

Fr. Giancarlo Michelini
1935–2026

Giancarlo Michelini was born in Barbarolo, a village in the Bolognese Apennines (now part of the Metropolitan City of Bologna), to Giobatta and Pia Barbieri on July 7, 1935. An uncle of his, who had been a missionary in China, may have inspired his religious vocation, while—by his own account—attending *the Antoniano* in Bologna certainly inspired him to dedicate himself to young people.

At the age of 15, on November 16, 1950, he entered the Order in Besana, from where he was transferred to Marchirolo in 1951 to continue his studies.

On September 25 and ember 1954, he began his novitiate, along with 16 other young men, but especially alongside Celestino Rizzi, who would share the stages of his religious and priestly journey and with whom he would later depart as a missionary for Taiwan. On September 26, 1956, he made his simple profession, then attended high school in San Giuliano, followed by his solemn profession (December 8, 1958), and finally in Mottinello, where he completed his theological studies and was ordained a deacon (December 22, 1962) and a priest (June 23, 1963).

During the summer of 1963, Fr. Michelini served as a summer replacement chaplain at the Hospital of Padua, but as early as October 17, 1963, he traveled with Fr. Celestino Rizzi to England to study English in preparation for the mission (for a total of six months).

On July 17, 1964, the two missionaries set sail from Genoa; on August 7, they were welcomed in Hong Kong by Fr. Antonelli, and on August 10, they arrived in Luodong (formerly transcribed as “Lotung”), where Fr. Michelini would spend practically the rest of his life. The first two years of the mission were devoted to studying Chinese (Michelini and Rizzi were, in fact, the first missionaries to attend a regular Chinese language course in Xinzhu at the Jesuits’ Chabanel Language Institute; and while Rizzi would become an expert in Chinese, Michelini would speak it, but struggle to read it and would use Romanized texts for Mass).

Upon completing their studies, in the summer of 1966, both were assigned to the parish of Luodong to assist Fr. Confalonieri. From the very beginning, Fr. Michelini distinguished himself through various socio-cultural initiatives open to all, without religious discrimination, to bring together all young people under the banner of goodwill. The narrow confines of catechism and the oratory were transcended to present the Church as the glue that binds society together.

The Mission was not yet ready for this shift, so much so that people wondered how to reconcile this new activity with the Order’s charism (health care). Not only in the Mission but also in Italy were the superiors perplexed. Fr. Michelini, however, enjoyed the support of local authorities, who promised him financial backing, and above all of Bishop Stanislao Luo Guang (1911–2004), who was eager to present, through an efficient youth center, the social value of the Church, embodied in Chinese society.

The tension dragged on for a few years (in 1970–71, Fr. Michelini spent 11 months in Italy, almost as an “exile”), and was resolved with the purchase, in the same year, of the first plot of land on Beicheng Road (not far from the parish), on which the *Lanyang Youth Catholic Group* would be established. Among all the activities promoted by the Center—recreational, social, cultural,

artistic, etc., and thus not strictly religious—the *dance* and “ ” *group* would emerge as iconic and a harbinger of success. It had its first consecration in Rome in the Nervi Hall before Paul VI on June 26, 1974, and would go on to perform before countless audiences worldwide, culminating at the Barcelona Olympics (1992), and as a pleasant and credible ambassador for the Republic of China (Taiwan) even in the People’s Republic (China).

Formally, the Center was under the authority of the diocese and, secondarily, the Mission Delegate; it is clear, however, that Fr. Michelini was the one firmly in charge, relying on many collaborators, especially to organize the countless trips around the world. As he grew older, he found himself increasingly compelled to delegate.

Fr. Michelini had always attended the St. Mary’s community for communal activities; otherwise, he resided at the Center. For many years, he celebrated Sunday Mass at Sanxing. Two years ago, as his health deteriorated, Fr. Michelini was admitted to the hospital and remained there. In the end, he was confined to a wheelchair, but he always came down to the community for lunch.

He suffered from heart problems, but about twenty days ago he suffered a stroke from which he was unable to recover.

Fr. Michelini died at St. Mary’s Hospital on April 4, 2026, Holy Saturday. The funeral was held at the parish church in Luodong on April 9.

He was buried in the Catholic Cemetery of Luodong, alongside many of our other missionaries.

The Taiwanese authorities did not spare honors for Fr. Michelini, ranging from actual citizenship of the Republic of China (along with the other missionaries), to honorary citizenship of Yilan County (to which Luodong belongs), up to the Order of the Brilliant Star (景星勳章: Jǐng Xīng Xūnzhāng) conferred by the President of the Republic for extraordinary contributions to the nation’s development.