

COLLABORATION FOR MISSION

“Let us reach out to one another”

(*Writings 2182*)



BACKGROUND

On different occasions, many brothers and sisters, both at personal and community level, have expressed a desire to encourage, as an essential dimension of our common missionary vocation, closer and more fruitful collaboration among our Comboni Institutes.

The desire to deepen and discern our experiences in this area led us to organise meetings such as that held at Entebbe, Uganda (July 21st – August 10th, '96) and to speak at various encounters, especially those held to prepare for the beatification of Daniel Comboni.

At our last General Chapters and Inter-Chapter Assemblies this desire was aired, albeit briefly, by many. The three General Councils – Comboni Missionaries, Comboni Missionary Sisters and The Secular Comboni Missionaries – gathered in Florence on December 28th 2000 to discuss this topic and, as a result of their discussion, decided to organise a seminar in Rome (23rd – 24th of June 2001). The invitation to participate in this seminar was extended beyond the three General Councils to members of the General Secretariats and Offices.

It was at the end of this workshop that we decided, amongst other things, to write this letter addressed to all members of the Comboni Family.

GREETINGS AND AIM

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. We begin this reflection by expressing the wish of Blessed Daniel Comboni: “*Let us reach out to one another: may the vow, the purpose, the effort of each of us who loves Jesus Christ, be one; that of gaining for Him unfortunate Nigrizia.*” (*Wr. 2182*). We pray that this desire of Comboni may become a reality and unite us heart and soul so that we might face the missionary challenges of our day with generosity and joy.
2. It is first and foremost the “signs of the times” that encouraged us to write this letter. Contemporary thought and events strongly challenge us to recognise communion and

collaboration as aspects of today's mission. The Church is re-discovering its prophetic calling to be a seed of solidarity amongst people, the bearer of a radical process of kinship, justice and peace. Men and women of our time expect a collaboration of concrete gestures at all levels; a collaboration which overcome prejudice and be able to open up new channels of hope.

3. However, we are especially prompted by the growing desire for a more creative and constructive collaboration among ourselves. A desire which makes itself felt especially where there is suffering caused by non-collaboration.
4. We believe that the dream of Daniel Comboni for us was to be a *Cenacle of Apostles*; men and women from different nations and cultures, who are united by the charismatic intuition that flowed from the Pierced Heart of Jesus Christ. It is from this Vital Source that collaboration amongst the Combonian Institutes, an essential dimension of the common missionary charism, is born.
5. We are equally convinced that we have inherited this type of collaboration from Daniel Comboni, as a genuine expression of his missionary methodology. In fact, in his plan he contemplated priests, brothers, sisters, lay people, teachers, craftsmen, Africans and Peoples from other continents all working together as part of the one missionary team.

Aim

6. *The purpose of this letter is, therefore, to foster, following in the footsteps of our Founder, collaboration among the Combonian Institutes, an essential dimension of our missionary vocation and evangelising witness.*
7. *We would also like to encourage and accompany this reflection with practical proposals and concrete measures for implementing it in the daily praxis of our missionary service so that collaboration may continue to grow.*

I. STARTING FROM OUR REALITY

Looking At The Positive Aspects

8. Certainly, collaboration already exists among the **members** of our Institutes. Many are the areas (spiritual life and ministries), the ways and the circumstances in which members of our Institutes commit themselves to working in harmony and sharing. Many of us treasure experiences of communion that have been vital in affirming our vocation and apostolic work. The Comboni Family, beginning from the first group of missionaries gathered around the Founder, has a history studded by shining examples of collaboration between true brothers and sisters. In fact, we have before us certain icons that speak louder than words.
 - At the fall of the *Mahdia*, Monsignor Antonio Roveggio welcomes Sr. Teresa Grigolini at Aswan. He listens to her and is convinced that, in God's eyes, she gained great merits by way of this new and unheard of type of sacrifice (her marriage) undergone for the entire group (the missionary prisoners of the *Mahdi*).
 - Towards the end of August 1903, Fr. Giuseppe Beduschi is dying at Lul, while Sr. Giuseppa Scandola, at the same mission, appears to be in good health. She sends him a message saying, "...*You will not die. I will die in your place...*" and she offers her life for him. In fact, Sr.

