

uniforms and at least one free meal a day, the unforgiving realities of the Kenyan slum are never far away.

"HIV/AIDS has been so disastrous in our parish that no one can count the number of orphans. I am trying to feed, dress and put these children back in school," Father Paulino explains. "Many of the children are HIV positive and a few are not, but all are vulnerable children. This is a nightmare."

Father Paulino's job is to end the nightmare for these children, if only for a few hours a day. Thanks to schools like Watoto Wetu, many children are glimpsing a life they never thought possible.

Children like Millicent, a 15-year-old orphan who found herself supporting five younger brothers and sisters. She wanted desperately to go to school, but was struggling to find money for food, let alone academic fees. In desperation, she took to the streets, illegally hawking items to passersby and risking rape, violence and arrest. Eventually, the authorities caught up and Millicent was thrown in jail. After an anonymous preacher made her bail, she found Watoto Wetu.

Today, Millicent is in eighth grade at the Watoto Wetu Centre. There she is "encouraged that her education is not only a right, but also an essential tool for achieving sustainable development," said Father Paulino.

This life-giving approach addresses not only the children's

educational and physical needs but their spiritual and emotional needs as well. Besides food, clothing and education, the school sponsors sports, outings, counseling and health care. This, says Father Paulino, gives the children a sense of value and worth.

"Some of the children will tell you they feel at home while in school," he says. "They are able to express themselves and feel loved. The Centre staff is working in collaboration with the community to see that the life of these children is changing from curse to hope." ▼

—Katie Walker



Students enjoy lunch at Watoto Wetu Elementary School.

Letters from Watoto Wetu students



Hi, I am Cherish Owino Ombara. I was born in 1992 and I live in the Gitathuru slum in Kariobangi, Kenya. I was brought up in a happy family and both my father and my mother cared for me like precious gold.

As I grew up, things turned quite traumatic. My father became so ill he was hospitalized for over a year. We had to sell all our properties in order to pay the hospital bills. My father soon kicked the bucket, my uncle stole what was left of our property and we were empty-handed.

Life was very hard, but the wise man says, "Fall of man is not the end of life." My mother is a hardworking woman and though she is sick with HIV/AIDS, she is trying to get us educated. She sells vegetables by the roadside to pay our house rent, but often we sleep without taking any food. Looking at all these problems, my sick mother was not able to buy even the essential items in our one-room shanty. She talked to the Small Christian Community and they agreed to enroll me in Watoto Wetu Centre as an orphan. That day, I felt as if God was holding me and I was happy to join fifth grade with a great zeal to do my best in education. One day, I want to be a radio and television broadcaster.

Today, I am in eighth grade and my health stays alive thanks to the porridge I take at the Watoto Wetu Centre. Yes, I have encountered many problems in life; however the Centre is giving me great support and I feel at home with the other children. One day, I believe, all these problems will end.

Our school cares for us holistically. We even have guidance and counseling, which has helped me to endure my struggles as a part of life. Here, we eat porridge and food, which is prepared very well. The teachers and the workers motivate us to achieve our goals. I am currently hoping to pass with good results and join the Starehe Boys Centre for high school. I am also the chairperson of the Peace Building Club.

I believe that despite all the problems I have encountered, I will do well and be able to tell those sailing in the same boat that we are able. We should not lose hope and should never give up.

*Thank you,
Cherish Owino Ombara*

Hello! My name is Teresa Nduko. I am 14 years old and in seventh grade at Watoto Wetu Centre. I live in the Ghetto-Ngei slum with my older sister. Our mother, Patricia Mumbee, died in 2003 from AIDS.

It was so painful watching my mother agonizing and after her death, my sister and I could not afford food, rent, medicine or clothing. Most of the time, we appeared as forgotten children. One day, my sister met a man from the Small Christian Community of St. Martin de Porres. She told him of our troubles and he listened to our problems. He looked for a place for us to lay our heads and after a time I was taken to the Watoto Wetu Centre. There we met Father Paulino and he agreed to pay for our house rent. Hearing that, we breathed such a sigh of relief!

The Centre offers a lot of care for us children. The Church knows that we are hardworking orphans in our Small Christian Communities and our schoolwork.

Now, I am at the top of my class every term. One day, I hope to be a medical doctor and take care of the sick and other orphans just as someone is taking care of me now. I want to work hard and succeed. I want to help our country escape from this poverty and I want to help other orphans as I am being helped now.

I would like to express my vote of thanks on behalf of myself and the other children in the school for the support of the Church and the people of good will. It is wonderful to sleep and wake knowing that someone somewhere cares that I am safe and well! May God bless you abundantly.

