

Letter commemorating the 20th anniversary of the **Comboni Missionary Laity**¹



In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples ... The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.

[Evangelii Gaudium 120]

Twenty years have passed the General Council of the MCCJ wrote a letter on the Comboni Missionary Laity. It was a reference and reflection for the different Comboni provinces/delegations, and for the lay people that for more than 20 years have been inspired by this charism.

We want this short reflection to serve in recognition of the work, and to encourage the intention to continue in this way. It is also an opportunity to thank all the Comboni religious who have given their dedication and service to accompany and promote secular Comboni vocations. It is also a moment of gratefulness for the Comboni Lay Missionaries who have made a living reality of this Comboni vocation with their dedication and effort. It is a way of collaboration and family to which we are committed and which we want to continue strengthening.

This letter did not refer only to the Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM); neither do we as CLM understand that the laity expression of the charism of St. Daniel Comboni is limited to our CLM movement. The charism of Comboni is much broader, and undoubtedly will bear new fruit for the Church and the world.

However, permit us that from now on we refer in particular to the path taken by the CLMs. In these twenty years, we have seen the birth and growth of numerous CLM groups in different countries. We are now present in twenty countries, of which fifteen have local groups (some with long life, and others who are newborn).

This vocation lived by many CLMs in different countries has brought life to the intuitions of the early years. Although we are on the way, it is equally true that we will walk a long path. These reflections have been lived out in small communities, and shared in each country. In the various continental and intercontinental meetings we have clarified our choices and our specificity as CLMs. However, we do not forget that in a lay, diverse, and international movement, we must remain open to the Spirit, knowing of a wealth where there is still much to be discovered and developed.

Our CLM Identity

During these years, we have delved much into our identity, asking what defines our identity as lay, missionary, and Comboni. Most recently, in the conclusions of the intercontinental assembly of Ellwangen 2006², the basic features of how we recognize our CLM vocation took shape. This

¹ [Letter from the General Council of the MCCJ on the Comboni Missionary Laity 1994.](#)

² [Final document of the intercontinental Assembly of Ellwangen 2006.](#)

is vocation expressed by the daily lives of many men and women from very different cultures, full of nuances and growth, always looking to answer the call of the Lord, in every place where we are, and seeking to maintain fidelity to our Comboni and missionary charism.

We feel that our Comboni and missionary call challenges us every day, and as a vocation involves all our work and options. It pushes us to take our own role in a Church of ministries, and asks us to respond to our baptism to be partners in the evangelizing, prophetic, and universal charity action of the Church. We are a church of frontier, of periphery, which stands beside the poor and most abandoned. Our commitment is developed in the world, involved in society, in politics, in education, in health, in agriculture, in the factories...wherever inequalities of this world need to be corrected, in supporting those who need it most.

A vocation for life

Our commitment extends over time, and in the different places where the Lord puts us. As the document of Layibi says³: *The missionary vocation is for life, while the missionary commitment "Ad Gentes" is for a minimum of 2 years (3 for other countries). A minimum time can extend to the maximum (six, eight, or sixteen years) according to an individual's personal realities, work, family, etc. This some can carry out alone, others in pairs or as a family, some younger, others following retirement, etc. This is a commitment that challenges us when we are also in our hometowns to discover our mission, besides our commitment to train and support those who we send and are in mission outside of their country of birth.*

CLM Groups who are Community of Communities

In the conclusions of the intercontinental assembly of Maia⁴ we recognize that the CLM communities need to develop processes to allow full realization of the vocation of its members throughout their lives. We do not want to live our vocation as individuals; the community is the first reference of our Christian life. It must be a community with its own style and expressions, unique to the people who compose it and the place where they are. It should be a support to our Christian life.

Similarly, our CLM groups serve as witness in the different countries. They are groups that, organized according to the local reality, want to be the basis and structure of this CLM vocation. They are groups that throughout these twenty years have been discovering each other (since we were born independently), and where we have seen a sense of an international CLM family. We recognize that the movement holds one single vision and we must all collaborate and work together harmoniously to live this common path.⁵

Internationality and autonomy

This path of internationality has allowed many meetings to be conducted in Europe⁶, America or Africa, as well as intercontinental assemblies. Our witness has not been expressed only in local ways. We have created international communities across countries, and we are committed to maintain them. We have created a small structure that aims to facilitate communication and

³ [Conclusions First African CLM Meeting Layibi 2011.](#)

⁴ [Conclusions intercontinental CLM Assembly of Maia December 2012.](#)

⁵ [Conclusions II African CLM Meeting Kinshasa 2014.](#)

⁶ [We may find a great job of approximation in Granada 06-Florence 07 Document.](#)

collaboration⁷, starting from the coordinating team of local groups, extending to the continental coordinators and the Central Committee, heirs of that first "committee for the laity" mentioned in the letter of 1994. We are gathering responsibility in each of them, though we keep the aid of the accompanying MCCJ as older siblings. It is true that in the newer countries the presence of the MCCJ is still great but it is also true that globally we can say that much rests in the hands of our own CLM.