Giuseppa dies a few days later on the 1st of September 1903, while Fr. Giuseppe would live for many years to come.

Daniel Comboni expressed great pride in his missionary fathers, brothers and sisters, united and faithful in tragic moments of privation and suffering, precisely when their collaboration expressed itself as charity and communion with one another.

9. The gift of collaboration incarnates itself in the concrete **communities**, which re-clothe it with their beauty, but also with their incoherence. We would like to hope that the positive elements may always be the stronger and that every obstacle may be eventually overcome. However, while we recognise the progress that has been made, we are also aware of the need to cultivate the attitudes necessary for a respectful and confident collaboration amongst us. Many brothers and sisters, in their simplicity, live these values, especially in this period when our Institutes are growing in internationality and interculturality.
10. The **General Councils** have by now developed a sound tradition of collaboration based on friendship and mutual support. We gather regularly to exchange information , share experiences, initiatives, questions and intuitions. Sometimes we have made our annual retreat together. In emergency situations of mission we consult with each other and take decisions together.
11. The members of the **Secretariats** and other **Offices** are those who are better able to actualise our collaboration at general level. They organise meetings to deepen principles, to plan and to take part in joint initiatives in different sectors such as evangelisation, missionary animation, justice and peace and the integrity of creation, formation, vocational ministry and economy.
12. We have noted with pleasure how, in the **provinces/ delegations/regions**, it has become a tradition in many places to celebrate the Combonian feasts together. Often the Word of God is prayed, listened to and shared. Inviting each other to our respective assemblies and meetings is a practice that has become widespread. More or less everywhere ways and means to encourage this dimension of witness and collaborative communion are sought out with creativity. There is also a growing tendency for provincial and delegation councils to hold joint meetings.

Learning From Our Limits

13. Coming now to our fragility, we must recognise that collaboration is not a given and we must make an effort to make it happen. Therefore, it is necessary to **identify our resistances** in order to be able to transform them into opportunities for growth. Sometimes, out of “politeness” we avoid clarifying the causes of conflict or we live ignoring each other. It can also be true that there are no real difficulties as such, but at the same time, neither is there a situation of fruitful communion.
14. The difficulties seem to come especially, but not only, from the **psychological makeup of the individual**. All of us have limitations, fruit of an education which does not help human growth, and which can translate into defence mechanisms, such as a lack of openness, rejections, insensitivity, thirst for power, fear, lack of balance, naiveté.... Certain *gender* difficulties are a normal part of the process of masculine or feminine identification in our growth towards feeling at ease with psychological, spiritual and apostolic complementarity.
15. **Insufficient knowledge of our respective vocations** (priest, brother, religious, lay, secular) can make it more difficult to collaborate and may give rise to misunderstandings or to unrealistic

expectations. Sometimes, there is, unfortunately, a lack of acceptance and appreciation of the different roles and ministries, which reveal a limited ecclesiological vision.

16. Certain difficulties such as clericalism (not only in the past and not only by priests), self-centredness, the imposing attitude of a group, the choice by missionaries who live ‘separately’ to the disadvantage of the mission, or the activism which leaves no space for reflection or for establishing priorities, reveal not only a mistaken concept of mission, a concept that blocks collaboration but above all, points to **a vocational identity which has not been sufficiently owned.**
17. The fact that, in some places, attitudes towards collaboration change, according to the interest or taste of those in leadership at any given period, causes us to reflect. This may indicate not only a lack of personal convictions based on values, but also of **structures and commonly accepted criteria**, which guarantee continuity and favour sharing and willing collaboration.

II. RETURN TO THE FOUNDATIONS

18. In the Comboni Missionary vocation, collaboration is, above all, a gift to be received with gratitude, before being a duty to be performed or an attitude to be encouraged. A gift that is unknown cannot be appreciated. A return to the biblical and charismatic roots helps us to deepen and to appreciate better the gift of communion received within the divine call to become part of the Comboni Missionary family for missionary service.