*Yours,
Teresa Nduko*



Remembering Generous Benefactors, Accorsi Society Enrolls New Members

The Fr. Hamlet Accorsi Legacy Society welcomes several new members into its ranks with this issue, bringing total membership up to 145 individuals and couples.

Among the newest members is Mrs. Gertrude Marold, who informed Fr. Paul Donohue, mccc, that she has remembered the Comboni Missionaries in her will.

The Comboni Missionaries were also beneficiaries of a provision in the trust of the late Rev. Vincent O’Dea. A close friend of the Donohue family, Father O’Dea was a supporter of Father Paul’s graduate education.

The missionaries are deeply grateful to have been remembered through very generous provisions in the trust of George and Margaret Reiley and the will of Mrs. Cecelia Brocks.

Finally, charitable gift annuities (CGAs) have been popular with Comboni benefactors lately. Ms. Lee Mulé recently gave her second CGA. Fr. Charles, E.J. Borowski took out his first CGA, as

did Mr. and Mrs. Cletus and Eda Gass.

“The Accorsi Society honors friends in Canada and the United States who tell us they’ve included the Comboni Missionaries in their wills, trusts, charitable gift annuities, life insurance and other estate plans,” explained Father Paul,

For information on including the Comboni Missionaries in your will, trust or other estate plans, call our Development Office at 513-474-4997.

who serves as Director of Benefactor Relations for Comboni Missionaries’ North American Province.

“Members’ names appear on a plaque outside the main chapel at Provincial Headquarters in Cincinnati, and they’re remembered in prayer every day.”

For an explanation of how CGAs work to benefit the missions while providing lifetime income for benefactors, see the box below.

For information on including the Comboni Missionaries in your will, trust or other estate plans, call our Development Office at 513-474-4997. In preparing your will or trust, be sure to use our legal name and address:

- In the United States, please use: Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, North American Province, 1318 Nagel Road, Cincinnati, OH 45255.
- Those in Canada should use the address of our office in Kitchener: Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, 148 Madison Avenue South, Kitchener, ON N2G 3M6.

You can also write to these addresses to let us know you’ve remembered the Comboni Missionaries in your estate plans. That way we can immediately enroll you in this society’s prestigious ranks. ▼

Help the missions and help yourself!

You can make a significant gift to the work of the Comboni Missionaries without sacrificing the security of your investments. You benefit in several ways with a charitable gift annuity (CGA) from the Comboni Missionaries:

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- Best of all, the gift you make when you establish your CGA will **support the work of missionaries**, who are working with the poorest of the poor around the world.

Here are the rates you’ll get for a guaranteed retirement income for life! The following rates reflect CGAs for the life of one individual.	65	6.0	70	6.5	75	7.1	80	8.0	85	9.5	90+	11.3
	66	6.1	71	6.6	76	7.2	81	8.3	86	9.9		
	67	6.2	72	6.7	77	7.4	82	8.5	87	10.2		
	68	6.3	73	6.8	78	7.6	83	8.8	88	10.6		
	69	6.4	74	6.9	79	7.8	84	9.2	89	11.0		

An ignorant people is an enslaved people

The following piece is a profile of Comboni Sister Mercedes Castillo, a missionary who encounters many challenges in her work with Latino immigrants in Coatesville, Pa. A fellow missionary Comboni Sister Deisy Adair Coelho, who is now stationed in Sudan, wrote the article.

It is Monday morning and I meet Sister Mercedes Castillo in the basement of the Comboni Sisters' house in Coatesville, Pa. She looks serene and the sound of her voice mixes with the movement outside the house—cars, buses and people talking in both English and Spanish. It is just minutes before she starts a busy day working with the Latino population in the city.

In Coatesville, a town of about 11,000, Sister Mercedes is one of the “bridges” in the diocese of Philadelphia for Latino people who left their countries in Central and South America and now find themselves in an unfamiliar place, often illegally.

The Comboni community of Coatesville started ten years ago. The Philadelphia Archdiocese invited the Comboni Missionary Sisters to work with immigrants in the diocese. The local Church has great hopes for the Latino community, Sister Mercedes said. The lively faith and culture of Latinos is growing.

Ten percent of Coatesville's population consists of Latinos, a percentage that grows every day despite rigid immigration laws. The other sisters in the community, Srs. Agnese Valieri, Roberta Ciccone and Angela Sesana, say the immigrants appreciate Sister Mercedes. Since she is also Latino, she is better able to understand their difficulties.

