

# COMBONI MISSIONARY LAITY

## *Letter of the Superior General and his Council to all confreres*

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Dear Brothers,  
peace and joy in the Lord.

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

**1.** The 1991 Chapter dealt specifically with laity in its various forms and drew up some useful proposals, encouraging all the members of the Institute to foster the promotion of the laity (CA 60-63). The Chapter has specifically given a mandate to the General Council *"to nominate an ad-hoc committee to look further into the laity project"* (CA 63.6). As reported by Familia Comboniana, the committee has met for the first time on May 13-14 1993, to reflect on the theme and to put together the various on-going experiences in some of our provinces. The reflections prepared in this meeting form the basis of this letter of ours to all of you, with the aim of animating and contributing to further the implementation of the Chapters proposals on the *"project laity"*.

**2.** Lay people have always played a very important role in the history of the church, particularly in evangelization. Take for instance the Institute for the Propagation of the Faith that was founded by the lay woman Pauline Marie Jaricot in 1822 and approved by the Pope on the following year. Many documents of the Church's teaching, from Vatican II to the Santo Domingo conference of 1992, pay particular tribute to the pastoral and missionary activity of the laity. We quote here some passages from the encyclical letter Redemptoris Missio (RMi) and from the apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici (CL) by Pope John Paul II, that states in a simple and clear way what is the role of the laity in the evangelizing mission of the Church:

*"The need for all the faithful to share in this responsibility (missionary activity) is not merely a matter of making the apostolate more effective; it is a right and duty based on their baptismal dignity. (...) They are bound by the general obligation and they have the right, whether as*

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<sup>1</sup> ABBREVIATIONS:

AA = Apostolicam Actuositatem

CA = Charter Acts

CL = Christifideles Laici

EN = Evangelii Nuntiandi

NGO = Non Governmental Organizations

RMi = Redemptoris Missio

RL = Rule of Life

*individuals or in associations, to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world” (RMi 71).*

*“All the faithful, especially the lay faithful who live among the people of other religions, whether living in their native region or lands as migrants, ought to be for all a sign of the Lord and his Church. (...) What is first needed for the evangelization of the world are those who will evangelize. In this regard everyone, beginning with the Christian family, must feel the responsibility to foster the birth and growth of vocations, both priestly and religious as well as in the lay state, specifically directed to the missions” (CL 35).*

*“Within missionary activity, the different forms of the lay apostolate should be held in esteem, with respect for their nature and aims. Lay missionary associations, international Christian volunteer organizations, ecclesial movements, groups and sodalities of different kinds - all these should be involved in the mission ad gentes as co-operators with the local Churches. In this way the growth of a mature and responsible laity will be fostered, a laity whom the younger Churches are recognizing as essential and undeniable element in the plantatio Ecclesiae” (RMi 72).*

The Bishops of Latin America admit that the lay people are *“the protagonists of the new evangelization, of human promotion as well as of Christian culture”* (Santo Domingo 97) and that *“there is an urgent need to foster a search for the holiness of the laity and for ways to enable it to play the role proper of its mission”* (ibidem).

The African Bishops are also constantly concerned about the formation of a laity that is mature and responsible: catechists, teachers and leaders in all the various human activities.

**3.** As Comboni Missionaries, faithful to the praxis of our Founder, who with courage and determination involved the laity in his evangelizing work, want to foster and pursue the present re-awakening of the Christian laity, who are ever more willing and ready to take on responsibilities resulting from being baptised, and to witness and announce the gospel “ad gentes”.

In the following presentation we shall use the see-judge-act method.

## ***FIRST PART***

### ***See***

#### **Lay people In the Church**

**4.** In a world where there is a fast growing awareness of the dignity of the human person, the laity is taking on a more active role also in the life of the Christian communities. This kind of lay re-wakening is founded on the force of the Spirit that through Vatican II has opened up the way to a greater understanding of the Church as the people of God, the Church as a mystery of communion and participation, the ministerial Church, a Church living and deeply involved in the world.