Enlightened by the Word of God

19. From its beginning, Scripture reveals to us that we have been thought of and wanted by God and created in His image. The vocation of the human being to communion with God and with others is innate in his or her very nature: “*And God said, let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves... God created man in the image of Himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female, he created them*” (*Gen 1:26-27*). The work of creation is, in fact, the work of Trinitarian love. The image which the human creature is called to reflect, is that of a God in communion.
20. The human person, created in the image of the “divine community” is called to rediscover that the communitarian-relational dimension of life is not an option, but rather the indispensable condition for growth and development of the personality. Paradoxically, the more one comes closer to the other, the more he or she achieves the fullness of his or her own identity. In the same way that God the Trinity exists in order “to be self-given”, so too the human being finds the depths of self in interpersonal relationship, and even more so, in the complementarity between man and woman (see *Gen 2:18*).
21. In the Old Testament, God elects Israel, makes her “His People” (*Deut 7:7; Is 41:8-9*), and establishes a covenant with her. The result of this pact of love is communion among the members of God’s People. That which was simply natural solidarity among families, clans and tribes, thus becomes communion of life at the service of God who had made them “On”. Loyalty and fidelity to God express themselves in reciprocal acceptance and in active participation in the life and destiny of the community (*Deut 22:1-4; 23.20*).
22. In the New Testament, Jesus inaugurates a new style of mission and kinship. The community of Jesus, twelve companions (*Mk 3:14*) and a group of women (*Lk 8:1-3*), does not seem to be a

model in terms of collaboration. On the contrary, often lack of openness, incapacity to perceive the message and the challenges of the Master, doubts and the personal interests of those specially chosen, seem to slow down the fulfilment of the mission. However, these are the individuals who make up the Church, people of God, whom Jesus, despite everything, animates, pardons and encourages, by expressing his trust in them, freeing them from their fears, involving them in the ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom, of healing and of forgiving sins (*Lk 9:1-6; 9:12-16; 10:1-2; 24:44-48*).

23. In the same way, Jesus, while accepting the slow pace of the weaker members, calls them to a change of mentality. He teaches them to accept each other without judging (*Mt 7:1-2*), to forgive each other even “seventy times seven” (*Mt 18:22*), and to assume his own attitude of gratuitous service and collaboration. “*You know that among the pagans their so called rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all*” (*Mk 10:35-45*).
24. The community of believers welcomes and makes its own the inheritance it received from Jesus. They are “*united heart and soul*” (*Acts 4:32*) and create real communion among themselves through the “breaking of bread”, the sharing of their belongings, suffering persecution together (see *2Cor 1:7; Heb 10:33; 1Pt 4:13*) and collaborating for the proclamation of the Gospel (*Phil 1:5*).
25. Jesus prayed that this dream of the experience of the children of God might also be realised in us. Being one in Him and with the Father is the necessary condition so that “*the world may believe*” that Jesus truly came among us and his love saves (see *Jn 17:20-23*). To enable us to witness that perfect unity, Jesus promised, “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses*” (*Acts 1:8*).
26. It is the Holy Spirit, poured into our hearts, who confirms us in our common mission and enables us to overcome all obstacles, so as to experience the joy of collaborating in the building up of the kingdom of God (see *2Cor 1:22-24*). “*There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of services to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose*” (*1Cor 12:4-7*). Availability for collaboration with the Spirit of God, protagonist of mission, has the power to create communion amongst us, because we are all called to the same ideal of service.

In the Footsteps of Daniel Comboni

27. Comboni’s ideal is to encourage the involvement of all possible energies in the regeneration of *Nigrizia*. The Comboni Family, today more than ever, feels called to incarnate that ideal in contemporary events. The fulfilment of this ideal would be impossible without collaboration at all levels. It would involve collaboration within the Comboni Family itself, with each member putting at the service of the mission the originality of his or her own calling and ministry. It would also involve collaboration beyond the Comboni Family, becoming, together with other missionary institutes and movements, leaven of missionary spirit among Christians.
28. Comboni is convinced that the work to which he is called is rooted in the very plan of the Father who desires to transform the world into his Kingdom. With a deep sense of humility, he places himself at the service of a project which is not his own and in which the necessary energy for fulfilling it comes from above. This attitude is indispensable in establishing true collaboration,

which is opposed to every intention of protagonism or self-affirmation in personal projects that would render vain the missionary proclamation we offer to others.