Before joining the Comboni Missionary Sisters, Sister Mercedes wanted to be a teacher, but as God's will would have it, studying education was a step that led her to the religious life. One day, while reading the works of scholar Simon Bolivar, she came across a sentence that stuck in her mind and heart:

“An ignorant people is an enslaved people,” were the words that touched her deeply and eventually became her mission vision. At the time, Sister Mercedes was also reading Comboni magazines. She became fascinated with the testimony of a Comboni sister who described the lack of education in Africa. It was then she realized she wanted to go and empower Africans by means of education—and to Africa she did go.

For nine years, Sister Mercedes worked with refugees in Zambia. There she was part of a team of Jesuits who tried to help refugees in every way possible, from scholarship programs to counseling. The objective of the team was to bring people together in faith and give them hope in a better future.

That same mission vision, which guided her in Zambia, continues to direct her work with Latinos. “I want to help prepare and form leaders who live their faith fully,” she said.

Sister Mercedes joined the community in Coatesville in 2004, taking on many social and pastoral responsibilities. When I ask for her job description, she smiles and takes a deep breath before listing all her responsibilities.

“Well, I take expecting mothers and babies to the doctor, do pastoral work, counseling, and translate documents into Spanish or English on the side!” she says. To sum it up, Sister Mercedes does whatever is needed. People trust her, just as they trust the presence and assistance of all the Sisters.

According to Sister Mercedes, the pastoral work with the immigrants in Coatesville is challenging because many of them are undocumented. Consequently, “today they are here and tomorrow they are gone,” she

said. Despite this reality, Sister Mercedes is trying to find catechists and leaders in and for the Latino community.

However, Hispanic ministry is not just hurdles and difficulties; there is much joy in it too. When I asked Sister Mercedes what she enjoys most about her work, she could not choose one thing. “I enjoy touching people's lives in so many ways and seeing them improving their lives,” she said.

One of these ways is through counseling people during their difficulties. “It is a way to journey with them in life,” she says.

Recalling her work in Zambia nine years ago, Sister Mercedes says experience with the refugees prepared her for work with immigrants. The refugees in Zambia were insecure and defensive—scared of the unknown. Latinos in the United States often feel the same way, she said. The hardships that come with being an immigrant are the consequence of increasing poverty and economic manipulation.

“Immigration is a modern version of slavery in our country,” Sister Mercedes said.

“As a Comboni Missionary Sister, I am living the Comboni charisma by serving the victims of this unjust economic system called globalization. I am giving my life to empower them with preparation so that Latinos may thrive in every aspect of their lives.”

She believes she is on the right path in her struggle to empower the Latino community to change their own reality...because an ignorant people are an enslaved people. ▼

—Sister Deisy Adair Coelho, *cms*

The meaning of 'mission'

Fr. Luis Carranza was born in Mexico and ordained a priest in 1975. He spent eight years in missionary work in Mexico and 16 years in the Republic of South Africa before being assigned to the Comboni Mission Center in LaGrange Park, Ill., where he now resides. We asked him for his perspective on "mission."

Would you trade a whole morning of work for one gallon of water that might not even be drinkable?

For some, there is no other option.

When I arrived in South Africa in the early 1980s, we Comboni Missionaries had most of our work in the so-called "homelands." In these reservations, there was no water, no electricity, no health services, no schools, no rain, no trees. The list never ends.

It was the job of the women to find water. In the desert, this is a job almost as impossible as trying to drive a car without gas. The women went round and round looking for a sandy place to dig as much as a square yard down and then at the bottom, some wet sand would appear. With much patience, they collected the water that gathered by pressing the wet sand with a soup spoon, pouring it into a calabash and

waiting again for more water to appear and be collected.

Just to collect a gallon of water, sometimes it was not even good water, could take the whole morning. But they had no choice.

Even today, water is still scarce in many parts of Africa.

My mission was to help provide water to the people, to help them find a little food to survive on, to be with them when they were rejected and considered as nothing - good only to work and enrich their white masters. But my mission was more than that.

Former President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary Clinton once came to Africa to meet the people and see their needs. Mrs. Clinton asked them, "What do you need? Tell me and we will give you what you ask for." Their answer deeply surprised her. "We want missionaries," they said.

Taken aback by their answer she responded, "Oh well, this I cannot give you."

Although hungry and painfully poor, the people are looking for something more than food. They yearn for dignity and respect, for recognition as human beings, for something more than others can give them, for that Something, that Someone, who can answer those deepest yearnings. We missionaries dedicate our lives to that end.

I am thankful to God for sending so many people who believe in our mission, and to the people who have answered God's call to the mission of the Church, the mission of Christ.

Together we continue, for the mission of Christ is just beginning. ▼

—Father Luis Carranza, mccc



Fr. Luis Carranza

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