**4.1** The associative reality of the laity is both varied and enterprising, with goals that range from the apostolic and missionary activities, to charitable, social and development roles.

**4.2** Religious Orders and Institutes are like yeast for many lay associations and lay groups, that, founded and supported by these religious institutions, share in their spirituality and pastoral activity while retaining their lay status.

**4.3** Some religious institutes, like our own, are trying out various forms of association and

collaboration that can enlighten the search for suitable new ways of association and integration of the lay people into our missionary activities.

Several Religious Orders and Institutes hold formation courses and activities specific to their charism with various groups of lay people, and their influence reaches out to a wider audience through newsletters, magazines or other suitable means.

## **The laity and the MCCJ**

**5.** Our Institute already possesses an experience and sensitivity towards the laity, with particular reference to that section of it that is the object of our pastoral activity for the foundation and growth of the local church. After Vatican II the lay ministries have been multiplying and new ones are taking up their specific roles beside the traditional catechist, particularly where there are the Basic Christian Communities (Latin America) or the Small Christian Communities (Africa).

But we have also been interested in the "missionary" aspect of the laity. The topic was examined and discussed in all the Chapters and Intercapitular Assemblies from 1969 onwards: the reading of the relevant documents will show how there has been an on-going awareness and promotion process of the laity.

Thus the 1991 Chapter guide-lines on the Comboni Lay Missionaries are not something new for the Institute, but *a point of arrival* of an ongoing process, showing the work done so far, as well as the *starting point* and a point to refer to for a process of *greater, better organized, more methodical and charismatic* work leading to the overall organization of the various forms and ways of the Comboni Lay Missionary status.

**5.1** For "Comboni Lay Missionaries" we mean all those people *"who in some way have been affected by the Comboni charism, or who could be influenced by our missionary spirit"* (CA 60.1).

We must thank the Lord for their large numbers (men, women, children, youths, sick and elderly, etc.), and they are all in different ways and degrees involved in our missionary activities, particularly in evangelization and human promotion, mission animation, vocation promotion and formation.

- a. In the field of mission animation we can include all the readers of our magazines, the relatives of the missionaries, the benefactors, old boys, former confreres, the youths formed in our vocation centres, the many enclosed sisters who pray for us, the many friends who pray and offer up their sufferings for the missions, etc.
- b. But there is now also a new reality which is slowly taking shape. Some people are asking a share in our life-project and work. Some lay people are ready to form with us "apostolic communities" or work-teams, pledging their services for a few years and some even for life, in support of evangelization, including the reaching out "ad gentes".

This kind of missionary laity is still striving to find its own identity and some of its aspects still need clarifying and defining. It is now important to pass from the stage of ideas and hypotheses to the courageous implementation of some of the projects and, in line with the call of the 1991 Chapter, set all the various proposals put the laity and by the laity into an organic structure.

**5.2** Many confreres have already worked with lay people (mostly NGO volunteers) in projects of human promotion and other pastoral initiatives. The experience turned out to be positive or negative, according to the various situations and individuals involved. Each collaboration is a kind of individual event, with good and bad things or difficulties on both sides.

Favourable or unfavourable opinions on the promotion of a Comboni missionary laity may

depend on such direct and personal experience with these lay volunteers. We are now called to learn from such past experiences, and setting aside undue generalizations, let us try to identify the good things done during these last years in collaboration with the lay volunteers. The failures should show and teach us how to improve the preparation of the lay people and how and what support they expect from us. A serious and serene assessment of past experiences may also improve our own capacity to cooperate and to renew our "life-style" so as to leave room for the lay people who want to take on with us the service of evangelization and mission animation.

**5.3** In line with the Chapter indications and guide-lines (CA 63,6) we of the General Council have appointed a committee ad hoc to examine in more detail, to coordinate and to verify the "laity project".