29. The call to mission unites us, creates a sense of belonging to a common project, and, as Comboni says, makes of us a “*Cenacle of Apostles for Africa, a luminous centre which sends right to the heart of Nigrizia, rays just as zealous and virtuous as those missionaries who part from it. And those rays which shine and give warmth, reveal the nature of the Centre from which they come*” (*Wr. 2648*).
30. Daniel Comboni himself lived this experience of “*cenacle*” in his relationship with his fellow missionaries. Being “*cenacle*” indicates a reality which is not based on the affinity of individuals or on human interests, but on a particular experience of Church and of communion, which has its foundation in Christ; Word and Eucharist. It is a place of encounter between the Mystery of God and our own reality of being different from each other, limited and fragile. It is here that divine initiative and our willingness to collaborate unite. Our being “*cenacle of apostles*” has the aim of “*revealing the nature of the Centre*” from which its members draw strength and missionary impetus (see *Wr. 2648*). This is already a missionary proclamation, the first which we are called to give.
31. Comboni, aware that it is Providence which makes missionary activity possible through the continual collaboration of many (see *Wr. 2700*), pursued with all his strength this idea of universal collaboration, by gathering around himself men and women, lay and religious, intellectuals and workers, without distinction of nationality or culture. His first task was to “*unite all these heterogeneous elements among themselves, creating perfect harmony, uniting them in intention and purpose*” (see *Wr. 2507-08*).
32. The inspiration of Comboni to “*employ first of all in the apostolate to Central Africa the powerful ministry of the woman of the Gospel and the sister of charity*”, whom he defines as “*shield, strength and guarantee of the missionary priest's ministry*” (*Wr. 5284*) is very meaningful. In a historical period in which feminine ministry was considered as a “support” of, and subordinate to the ministry of priests, Daniel Comboni, with truly prophetic vision, speaks of the ‘ministry’ of women. He also believes that the collaboration of men and women as equals is indispensable for the success of his work. Actually, he goes beyond that. He identifies the century in which he lives as, “*the century of catholic women, who the Providence of God calls to be true priests, religious and apostles of the Church, auxiliaries of the Holy See, arm of evangelical ministry, and pillars of the apostolic foreign missions*” (*Wr. 4465*).
33. Looking above all at his example, we are certain that Daniel Comboni wanted to communicate to the members of his Institute this spirit and methodology of collaboration. He was, in fact, convinced that the works of God “*separated one from another, produce scarce and limited fruits, but instead when united and directed towards the same goal, they would be strengthened and develop more easily and become efficacious in obtaining the desired result*” (*Wr. 1100*).

III. WAYS FORWARD

In the Relationship between Woman and Man

34. The most specific richness we have to offer is our being woman or man. This opens us to reciprocity and complementarity, which is fulfilled in the measure that we know and accept

each other with openness and maturity, share our own gifts, live the consecration which unites us and the total dedication to the mission which has been entrusted to us.

35. Intuition and logic, the potential to love, our different sensitivities and ways of reacting, our perceptions of values, our different ways of living out our faith, all of which constitute a great wealth in our common mission, make complementarity indispensable.
36. Both our being created, man and woman, in the image and likeness of God and the strength of our common Combonian charism, make us capable of producing seeds of growth for the Kingdom and of cultivating attitudes which prepare us for constructive relationships. It is a case of overcoming subtle forms of prejudice and that lack of authenticity, which prevent responsible relationships. We must recognise and accept that, with all our richness and vulnerability, we need one another.

In the relationship between different ministries

37. In order to grow in positive and fruitful collaboration within our Comboni Family, there is a premise, which cannot be overlooked or taken for granted. That premise is the reciprocal knowledge which goes beyond esteem and affection on the human plane, and which highlights the variety of gifts within the same charism: lay and religious, priest and secular, sister and brother. It is precisely this variety of ministries within the charism that constitutes its greatness and is at the same time evidence of its fecundity and capacity to embody itself in the most diverse situations and states of life.
38. Acquiring this knowledge demands serious effort on everyone's part. No doubt, it will produce fruits of a greater understanding of one's own gift as we grow in awareness of the gifts of others. It will help us to discover better the true "face" of Comboni and the richness of the of the charism that we hold in common. Our diversity and complementarity will imply different ways of living and expressing our common vocation *Ad Gentes*, and this will be reflected in the different forms of our collaboration.

