
Luciano Lanzoni: the steadiness of the Gospel

Luciano Lanzoni (Bomporto di Modena, 1958 - Ampasimanjeva, Madagascar, 18 June 2021) was employed in a factory before choosing to consecrate his life as a layman to the Secular Institute of the Servants of the Church in Reggio Emilia. He decided to devote his life to helping the most needy, and focused his efforts on the social rehabilitation of ex-convicts and drug addicts. In 1990, he left for Madagascar to serve as a lay missionary. There, in the diocese of Ambositra, he helped the sick at the Akain'ny Marary, a sanctuary for lepers, tuberculosis patients and the physically and mentally disabled. The diocese of Reggio Emilia supported the facility with financial and human resources. Besides taking care of the chronically ill and the mentally disabled, Luciano organised mobile health units to travel to the remotest villages and persuade the members of the local community not to marginalize mentally disabled children. In 2007, he was transferred to Manakara, in the diocese of Farafangana, 400 kilometres south, where he worked on the prevention and treatment of filariasis, leprosy, malaria and tuberculosis as part of a European Union project in collaboration with the NGO Reggio *Terzo Mondo*. In recognition of his efforts, he was awarded the 'Donata Testi' prize in Carpi in 2009. In November of that year, during a robbery, he suffered a lung injury and miraculously escaped death. But Luciano had no time for his personal health problems and, as soon as he could, he resumed his mission: he moved to the southern outskirts of Manakara and, in 2011, he began ministering to the various forms of disability and mental distress in the area, with a special focus on children, for whom he oversaw the construction of the Mental Health Clinic at Ambositra Hospital. He was a hardworking and selfless man. This consecrated lay man continued his mission of setting up new structures without ever neglecting those he had previously cared for. In 30 years of service in Madagascar, he helped hundreds of people and brought many children out of exclusion and isolation. He would have accomplished many more projects had he not succumbed to COVID-19 at the age of 63 on 18 June 2021 in the hospital of Ampasimanjeva, Madagascar. He died of severe respiratory failure caused by the virus. In his last voicemail to the Mission Centre, Luciano said he was feeling a little better: "I had a bit of a hard time because the oxygen here is rationed and so my thoughts and words are also rationed a bit at the moment. I send you all my best wishes and hope to give you an update tomorrow." (*) Popoli e Missione

Miela Fagiolo D'Attilia (*)