



**“GO AND PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM OF GOD”**

JPIC in the formative process of Consecrated Life

Rome - February 4, 2012

1. **Congregation-** COMBONIAN MISSIONARY SISTERS “PIOUS MOTHERS OF AFRICA” (la nigrizia)
2. **Presentation-** Sr. Luzia Premoli – Superior General
3. **Presentation of the Congregation and its charism** - We were born in 1872 as an Institute who was exclusively missionary *ad gentes* thanks to the prophetic inspiration of Daniel Comboni, a passionate man for Christ and for Africa, with a special weakness for the poor and the excluded.

Supported by a boundless faith in the belief that African people would become, through the power of the Gospel, the protagonists of regeneration and liberation, Comboni felt the urgent need to integrate the presence of consecrated women in the evangelizing mission of the Church. He argued that women *“were an indispensable and essential element in every respect”* and wanted *“his sisters”* to be *“able and holy women”* capable of charity, to deal with all, able to be one with the weak and the excluded.

For Comboni collaboration was vital for the evangelization and he was convinced that *“... the work of the Sisters is a true priesthood. Where the Sisters are there is a solid Mission”*

His passionate life spent on the proclamation of the Gospel in Africa and his missionary inspiration summarized in the motto "Save Africa through Africa", are the legacy delivered to us, and to which we are committed today to fulfill with the peoples among us.

- In the African Continent where our origins are rooted
- in Europe, the Americas and Asia where our charism has found fertile ground to receive nourishment and bear fruit.

Our spirituality is centered in "keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ", the Good Shepherd, trying to make his feelings our own: his unconditional donation to the Father, the universality of his love for the world and his involvement in the pain and poverty of humanity (cf. RDV 3).

In his love for the Cross, Comboni invites us to find the true meaning of the spirit of sacrifice, understood as a willingness to lose everything for God and for the mission: "They will be happy to volunteer to lose everything and die for him and with him" (Writings 2722).

At this particular hour, we continue to draw from our spirituality that passion for the Kingdom that urges us to be women inhabited by God, cultivating the mystique of boldness and prophecy: *“we have seen the Risen Lord”*, for this we are committed to *“rebuild lives and life in abundance”* (from AC<sup>2010</sup>)

We see ourselves as *Women of the Gospel*, consecrated to God for the mission *ad gentes* and expressing the specific nature of our charism in:

- Sharing and proclaiming the Good News of the universal love of God in Jesus Christ, especially to the poor and oppressed;
- Encouraging the growth of the values of the Kingdom already present in creation and history;
- Being "bridges between nations", that is, between peoples, cultures and religions, including the excluded and those that exclude; being women of dialogue and reconciliation, who generate and care for life.
- Animating the mission of local churches, communicating the passion for evangelization, also through commitment to JPIC.

Nowadays, we form a family that is exclusively missionary, united by this sole ideal. We come from 33 countries; we operate in 34 countries on four continents. Currently we are 1400 sisters. Our way of life in multicultural communities is already proclaiming the Good News and is a sign of the Kingdom.

## OUR MINISTRY

Sustained by the prophetic vision of Comboni who believed in the '*omnipotent ministry of the women of the Gospel*' in the realization of the Kingdom of God, we lived our ministry through:

- Catechetical ministry
- Education ministry
- Health care
- Women promotion
- Formation and human and religious promotion of leaders
- Commitment to JPIC
- Missionary Animation of Churches.

## 4. - Describing our experience

In recent years our reflection has led us to think about formation as a "process" that may respond to current challenges of the mission and of consecrated life today. In AC<sup>04</sup> we state: "*From mission to formation remains a point of reference and of integration between what we are and what we are called to be in our continuous process of growth.*"

It is not an experience, though we can say it is "*the experience of training in the Institute.*" Some aspects we consider important will be submitted. They include and focus on the training process of the Congregation at all stages and help members to awaken and commit themselves in the personal, communitarian and apostolic aspects regarding Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation and which respond to the challenges of intercultural relationships. (Presentation with some slides)

### A. - Formative role of the environment/life style

Formation houses located in working-class neighbourhoods We have highlighted the importance of a sober lifestyle, inserted in a working class neighbourhood that enables discernment from everyday life with the poor. This is considered an unquestionable choice for all stages of formation.