The members of this committee were chosen among those who attended the assembly held in Rome 1-4 October 1992, with the aim of identifying the objectives, composition and purpose of the committee itself.

## ***SECOND PART***

### **Judge**

In this "judge" stage we want to reflect on the fundamental reasons *for a more qualified commitment* of the Comboni institute with and for the laity.

### **Centrality of mission**

**6.** The renewal, the demands and the new paths have to come from and be for the missions. Also the role of the laity is to be seen in terms of the mission today, in its various component parts. At the centre of the mission there is the Spirit of the risen Lord, that is being obeyed with equal dignity and different ministry both by the laity and by the consecrated ministers.

### **Church people of God**

**7.** *"In the Church there is diversity of ministry, but unity of mission" (AA 2). This diversity of service in the unity of the same mission makes up the richness and beauty of evangelization" (EN 66).* All the various ministries have thus the same goal: the mission, the evangelization taken as whole, including its complexity and dynamism (cf. EN 17). In the Church there should be no competition among the various ministries and charisms, since they all stem from the same Spirit. The ministries do not compete against each other, but complement each other.

They are to be exercised for the good of the only mission in a spirit of communion that needs to be constantly sought and built up through discernment, a process that may not be devoid of difficulty. The various ministries, coming from the same Spirit, enrich the mission and provide reciprocal aid to discover and live one's own identity: bishop, priest, brother, sister, layman, laywoman, consecrated or in the world, married, etc.

### **Daniel Comboni and the laity**

**8.** In the work and writing of Daniel Comboni we find some references to the "missionary laity" as we understand them today. These few references seen in their context have a pioneering value:

- his Plan specifically foresees an African missionary laity (*"To regenerate Africa through itself"*);

- in his Cairo Institutes he trained lay Africans, to be sent back at the service of the missions deep inside the continent (S 2472, 3409);
- in Egypt he appointed laymen as procurators for his mission, and responsible for reception, custom clearance and forwarding;
- he very much wanted to involve the laity in missionary cooperation in his home country. He wanted a qualified presence of the laity in the main council of the Good Shepherd Association;
- he took great pains to keep correspondence and links with many friends and benefactors directly, or through the Good Shepherd Association and the "Annali" newsletter that he himself founded and published (and later changed into "Nigrizia");
- he had strong links with the Cologne Society central committee and the "Marienverein" of Vienna, composed of churchmen and laymen;
- he raised the interest of the powerful, politicians and well to do for the African mission.

These few short references are enough to say that Daniel Comboni was a great animator and coordinator of mission activities for Africa, involving not only the clergy and Religious Institutes, but also the laity of every class and nationality.

### **The laity in the history of the Comboni Missionaries**

**9.** The charism of Daniel Comboni, assumed and kept alive by the members of the various Institutes that draw their inspiration from it, is a gift granted by God to the whole Church. So it can be shared also by other ecclesial institutions beyond the historical situations and ways in which it has existed so far. After Comboni, in the Institute this "lay status" lost sparkle (as a consequence of the historical period and also because of a diminished "combonianity") and for a few decades little was done to keep up awareness and sensitivity for this state. The Vatican II and subsequent Church teaching and documents have once again raised the interest and commitment of the laity for the mission. It becomes therefore important that we Comboni Missionaries, who in different ways have always supported the missionary activity of the laity, prepare with a positive and encouraging attitude of trust to receive and cooperate with these lay men and women, and see in them not just material and technical performers of what we, priests and brothers, do not know or cannot do, but people who share our own responsibility of the evangelizing work of the church, true partners of the only mission.

It is necessary, on the other hand, to give our contribution to prepare these laymen to cooperate with the religious personnel and with all other church personnel (local clergy, other missionary institutes, NGO volunteers, consecrated lay men and women, local laity, etc.), since, as the signs of the times show, the future of the mission will in good measure depend on the activity of "ecclesial teams" and "apostolic communities".