In the formative journey and in community life

39. We would particularly like to highlight the treasure which the members of our Comboni Family, in their diversity, are. This variety of ages, formation, cultures, nationalities, personalities, experiences, and mentalities necessarily influences the pluralist dynamic of the collaboration among us.
40. It follows then, that attention to the individual, to his or her holistic growth, is a necessary condition for creating fruitful relationships among us. In fact, a solid formation in our charismatic identity and the dynamics of community life is at the root of our collaboration.
41. First and life-long formation, which are a concrete reality in every province, region, delegation and missionary community, must prepare us for discernment, sharing and participation in decision making with others. The formation of "community minded individuals", which avails itself of the helping professions, is therefore indispensable in order to help us enter into a process of dialogue.

In missionary service

42. The Second Vatican Council has contributed to a renewal of our understanding of mission, giving us, in particular, a vision of Church as “people of God”, ministering, participative, poor, servant and pilgrim. Other documents of the Church subsequently took up and deepened this dimension of collaboration (see Appendix 1). The consequences of this new awareness are many. We want to limit ourselves here to highlighting those related to our theme of collaboration: the richness and plurality of services in mission, the building up and development of ecclesial communities, the full participation of lay and non-ordained ministries, and the role of the woman.
43. Our collaboration within this missionary perspective implies choosing a methodology of reciprocity; that is, it implies adopting the same vision or common project, mutual trust in teamwork for planning together, respect of the various stages, prudence, patience, charity, and perseverance. Success in this demands that each of us listen, reflect, pray, dialogue and be converted to the evangelical values of communion and participation.
44. To place oneself in an attitude of searching for new ways of collaboration which lead to a more incisive and effective pastoral planning is a sign of apostolic maturity. To open oneself to collaboration gives, to our missionary service, depth, courage and the distinctly “*catholic*” touch desired by Comboni.

In combonian spirituality

45. Collaboration in researching our common roots is a priority. A deeper knowledge of Daniel Comboni and his spirituality will help us to make our own his passion for mission and his virtues. Our communion with one another, following the example of Daniel Comboni, must be centred on our deep relationship with Jesus Christ and our commitment to follow Him wholeheartedly. This commitment must be sustained by prayer, by humbly welcoming the Word and by an openness to the poor.
46. Our journey towards attaining the freedom necessary for welcoming others as brothers and sisters, without that fear which blocks dialogue, will be helped by our frequent reference to the life of Blessed Daniel Comboni, our daily contemplation of the Pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd and our ability to allow ourselves to be challenged by Christ, who enlightens us about our deepest truest selves.
47. Our combonian spirituality is incomplete if we do not consider our deceased who are alive in God. Daniel Comboni and those in our Institutes who have gone before us are still present in our Comboni Family through the witness and fidelity of their lives and continue to intercede for us. In remembering them, we must re-appropriate the charismatic energy especially of those who particularly personified our Combonian spirituality.

SOME PROPOSED GUIDELINES

48. It is easy to agree with the necessity of collaboration, but concrete guidelines are lacking. Most of the time, collaboration is left to the initiative of the individual or of the community. To seek and use means that facilitate collaboration is an important duty for us all.
(In Appendix 3 there is a questionnaire for the communities which can be used as a basis for creating these guidelines.)
49. We propose, in what follows, some areas in which, it seems to us, collaboration is both feasible and indispensable.

