



# 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.

### *Will the real hero please stand up?*

**By Fr. Peter Ciuciulla, mccj**

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Lent is a time to open oneself to God and to our brothers and sisters, especially those who are most in need. It's a time to intensify our efforts and keep walking towards God and others. It's a time to re-connect, a time to focus, a time to love, a time for a new beginning.

In Chad, Africa, where I was a missionary, a new beginning is always preceded by a time of separation from the ordinary, a time outside regular life, where a person can get away from distractions and be open to renewal.

Every year for the twelve I spent in Chad, we would organize a Lenten retreat for the Small Christian Communities where people would go out and spend three days in the bush, away from their regular routine. During these days they would have catechesis, prayer, reflections, and confession. The pastor would be there with them to share the joy of being a community walking together towards the Resurrection, a new life in Christ, a new beginning.

Normally, we would choose a theme to reflect and pray on, and we'd try to look at it in the light of the Gospel and the new life Christ had brought us. I would witness miracles happen during these times of retreat of the poor.

This was a very tiring time for the priests since we organized 15 of these retreats so all 95 Small Christian Communities of the parish had an opportunity to participate in one. Most of Lent, we were out in the bush, immersed with the Christian Community in preparing for Easter.

It was during one of these retreats that a huge problem arose. The wife of the one of the catechists was in danger of death. Because of a conflict a few days earlier, somebody wanted to kill her. She and her husband were very frightened.

I thought it was important to talk to the people who had made the threat and try to convince them to abandon their idea of killing. As I went about trying to devise a plan, the first information I gathered

was not good. Those around me said, “Father, they’re not Christians. They won’t listen to you. They might even harm you. Stay away from them.”

I listened intently, but in the long run, I decided to approach the opposing side. My heart beat very fast on the morning I was to make contact. I don’t have to tell you how scared I was! What am I going to say? Where do I even start? Why should they listen to me? So many questions in my mind and so little faith in my heart. I was literally shaking in my sandals!

When I met the people face to face, I had no choice but to forge ahead, hoping the Spirit would guide me. The first words out of my mouth were, “Life and death belong to God, and revenge belongs to Him as well.” I don’t know where those words came from!

“Why are you telling us those words of yours?” they asked me.

“These are not my words; these are words of God.” We stood in silence and some time passed. I saw in their eyes that something was happening, but I wasn’t sure what.

You can only imagine my surprise when I heard one of them reply, “If those are the words of God, then we rest our case and let everything up to Him.” In just a few minutes, everything was over.

Perhaps I sound like a hero, approaching the enemy and standing my ground against those who had threatened to kill in revenge. In reality, I was a shaking, frightened priest who happened to be God’s messenger, and who had the blessed opportunity to witness true heroes – a group of people willing to put down their weapons and turn things over to a God they weren’t even sure they believed in.

Thanks to some non-Christians who “crashed” a Lenten retreat, I learned firsthand what it means to open ourselves to new life and that trust in God can bring about radical change in us.