### **The laity and our Rule of Life**

**10.** The 1979 chapter introduced the laity in our Rule of Life. It mentions it indirectly when proposing a certain type of mission, animation and cooperation, where the laity should also be given space (cf. RL61, 62, 64, 73.4, 77.2). Two numbers have however a specific relevance for us here:

- RL 77.6: vocation promotion of missionary laymen;
- RL 68: the "apostolic communities" as the specific place of collaboration with the laity and with all the other apostolic forces at work.

It is this very number of our Rule of Life that best introduces us into the spirit of acceptance and cooperation with the laity, as essential part of the "apostolic community": *“to render the evangelizing activity more complete and effective”* (RL 68).

## **The three dimensions of the combonian laity**

**11.** The following three dimensions of the combonian missionary laity arise from their specific condition and belonging to the Church, from the ministry they are called to exercise and from the charism from which they draw inspiration:

### **11.1 Lay status**

*"By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (LG 31).*

*"Their primary and immediate task is ... to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities, such as love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering" (EN 70; cf. RMi 59, 72, 82).*

The lay people who have *"the primary task"* of operating *"in the affairs of the world"*, must get involved and exercise their lay status also in the ecclesial ministries, such as those connected with the Word, catechism, liturgy, ecclesial communities, charitable deeds, administration of the goods of the Church, teaching of religion in schools, etc. (cf. RMi 73-74; Santo Domingo 97, 99).

### **11.2 Missionary status**

The Baptism, together with Confirmation and Eucharist, is the root of the missionary commitment of every Christian: "right and duty based on their baptismal dignity" (RMi 71). This missionary status can take different forms, according to the possibilities and gifts of every one: "Within missionary activity, the different forms of the lay apostolate should be held in esteem, with respect for their nature and aims..." (RMi 72).

For some this commitment takes the form of leaving one's own country, while for others it may be expressed through the mission animation of the local church and the support to the missionary activities *"ad gentes"*. In *"missionary laity"*, differently from the organizations of volunteers that aim only at technical development, the stress is on the faith-motives which is the specific and indispensable characteristic of the missionary activity as such, that is thus seen as a *"lay ministry"* within the lay status for building the Church.

The role of the lay missionaries is to announce the Gospel through their style of life, manifesting the faith that is the foundation of their service. The testimony of married lay people is particularly important because they do their missionary service as family.

### **11.3 Comboni missionary spirit**

The charism of Comboni, gift of the Spirit to the whole Church, goes well beyond the present Comboni Institutes that draw their inspirations from it. There are lay people, men and women, who feel that the charism of Comboni affects, inspires and touches their Christian and apostolic lives which - expressed in an ecclesial way - thus become an expression of a missionary vocation that draws its specific inspiration from the charism of Comboni. So Daniel Comboni is also theirs. These people, *who live the Comboni charism as lay people*, enrich it and develop its lay and secular dimension.

These people nourish their missionary and combonian spirituality with our testimony of missionaries identified in the charism of the Founder. Their access to the writings and charismatic experience of Daniel Comboni provides them with the essential elements of his charism and of his missionary spirituality of the Heart of the Good Shepherd.

They are consequently aided to adopt the fundamental principle of the missionary methodology

of Comboni: "Save Africa with Africa", acting as promoters and propagators of the local laity. The various initiatives of the "Comboni Lay Missionaries" already in progress in some provinces, assisted by some of our confreres, are concrete manifestations of the "secular" vitality of the charism.

## ***THIRD PART***

### **Act**

#### **Chapter guide-lines**

**12.** Our purpose here, as General Council, is to go through the Chapter guide-lines on the Comboni lay missionaries and to issue some practical directives to start or support the reflection in our communities and provinces/delegations.

We take it for granted, of course (see n° 5 above), that in our pastoral work of evangelization we give priority, in collaboration with the local church, to the formation of a mature and responsible native laity enriched by the various ministries (CA 63.1). This undertaking is quite in line with our missionary methodology (cf. CA 44.2b-c-d, 46.1.b).