Economy

We recognize that to be self-sustaining will be a long-term process. As lay missionaries, we are in a complex situation. Above all, we commit ourselves to find creative solutions that allow us to sustain ourselves as we seek to establish networks of solidarity among the different groups with the creation of an international fund to facilitate coordination and assistance to CLM communities and specific country situations with fewer resources.

Comboni Family

Close collaboration between CLM and MCCJ over the years is making a broader vision of Comboni Family⁸. Concrete experiences of cooperation in situations of mission, training, retreats, coordination support, and vocational promotion are helping us to rediscover and take concrete steps towards building a more united Comboni Family. We take as inspiration the life of Daniel Comboni himself, who put in the center "the mission" and around this centrality of mission called religious brothers and sisters, priests, and laity of many skills and put them to work together. With his loss, and as the result of the structures and thoughts of the moment, each family branch drifted apart. Perhaps now, also informed by the new ecclesiology born of Vatican II and the recognition of a ministerial church where we all share responsibility, we are rediscovering this sense of Family and Church, that Comboni implanted in his first Cenacles of Apostles. Therefore we wish, in fact, that there may be in the Comboni Family of today room for diversity recognized in equality of the styles of life. We wish to learn how to recognize the talents of each group to help them bear fruit for the Kingdom, working as a team.⁹ Being as Comboni said a small Cenacle of Apostles for Africa, a luminous point that sends to the center of Africa many beams of light, as diligent and virtuous missionaries come out of its womb. And these beams can cast warmth and light together, and necessarily reveal the nature of the point of origin (E 2648 rules).

Challenges

Twenty years on, we still have many challenges.

The first and foremost would be to keep us faithful to our Comboni and missionary vocation. To serve the mission is to serve the church and the world.

We live an alternative lifestyle, sharing with those who need it most, testifying our vocation wherever we are, because we know that the world needs witnesses rather than teachers.

⁷ [Organization of the Central Committee and the international CLM movement. CLM intercontinental Assembly Maia 2012.](#)

⁸ When we speak of Comboni Family, we refer to the Comboni Missionaries, the Comboni Missionaries Sisters, the Secular Comboni Missionaries, the Comboni Lay Missionaries and the other groups and lay people who are inspired by St. Daniel Comboni.

⁹ [Letter for the 150th anniversary of the Plan written as Comboni Family in September 2014.](#)

We understand that as CLM we must give a double answer to our vocation ad Gentes: both at the personal level (the call each individual receives) and at the level of the CLM group (taking responsibility as a group open to the possibility that others will go and act in our place), thus opening the Church to its missionary dimension ad Gentes and inter Gentes¹⁰. In every moment of our lives and wherever we are, the Lord asks us to give a missionary response. When we are not outside our country our reference must continue to be the mission. In this globalized world everything is related, as Combonis and as missionaries we are called to networking, to build bridges between cultures, to respond to inequalities forged locally and internationally.

We want to establish a stable and enculturated missionary presence, in which we respond as local community and as an international movement. We encourage responsibility among the groups, through mutual support and collaboration. All this will proceed through the consolidation of the groups in each country, from the richness and specificity of each culture and the expression of the charism in each group.

We believe that strengthening communication is to strengthen the affection, and to make networking is to offer comprehensive solutions to a globalized world, informed by local and close work with the people and communities where we live.

We are heirs of a particular charism and we know this means to know it, recreate it, take responsibility, and pray it. We ask God to keep in us the passion that inspired and motivated the whole life of St. Daniel Comboni, to scream with him Africa or death!

Within this charism we feel very close to all the Comboni Family. Comboni challenges us to be witness of a new Church, surpassing the religious-clerical reference, promoting among all a more ministerial and less clerical church, and especially more true to its mission and service to the poor and most abandoned. We believe that this remains as stated in item 14 of the letter of 1994, a constant reawakening and revitalization opportunity for all.

We do not forget the words of Comboni: "As the work I have in my hands is all of God, it is with God with whom we especially need to treat all small or big tasks of the mission (E. 3615)." Therefore, we entrust ourselves to Him every day.

We do not pretend to be exhaustive on reflection or proposals. These will become clearer in our day by day lives and in the missionary commitment of the CLM communities and individuals that comprise it.

After twenty years we can say that we have not arrived, but we are on track and as CLM movement we hope to be underway. For it is on the road where we find Jesus of Nazareth and the people we are called to serve.

CLM Central Committee, December 2014

¹⁰ [Conclusions III CLM American Meeting. Guatemala 2014.](#)