50. At the Level of the General and Provincial Administrations (Regional, Delegation, Zonal):

- A) Let us encourage a common effort to draw out those elements of the Combonian charism which have not been sufficiently developed or put into context in the different continents. Let us also endeavour to highlight those historical figures from among our missionaries who especially personified and witnessed these values. Equally, in view of the canonisation of Comboni, let us make an effort to recover those places where he lived and which contribute in some way to allowing us to experience more closely and tangibly his presence.
- B) Let us encourage research on our vision of mission, ranging from biblical, theological, historical studies to research on missionary methodology in the specific contexts of our activity. A unique opportunity for this is offered by the preparatory work for our next General Chapters and by the General Assembly of the Secular Comboni Missionaries since all of us have chosen to study aspects of Evangelisation and how to be missionaries today.
- C) Our relationship with the Local Church always remains a priority of our missionary service. Collaboration among ourselves witnesses an even more vital attitude of love and service towards the people and the Church to whom the Lord has sent us. Daniel Comboni always desired and sought collaboration with the Church in all its expressions. He trusted the Church, involved her in a responsible way, and was ready to share, with great love, the struggles and the misery of the people. Indeed, it is precisely our participation as brothers and sisters in the joys, the anguish and the hopes of the Local Church of which we are part that motivates communion among ourselves.
- D) Lay Comboni Missionaries are a clear and inspiring expression of the fecundity of the charism of Daniel Comboni. They participate in the missionary activity of the Church through the plurality of the different ways of committing oneself, according to the Combonian charism. We want to thank the Lord for their journey and recognise in their evangelical witness a sign of the times for mission today. We want to maintain with them a relationship which is warm hearted, of encouragement and which is geared towards collaboration at various levels.
- E) We the General Administrations, according to our respective realities, commit ourselves to maintaining the positive working relationship which already exists through meetings, co-ordination in emergencies, retreats, and an exchange of information, and to growing in collaboration for the good of the mission. It would be profitable for us, for example, to co-ordinate both the planning of our visits to the Provinces, Regions and Delegations, and the visits themselves, by preparing and evaluating these together. In addition, we could seek to make better use of our various news bulletins to pass information to each other's communities.

51. At local level:

- A) It is essentially in the local communities that collaboration among us is experienced. Therefore, it is important to maintain an attitude of dialogue and to put into place strategies that will ensure a good quality of communication.
- B) We have already mentioned above some existing initiatives (regular joint Council meetings, the invitation to participate in each others Assemblies, the celebration of Combonian feasts together, teamwork in certain sectors...). Let us continue in this direction with enthusiasm and conviction.
- C) We think it profitable that criteria and orientations for collaboration in the various sectors be put in place in order to ensure continuity.

- D) We encourage the local superiors to meet and creatively seek ways to encourage and favour collaboration among the communities.
- E) We suggest that each province, region or delegation organise a *seminar or workshop on collaboration*, in order to give everyone a chance to listen to each other and express their expectations and proposals concerning collaboration. This workshop could be accompanied by a liturgical celebration that might go towards healing the reciprocal wounds of the past and, especially, express thanksgiving for the gift of the communion already achieved.

52. At the Level of the General, Provincial, Delegation and Zonal Secretariats and Offices

- A) We ask the Secretariats and Offices to gather the motions, regarding collaboration, put forward during the different Assemblies of the various sectors. We already have a wealth of reflection and experience which must stimulate us to continue.
- B) The Combonian Institutes already have a *history* of collaboration; with much light and a few shadows. We invite all provincial, regional and delegation superiors (coordinators), and all those responsible in the different sectors, to make every effort to conserve the memory of our past and to deepen the roots of our identity. In particular we would like to underline the writing of the history of the Province and of its exemplary members who have incarnated our charism, the care of the historical archives and of anything regarding our cultural heritage, the translation in the different languages of our most important writings etc.
- C) Let us encourage common projects of *Evangelisation*, with full joint participation in planning and carrying out these projects together as a team. Let us likewise agree upon the same type of collaboration in running centres of formation and in activities which support the mission.
- D) In our promotion of *justice and peace and the integrity of creation*, an integral part of evangelisation, let us go beyond simply participating in various initiatives, but rather collaborate to create a network for more courageous and incisive action. This begins with our commitment in the various sectors of our own activity, and then by working together with other ecclesiastical institutes and social organisations. (see *Letter*, “Justice As A Life Giving Relationship”, Jan.1st, 2000)
- E) We encourage interaction and communication among those responsible for *First Formation* regarding common formative activities. This will help our young people to grow in complementarity and reciprocity in such areas as: vocational awareness, psychological and emotional development, consecration and mission.
- F) In *Life-long Formation*, in addition to the essential aspects mentioned above, such as, the deepening of our spiritual roots and the vision of mission, we could give some thought as to how to benefit more from existing initiatives such as: ‘The Combonian Year of On Going Formation’ (MCCJ), The Renewal Course in the Holy Land’ (CMS), the different initiatives related to our spirituality and the work of the Secular Comboni Missionaries (see Appendix 2), the preparation for final vows (MCCJ – CMS) and the seminars on the different stages of life, on the integration of affectivity, and on illness and old age.
- G) In the area of *Missionary Animation*, which offers many opportunities for mutual support and collaboration, let us foster an approach to vocation ministry which presents all forms of commitment according to our charism. Let us also encourage the animation of groups in the

Local Church, the Mass media, and the support of and collaboration with the Lay Comboni Missionaries.

