



# COMBONI MISSIONARIES

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THE WORLD IS OUR PARISH

## *Mission Visions*

“Mission Visions” is a monthly column provided free of charge to diocesan newspapers to create greater awareness of the worldwide mission work of the church.

### *Attitudinally speaking*

By **Fr. Peter Ciuciulla, mccj**  
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New Year 2009 – a quiet day at home, unwinding from all the Christmas liturgies, card sending, gift wrapping, visiting – and yes, eating! What a gift to be able to spend a relaxed, open-ended day. During my years in Chad, Africa, New Year’s Day always found me travelling to visit with other priests, to wish them well, and to talk about our plans for the coming year.

I remember very clearly the yelling of the children from every village I passed along the way. As soon as the kids heard my car, they’d stop their playing and come running at me like a swarm of little bees, stop right at the edge of the road, and with all the air in their lungs, scream Happy New Year at me. Even when I couldn’t see them anymore because of the dust or a bend in the road, I could still hear them chanting in chorus.

Once I stopped in a remote village to talk with the people. There they were, a cloud of kids shouting Happy New Year loud enough to wake the rocks. I asked them, “Why do you shout so loudly and why do you keep repeating the same thing over and over?” They looked at me with an expression that itself was a question to me: *do you really not understand?*

Then they told me they needed to yell so their wish would reach, not just my ears, but the ears of the Old Year and New Year as well. They wanted to be sure the Old Year would really go away and take all the bad things he had brought with him when he came. Bad things like death, sickness, and *bōróm ngāy* (the empty place in the stomach, hunger).

At the same time, they wanted to make sure the New Year heard their wish so he would bring only good things with him. “And what would you like the New Year to bring?” They were quick with their list: peace, food, white water (drinkable water) medicines to keep us well, and school. Nobody mentioned anything personal. Every wish from these little kids was for the greater good of the whole community.

Those children in that remote village taught me how to distinguish between a good year and a bad year, and it had nothing to do with a better car or wide screen TV or improved ratings for my favorite football team. Their rationale was simple but profound, shared through a story.

The night before, as they sat around the fire, one of the grandfathers had told them a folktale. Three brothers went to look for a treasure. While on their search, they met people in need, but the two oldest brothers were too busy looking for the treasure to pay any attention. The youngest and smallest brother, however, stopped and wasted precious time to offer help.

Of course, the needy people turned out to be the guardians of the treasure, which they gave to the child for helping them. More interesting, when the youngest brother went back home, he shared his treasure with the older brothers who had, of course, failed in their search.

When the kids finished telling me the story, I asked, “So what did you learn from this tale?” They looked at me with that *Oh, brother!* kind of expression and patiently explained.

What made the difference, they said, was not the treasure, but what made it appear – attitude. Attitude towards those who needed help. “Do you mean,” I asked, “that if I share the good things I have, I’ll find a treasure?” And then I made the quantum leap. “So, what makes the difference is not what the New Year brings to me, but what I bring to the New Year. If I love and care and share, the New Year can’t help but bring good things with him.

“Yes,” they told me, now with a look that said - *finally he’s catching on.*

Not a bad lesson to learn from those munchkins.

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An electronic photo of Father Ciuciulla can be obtained by e-mailing [luebbers@ComboniMissionaries.org](mailto:luebbers@ComboniMissionaries.org).

Fr. Peter Ciuciulla, mccj, is Mission Director of the North American Province of the Comboni Missionaries, a worldwide religious institute founded by St. Daniel Comboni to carry the Gospel to “the world’s poorest and most abandoned people.”