Together with these intra-ecclesial ministries (catechism teaching, sacramental life, growth of the ecclesial communities, liturgy, etc.), we encourage particularly those who are working for the transformation of society according to the Gospel, through an active presence in "secular events" which is more appropriate to the laity (politics, economics, social order, health, communications, science, arts, family, education, ecology, peace, justice, human rights, solidarity, etc.).

#### **12.1 "*Propagative role of lay missionaries*" (CA 63.2)**

As a preference, the lay missionaries should exercise a role of formation and animation of the local laity, especially in matters regarding the transformation of society, from within the reality of the temporal affairs, and in syntony with the local Church. The arrival of lay foreign missionaries, beside fostering the development of the community, will aid also the growth of a local missionary laity "ad gentes", thus playing a propagative and mission animation role. The lay missionaries are to be part of the apostolic community they serve with their specific contribution, and some of them could even adopt a community style of life of their own.

#### **12.2 "*Associate Comboni Missionaries*" (CA 63.3)**

This form of missionary service "ad tempus", approved by the 1985 Chapter (127-130) and practiced so far only by the DSP, has generally yielded good results. It should therefore be carried forward and extended to other Provinces. We should bear in mind that the lay "associates" want to live within our Comboni communities and share in all their activities. Thus the Comboni communities receiving them have to be suitably prepared.

This form of "associates" and the way it is lived should be made better known and extended to include, for instance, also diocesan priests (as an alternative to the "fidei donum") and religious personnel of other institutes willing and fit to live with us for a few years of missionary service.

#### **12.3 "*Comboni missionary supporters*" (CA 63.4)**

We gather under this heading all the various kinds of persons who, without any special link, feel close to our history and our present life, through the fact that we are missionaries and Comboni missionaries: relatives, friends, benefactors, old hoys, collaborators, readers of our magazines, praying and suffering friends, etc.). These many lay people need to draw nourishment from the fount of the Comboni missionary spirituality. There must therefore be a more systematic

commitment on the part of the Institute to keep them well informed on our activities, on the needs of the young churches and to take care of their spiritual formation, founding their dedication on a better knowledge of Comboni and of the Comboni Missionaries.

#### **12.4 "Lay Comboni Missionaries" (LMC) (CA 63.5)**

The "LMC" are a new reality, demanding our trust, availability and creativity. Some laymen, given the nature of the reasons urging them to engage in mission activity, feel a vocation similar to ours, though retaining their lay status, that distinguishes them from us and makes their service a complementary to our own service. These laymen ask us to share our mission by reaching out "ad gentes" or doing mission animation in their home country.

This "vocation" cannot find satisfactory outlets without a real, and initially quite burdensome, organizational commitment on the part of the Institute or at least by some provinces.

The laymen themselves should be animated and encouraged to organize themselves in their various stages of their missionary course. They can thus grow at their pace, be more creative and manage better their lay status, without unnecessary dependence. Our specific role with them should be limited to spirituality, formation and also on some other aspects such as the economic one, in case of need, particularly at the initial stages.

Some of the groups of LMC may choose community life as their style of missionary presence and, though independent from our religious communities, are part of the apostolic community sharing the pastoral projects from beginning to end, i.e. its planning, implementation and assessment

### **Provinces / Delegations and the laity**

**13.** As General Council we invite all Provincial Superiors and Superiors of Delegations with their respective councils to animate their province/delegation to get involved in developing and expanding the Comboni missionary laity. Starting from the local situations and demands, and bearing in mind the contents of this letter, every province and delegation should begin initiatives aimed at developing one or more ways (cf. 12.1-4), and guiding them to maturity, for a more complete and qualified service to the "mission".

The following elements will have to be taken into consideration in order to succeed:

#### **13.1 The persons**

The characteristics that identify a group as lay-missionary-combonian are first of all founded on the persons, and arising from their expectations and from the requirements of the mission: every project is to take its start from the people and has to develop and mature in them. This may lead to different forms of missionary laity (see above) and to each province choosing the way most suitable to them. In any case, it is the laymen themselves who must always be the protagonists, and receive from the institute only the support and formation necessary for the start and growth of the project.