H) In the field of **Economy**, let us commit ourselves to cultivating a style of life according to the Spirit of the Gospel and not under the control of money and power. Let us also commit ourselves, as true brothers and sisters, in transparency and solidarity, to a collaboration that expresses itself through concrete gestures, not only in terms of economy, but also at the level of service.

53. Let us encourage each other to plan the initiatives we have in common, defining together objectives, strategies, means, and evaluations (what? how? who? when?), so that our commitment to collaboration, may produce long-lasting fruits for our apostolate. We are certain that love of the mission and the creativity instilled in us by the Holy Spirit will inspire many other constructive initiatives.

CONCLUSION

54. Jesus sent his disciples ‘two by two’ because, according to the Jewish tradition, the witness of one person alone was not valid. There are, however, other more important reasons:

- we go “two by two” first and foremost to guarantee His presence among us. In fact, He tells us, “For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them” (*Mt 18:20*);
- we also go ‘two by two’ to evangelise as Church, that is, as people who serve one another, so that when others see how we love each other, The Father, who is in heaven, is glorified (see *Mt 5:16*).

55. The aim of collaboration is not for us to become more “efficient” or “productive”, as in contemporary Capitalism, but it is rather, to enter into the evangelical and Combonian logic of dying to oneself so that others might live. The Cross is a prophetic, humble and radical sign of the power of God, which fulfils in us his plan of communion and kinship through the generous offering of our lives for His people.

56. Our final greeting is expressed in the wish that all of us may rediscover with joy our reality of “being hewn from the same Rock” (see *Is 51:1*) so that we might live in continuous gratitude to God and to one another.

57. May Mary and Joseph, the great patrons of Blessed Daniel Comboni and of our institutes, accompany us in this arduous and enthusing journey.

*Rome, March 17th 2002
Anniversary of the Beatification of Daniel Comboni*

Mother Adele Brambilla (Sup. Gen.)

Sr. Annunziata Giannotti

Sr. M. Aparecida Goncalves

Sr. Margit Forster

Sr. Luciana Zonta

Silvana Bordignon (Resp. Gen.)

Anna Maria Menin
Clementina Lotti
Celeste Moreira de Paiva
Isabella Dalessandro

Fr. Manuel Augusto Lopes Ferreira (Sup. Gen.)
Fr. Venanzio Milani
Fr. Juan Antonio González Núñez
Bro. Umberto Martinuzzo
Fr. Rafael González Ponce

APPENDIX 1

GUIDED BY THE CHURCH

The texts from the *Magisterium* of the Church that inspire us to live missionary collaboration are many. Here we quote those which seem to us particularly meaningful.

“People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories....The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living...” (Redemptoris Missio 41-42).

Evangelii Nuntiandi insists on the absolute necessity of communion within the evangelising community, which fulfils its mandate when it offers the example of “*people who are mature in faith and capable of finding a meeting point beyond the real tensions, thanks to a shared, sincere and disinterested search for truth*” (EN 77).

Mutuae Relationes and *Ad Gentes* insist on mutual collaboration among the Religious (MR 21) and co-operation among Missionary Institutes (AG 33) with the aim of co-ordinating pastoral work and the various activities in such a way as to encourage the involvement of all believing lay people, men and women, and of the Christian community as a whole.

Consecrated Life reminds us that evangelising communities have “*the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries.... In an age characterised by the globalisation of problems and the return of the idols of nationalism, international Institutes especially are called to uphold and to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures*” (VC 51).

The same text reveals that, “*the future of the new evangelisation, as of all other forms of missionary activity, is unthinkable without a renewed contribution from women, especially consecrated women*”. The consecrated woman in particular, “*can help eliminate certain one-sided perspectives which do not fully recognise her dignity and her specific contribution to the Church’s life and pastoral and missionary activity*”. In addition, “*women’s new self-awareness also helps men to reconsider their way of looking at things, the way they understand themselves, where they place themselves in history and how they interpret it, and the way they organise social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial life*” (VC 57).

