



Mbundu yi mpa, Mpeve ye mpa

A new heart and a new Spirit

LETTER TO OUR
BRETHREN
FEBRUARY 2017

Dear Brethren:

I believe that it is helpful to use sometimes a narrative language to express and communicate what we think and feel. This is the approach I chose for this fraternal letter that you will receive exactly on January 31 of this Calasanctian Jubilee Year, in the *Thanksgiving Day for our Vocation*. I want to tell you about my third visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, trying to describe in a narrative language the piarist life that is growing and incarnating there the charism of Calanz.

On November 29, 2016 I arrived to Kinshasa accompanied by Fr. Pierre Diatta. It was my first journey in this Jubilee Year. We were welcomed with joyful and festive dances hosted by the pre-novices and the lay piarists who were expecting us in our house hired to the Combonian Missionaries of Lemba, in the large capital city of the DRC. We suddenly discovered the reason of such fantastic joy and reception. It wasn't only for the visit of the General, but because it was the *first visit in the Jubilee Year*, and they wanted to express their gratitude spontaneously, with a great **sense of ownership** expressed in their own style, just to say: *"We are glad that you came to visit us."*

In the Congo we have two communities, one in Kinshasa and the other in Kikonka (diocese of Kisantu). We have completed there two years already, making gradual progress towards the accomplishment of the missionary plans of the Order in the country: as a result of our presence in their country, we already have one novice and some Congolese juniors, a good number of pre-novices, and an emerging group of lay piarists who are discovering little by little our charism and dreaming to incarnate it.

I had the opportunity for visiting the two diocesan bishops: cardinal Monsengwo of Kinshasa and bishop Nsielele, of Kisantu. These steps regarded **ecclesiality**. When we started in Kinshasa, the cardinal had asked us “time and periphery” to reflect on our settlement in the diocese. After two years we submitted to him our discernment, which he received with joy and gratitude: we wanted to settle in the periphery of the city, build a house for the future demarcation and a socio-educational centre to assist the people. We have already bought and formalized two plots, not far from the airport, which makes things easier.

In Kikonka (diocese of Kisantu) we have developed even better. We have signed a stable and open agreement with bishop Fidèle Nsielele and we have taken over the parish of Saint Peter and its four parish schools, two primary and two secondary schools. Our community (Marcel, Godlove and Armand) lives there, in a small parish house and in very poor conditions. This year, God willing, we are going to build the parish house and look for a plot where to build a new school for so many children who need it. Step by step.

In this parish, presided over by the bishop, we launched the Calasanctian Jubilee Year. With hundreds of children of all ages, singing to Calasanz with all their might; with the teachers of the school, who were very touched; with the parish council, expressing its deep Advent hope (“*we are going to be once again a parish, to regain the youth, to start a new stage*”): **Mbundu yi mpa, Mpeve ye mpa**. With the bishop, who wanted to deepen the knowledge of Calasanz, of whom he knew nothing, and was really impressed by our holy father (he asked me to give the homily because he wanted the community well informed regarding our Order and charism). And with the piarist members of the two communities of the Congo, accompanied by their Provincial (thank you, Fr. Evaristus, for your presence and commitment), some diocesan priests and the whole parish community.

We offered two gifts, one for the parish, and the other for the school: two jubilee presents to celebrate our arrival. The gifts --solar panels for the parish and benches for the primary schoolchildren-- need to be explained because they are very symbolic and the result of a community reflection and discernment. We had installed a tabernacle in the parish, but not always we had electrical power. With the solar panels there will be light the whole day, and the tabernacle will be always illuminated. The people suddenly understood the sign as indicating **the Lord’s centrality in our lives**. And the benches? Very simple: the primary schoolchildren studied in the floor because they had no benches. We have bought benches because **the children are the rationale of the Order: actually we exist for them**. With these two gifts **we disclosed our identity, namely that we follow Jesus as the centre of our life and we surrender body and soul to the children, preferably to the poor**. The people understood it quite well!

Just a nice touch I’d like to add. When the bishop started the Collect of the Mass of Calasanz, hundreds of children joined him in loud voice, which surprised and cheered up the bishop. Just two months there and the children already love Calasanz. Thanks to Marcel, Godlove and Armand! As soon as possible we’ll build in that city our Pre-Novitiate. Please God.

We had time to visit a small village (Bu), where the Mfumu (his majesty, the chief of the village) gave us ten hectares of land. When we went to thank the donation, we found that the whole village had gathered to welcome us and was happy because we had accepted that piece of land. We have already a dream: to establish there a Farm School called “Laudato sii”, which we will try to run according to all the principles set out by Pope Francis in his first Encyclical. Everything arrives. We have no hurry, but we eagerly want it.