#### **13.2 Planning and trial**

A sound and serious reflection LMC should be held, together with the interested laymen and particularly in the case of the LMC formula (cf. 12.4), on their identity, formation, profession, requirements, relations with the Institute, till a final proposal can be drawn up.

A specific aspect to bear in mind is the relationship and role of the lay Comboni associate within the local church he serves and within the local church sending him, his evangelization or mission animation role, so that he may manifest communion among the churches together with all the other forms of missionary vocations.

Juridical and economic aspects should be clarified from the start, since they play an important



part in the concrete fulfilment of any project. They should be studied with the laymen themselves, to foresee the problems involved in their maintenance and the maintenance of their family, travels, insurance, health, work accidents, ageing and, necessarily, also the service agreement with the local church, which must have the consent of the bishop. To respect the identity and role of the laymen, a juridical and administrative autonomy should be worked out as soon as possible.

After the project has been studied for a suitable time, steps should be taken to "test" it on the field, within the context of some pilot-project, without pretending to have identified or solved all the problems, and knowing that some risk is inevitably present whenever new ways are tried out, particularly in matters of missionary vocations "ad gentes".

### **13.3 *Be aware of the limits***

In order to be able to get over inevitable disappointments and discouragement, it is necessary that the laymen and the Institute study and reflect together on some of the limits inherent to a missionary commitment of the laity. We mention here some of the most evident:

- some laymen will only be able to do a fairly short period of service "ad gentes", and thus will be unable to acquire a knowledge of the local language good enough to be able to communicate with the local people well. This will also mean that enculturation, normally requiring a fairly long period of time, will also be limited;
- initially the continuity of the service with regular rotation of personnel will not be assured;
- in missionary situations of insecurity the responsibility for one's family takes priority over responsibility for the local community.

### **13.4 *Examination and assessment***

The plan that each province has prepared or will prepare on the project-laity is to be examined and assessed at regular intervals. The Chapter Acts state clearly: *'Special attention must be paid to directing and periodically assessing these first experiences, with the mutual co-responsibility of sending and receiving Provinces and the General Council'* (CA 635).

These periodical examinations should bring out the difficulties and what was done to overcome them to keep faith to the original fundamental purpose; this applies particularly in the case of laymen engaged in the evangelization "ad gentes", their relations with the local church and state authority and with the Institute, financial requirements, house and insurance problems, type of service within the community, relations within the apostolic community and with the local Comboni missionary community.

## **A reawakening and revitalisation opportunity (cf. CA 7)**

**14.** If the event of the lay Comboni missionaries come from the vitality and wealth of the charism granted by the Holy Spirit to Daniel Comboni and to the Church for the benefit of the proclamation of the Gospel to the *"poorest and most abandoned of the universe, especially concerning the faith"* (RL 5), it is necessary that we as Institute, from the local communities to the provinces and delegations, start preparing with faith and courage for the challenges that are to come. We should face them with open heart and a faith-founded combonian determination, looking at them as a grace of God that will foster the growth of our identity, according to the dynamism of the focal point that the Chapter has singled out as the way to live with Daniel Comboni today.

### **14.1 *Overcoming clericalism***

The active presence of the laity will aid us to shed all forms of clericalism still present among

us, priests or brothers, that lead us to manage the life of the Christian communities and their activities in an individualistic manner, taking all decisions on our own. Pope John Paul II writes that it is *"a mistake against the gospel and against theology to imagine the Church only as a hierarchical body: a Church with no people. (...) Clerics and laity, hierarchy and ordained faithful form the only people of God, the only Church, the only communion of the followers of Christ, thus the Church belongs to all and everyone and we are all responsible of its life and growth"* (Osservatore Romano, 28.10.1993). It is imperative for all of us to learn how to share with the laity the responsibility for the life of the Church and for evangelization, welcoming and developing the charisms proper to their lay status.