Members in formation combine study, work and apostolate. Educational value of work, solidarity, responsibility, of "normal life", without privileges is stressed.

**B. Formation community with sisters of different nationalities** Each community is a training space and, by virtue of our charism, we are intercultural communities from the very beginning. This aspect is an area of growth and witness for us, of proclamation and dialogue, of reconciliation and sharing

**C Interprovince postulancy and novitiate, with young people from different countries.** The choice was motivated by two important reasons:

- having number of members in formation that allow to deal with various relational dynamics, from the early stages of formation,
- Interculturality within and without the Institute, with all its challenges, enabling to handle conflicts that arise in the intercultural encounter: dialogue, respect and acceptance of diversity.

**D Attending various intercongregational, church and local community courses, meetings and formation programmes** Focus on a human, intellectual and spiritual formation along with other young people, profiting with the knowledge of the various charisms, weaving relationships with other people in the ecclesial and civil level.

**E. Formation in JPIC** By learning the contents and participating in various initiatives on JPIC, all sisters are encouraged to live this evangelization dimension as cross-sectional that permeates spirituality and ministry. Practically, from the early formation young members are carrying their ministry with the poorest and marginalized and participate in movements, groups and initiatives that promote JPIC in the church and in society.

**F. A FORMATIVE PROPOSAL** born in the last 4 years as a more involved novitiate (a novitiate community in a new suburban home in Milan with a high percentage of immigrants)

*"From mission to formation remains a point of reference and of integration between what we are and what we are called to be in our continuous process of growth." (AC<sup>04</sup> #78)*

In order to apply this methodology we should always start from reality (mission-consecrated community life), and the formation contents should be dealt according to the formative experiences that are in place.

After the introductory period of the basic contents, a more structured engagement in the apostolate can be started. Novices are proposed a commitment of more days a week in the apostolate currently available in the area: Caritas – Families - Immigrants Youth (choosing one / two of these), to offer the possibility of continuous experience: a necessary condition both for the emergence either of the passion for vocation / mission and the personal potential / difficulties. The apostolic experience is the starting ground from which we can deepen the values and practices of our way of life through the interaction of the different aspects of the Rule of Life, AC and other Congregational documents.



Apostolic Experience

Discernment

Covenant relationship with God – Consecration

Rule of Life

A.C.

Contents

Mission *ad gentes*

Values SMC

Lifestyle

## 5. How it works

This formation process takes place with the preparation of the formators, with a training program for the formation community where young people are included, with wider interprovince and general assemblies for reflection, evaluation and planning in order to build up unity in the institute, while always maintaining a personalized way and inculturation in formation.

## 6. Strengths and weaknesses

Among the strong points we acknowledge a formation that combines theory and practice, enabling young people to prepare as well for the journey of ongoing formation, the confrontation with the reality of the people among whom we live; also the challenge of openness to the various realities in the world . In fact it is from mission to formation, as we are inserted in different cultural contexts.

The weak points that we find are traveling, having to learn multiple languages and be part of different cultures in a short time. For some people this is an effort that takes so much energy. There is also the effort to involve the whole community in the education process of young people and ensure a multicultural team. You run the risk of fragmentation. It takes a lot of attention to personalized accompaniment at human and faith levels and a continuous discernment.

We also believe that this lifestyle and formation demands taking a counter-current step from a model of Consecrated Life, which still looks on the Sisters, or young people in formation, as confined within the walls of convents and churches. We notice this type of resistance particularly when you move the houses to the periphery, unsafe areas, distant from the city center, when you take on jobs outside of our usual work, or within the parish, when the sisters and young people actively participate in demonstrations and initiatives with the poor by their side, especially in the area of JPIC.

**7 - Prospects for the future** To continue in this line, trying to overcome the difficulties, joining forces at the inter-congregational level, accompanying reflection

on Consecrated Life, preparing formators and the formation communities so that formation is not seen as a stage, but a process for life.

To evaluate the experience of interprovince novitiates, especially in regards to the formation community, which in some cases is small and the project of the novitiate in Milan, in need of further implementation and evaluation.

Rome, January 16, 2012

Sr. Luzia Premoli