With the religious we had meetings and personal talks. We have six religious there. One of them, Gilbert, belongs to the Province of Western Africa, and is studying in Kinshasa, while living in community with Jean de Dieu and Jovino. The others belong to the Mother Province of Central Africa. With them we had meetings, visits, personal chats, we prayed together, we shared dreams, and celebrated the daily Eucharist. **We have already identified the first horizon of our presence in the DRC:** that before the next General Chapter the Congo becomes a Provincial Vicariate dependent on the Province of Central Africa. The Order envisages the Congo as a future demarcation, and we are working in that direction. **We are just emerging**, but as all the other historical presences of the Order: **with a vocation to grow and consolidate**. We pray, looking forward that some day the Order will have the Province of the Congo.

Three significant meetings I wish to highlight: with the pre-novices; with the piarist lay people; and the Jubilee celebration held on the second Sunday of Advent in Kinshasa.

The foundation of the Congo has started with all the Keys of Life in action, including the impulse of the Participation in the Pious Schools. A group of twelve people, most of them teachers, regularly gather to know Calasanz. With them we could share the bet of the Order for the participation of the laity. And from them I could receive once more the witness that more frequently I receive from lay people when I meet with them: “*Calasanz has changed my life*”. This is only the starting point. Not a theory, or the mere study of a biography, but a personal experience! They understand, right from the beginning and very clearly, that **if the encounter with Calasanz doesn't transform, there has been no encounter at all**. If it has been an encounter, something new occurs in our life. This is the deepest truth of the piarist laity. That's why it is unstoppable, thank God!

The meeting with the pre-novices was very meaningful both for me and for them. It has been **a meeting with their vocation**, with the work of the Lord in each one of them, since they have been called to become piarists up to now, two intense and fruitful years of their life. We had two meetings, without any rush, and some personal talks (due to healthy problems we have missed some meetings). I could find how grateful they are for their vocation, as well as the strength of their faith, the passion with which they dream the foundation of the Order in their country, the natural impatience that seeks to go faster than what is possible, the trust that the Province and the Order will do the best possible for them. They are approaching a new formative stage, and they know we keep them in our prayers, so that every step they take result in their benefit, on behalf of the children, and of the Order. I invite all of you to pray for this intention. Their names are: Henri, Guy Michel, Cyprien, Cédric, Stéphane, Héritier, Freddy and Barthelemy.

The visit concluded with the Mass of the Second Sunday of Advent, in which we

celebrated the Calasanctian Jubilee Year in Kinshasa. Besides our communities and pre-novices, all the piarist lay people were present, as well as all the religious of Cavanis in Kinshasa, many representatives of religious communities close to us, and above all, ***a group of twelve street children who were seated in a preferential place.*** These children live many hours in our house, as they come several days in the week. Here they sleep a while, wash themselves, eat, play, and implement formative activities under a project run by the piarists. These children also received their gift during the Mass: a pair of sandals, to walk more comfortably in the streets of the city. They gave the Calasanctian tune to our celebration, and through them everybody understood the meaning of being a piarist, ***understanding that the children wandering in the streets of Rome were the ones who made of Calasanz a piarist.***

I was very happy to know three persons who collaborate intensively with us and showed their work: Noëlla, who coordinates the project “Santa Dorotea” for the street children; Thomas, who coordinates communication and management issues; and Jeffrie, responsible of preparing the projects and mobilizing resources. I’m very grateful for having been accompanied in this visit by Fr. Evaristus (Provincial of Central Africa), Fr. Félicien (provincial assistant for economy and management), Brother Pedro Martínez (responsible of buildings and works) and Georges Bissongol, provincial responsible of Itaka-Escolapios. Thanks to them we could address many particular issues that required our attention and our decisions. The Pious Schools of the Congo are and will be the fruit of the work of all.

These were five intensive days, full of life, of love for the Order, of “good dreams”, which materialize with our lives. I could experience once more a long-standing personal conviction, namely that sharing the hopes, the works, the difficulties, the searches, the prayer –eventually the life of my brethren, consolidates my piarist vocation and my love for Calasanz and for the Order. Thanks to my brothers in the Congo!

And thanks to the Province of Central Africa, especially to the Provincial Congregation (Evaristus, Felicien, Andrew, Emilio and Romeo) for their diligence and efforts on behalf of this emerging piarist presence entrusted to them by the General Congregation. In the midst of so many projects and challenges you are dedicating yourselves to the Congo with generosity and love. Go forth with courage!

In this letter I wanted to take us close to a piarist presence that is quite unknown to all of us, because it is new. I intend to do the same in other letters of this Jubilee Year, as I am sure that only sharing our reality and our life we can work together in the construction of the Pious Schools. That is why this letter is full of names of particular individuals, because it is very helpful to become aware of the importance of each one’s contribution to the common project.

I conclude with a very simple request: let us pray for our brethren in the Congo, so that they may be blessed with the daring and ever-enduring patience which made Calasanz a founder. ¡Yesu Ntotilla, kayala !

Fraternally yours,

Pedro Aguado
Father General