#### **14.2 *A new mentality***

The responsible presence of the laity in our missionary service demands of us a human and spiritual renewal. Collaboration with them will aid our overcoming also what the Chapter Acts call the *"shadows in our life"* (CA 4.6) such as temptation to discouragement, individualism, activism (CA 4.6), lack of identification and motivations (CA 11.3-4) that hinder our *"making common cause"* with the people.

#### **14.3 *Collaboration with the other Comboni institutes***

The reality of the combonian missionary laity calls us to open up to sharing with the other female Comboni institutes, as is also their wish: the Comboni Missionary Sisters and the Comboni Secular Missionaries. We are offered a renewal chance of greater Collaboration and communion at all the levels (community-province/delegation-general administration), supported by the spirit of our Founder, that we hope to address soon as Blessed, and by our common love of the mission *"ad gentes"*.

#### **14.4A *service to the Church***

The motivations of our commitment to develop the Comboni missionary laity in its various forms is founded also on the will to give a renewed contribution to the whole Church and is not just a search to respond to the needs of the Institute. This will mean that the laity who draw their inspiration from Comboni will not necessarily be bound to the Institute in matters regarding their activity and their choices of fields of activity.

#### **14.5 *Invest in formation***

The history of our Institute is testimony to the great investment in personnel and means that, thanks God, contributed to the rising and growth of many local churches. Faithful therefore to our tradition, we encourage all provinces and delegations and the communities to invest time and energies in the formation of the lay missionary awareness, as demanded by the signs of our time.

#### **14.6 *Application of this letter***

Concluding this letter, we urge all the Provincial Superiors and Superiors of Delegations to:

- send copy of this letter to all confreres, so that they can study and reflect on it, within fixed periods of time, reminding them that all have the right and duty to express their opinion;
- remarks, suggestions and a short report on what was done should be collected and sent to Bro. Casas, of the General Council, and to one member of their choice of the "Laity Committee"<sup>2</sup> within May 31th 1994, so that there may be a first assessment during the

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<sup>2</sup> (\*) *Laity Committee*: Fr. Ezio Bellini (1), coordinator - Fr. Romeo Ballan (PE) - Bro. Hans Eigner (DSP) - Fr. Joseph Uhl (C) - Mr. Marino Pattini (LMC community - Via Trieste 4 - 21046 MALNATE (I) - Tel 0332-425865)

Intercapitular Assembly;

- prepare for a possible updating of the Provincial Directory on the role of the Comboni lay missionaries, bearing in mind the Chapter guide-lines and the contents of this letter,
- appoint in every province and delegation a person to act as animator and coordinator of what is being done for the realization of the "Project Laity" and to keep contacts with the "Laity Committee".

#### **14.7 Laity Committee**

We wish here to express our gratitude to the members of the "Laity Committee" for what they have done so far, particularly in their preparatory research for this document and we invite them to go on with their task that consists in:

- coordinating all initiatives undertaken by the various provinces and delegations;
- offer their contribution in terms of knowledge and experience;
- follow up the application of this letter in the provinces and delegations, collecting and studying their remarks and suggestions;
- prepare detailed and concrete indications to be studied in the forthcoming assembly of November 1994, bearing in mind also the reflections that will emerge at the Intercapitular Assembly.

The Christmas that ends with today's feast of the Epiphany has often been urging us "Nolite timere!" Strengthened by these words and supported by the Spirit of the Lord, let us open up courageously to these new missionary challenges: today, more than ever, we have the strong and real hope of witnessing the new reality of a commitment of and with a Comboni missionary laity.

Rome, January 6th 1994

*Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord*

Fr. David Glenday, sup.gen.

Fr. Vittorio Moretto

Bro. Guillermo Casas

Fr. Manuel Casillas

Fr. Giuseppe Filippi