The call to unity must become fraternal relationship and mutual collaboration even among the different Institutes of Consecrated life. “*Those who are united by a common commitment to the following of Christ and are inspired by the same Spirit cannot fail to manifest visibly, as branches*

*of the one Vine, the fullness of the Gospel of love” (VC 52). “... especially in those Countries where particularly difficult situations increase the temptation for them to withdraw into themselves, to the detriment of the consecrated life itself and of the Church...these Institutes should help one another in trying to discern God’s plan in this troubled moment of history, in order better to respond to it with appropriate works of the apostolate” (VC 53). The words of St. Bernard quoted in *Consecrated Life* about the different Religious Orders are still relevant and inspiring: “I admire them all. I belong to one of them by observance, but to all of them by charity. We all need one another: the spiritual good which I do not own and possess, I receive from others...In this exile, the Church is still on pilgrimage and is, in a certain sense, plural: she is a single plurality and a plural unity...” (VC 52).*

Pope John Paul II presents to us this text on the spirituality of Communion. It is a text which we should frequently meditate: “*To make the Church the home and the school of communion; that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings.*

But what does this mean in practice? Here too our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the Mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as, ‘those who are a part of me.’ This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a ‘gift for me’. A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, ‘masks’ of communion rather than its means of expression and growth” (Novo Millennio Ineunte 43).

APPENDIX 2

A Brief Presentation of THE INSTITUTE OF THE SECULAR COMBONI MISSIONARIES

1. “The institute of the Secular Comboni missionaries, constituted according to the laws of the Church, is composed of people who consecrate themselves to God but remain in the world to co-operate with missionary apostolate, according to the spirituality of the Apostle for Africa, Daniel Comboni, so as to achieve their own evangelical perfection” (*Constitution*).
2. The Secular Comboni Missionaries recognise themselves as an expression of the fecundity of the charism of Daniel Comboni. They feel that they are part of the Comboni Family, sharing in the same charism, which they embody according to the character of their Institute. In Comboni, who was certainly sensitive to that movement which led to the recognition of the role of the Lay people, that would come about at a later stage in the Church, the Secular Comboni Missionaries

find their inspiration and motivation, not only for their missionary spirit, but also for their secular state.

3. The secular state is the element which most distinguishes them, and it is precisely this dimension which they would like to be better known by the other members of the Comboni Family. Their being secular confers a uniqueness on their consecration and their missionary vocation “Ad Gentes”, which is lived out through the profession of the Evangelical Counsels. The secular state puts particular accent onto the individual rather than on the Institution, on their being hidden leaven, rather than on the visibility of their organisation, their structures and activities. *“The unique way in which we are called by God to embody the charism inherited from Comboni, is to be sown, like seed, within society, so that the Gospel may grow up within the most varied realities and human situations, and we may be, wherever we may find ourselves, expression of the missionary spirit”* (*La Nostra Voce Bulletin*, June 1997).
4. The specific aim of the Institute consists of co-operation with missionary activity in its different expressions. The Secular Comboni Missionaries give priority to Missionary Animation both in their own environments and in the countries to which they are sent for a missionary service. It is first and foremost a lifestyle, but it expresses itself also through specific activities.
5. The Institute joyfully welcomes among its members, persons with physical disabilities or other chronic illnesses who are able to commit their lives to the mission and who embody in a particular way the dimensions of prayer and sacrifice (see *Col 1:24*).

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire for Community Reflection

1. *What do the men desire that the women understand better about them, and vice versa?*
What do we need to do in order to welcome our respective expectations?
How can we positively promote the emergence and the affirmation of the feminine in the Church and among ourselves?
2. *What does each Institute (or realities of the Comboni Family) desire that the others understand better about their specific vocation?*
3. *Which history has each Institute written in order to document for the others its experience of Religious Life and apostolate?*
What are the elements of the Comboni charism to be considered most important as a basis for our relationships?
Which examples do we have of brothers or sisters who have personified these values?
4. *How can we make our differences a source of enrichment, rather than a cause of division?*
What do I consider precious in myself that I would like to offer to others?
How can I collaborate without making my ideas or feelings an absolute?
5. *What type of collaboration among our Institutes (provinces, regions, communities) do we have to attain for our common mission?*
How do we ensure a process of discernment and of evaluation for the good of our missionary action?