

CONGO PROVINCE

Official Language: **French**

Vision Statement

As members of the Divine Word coming from different nations and united with the local Church in Congo, we commit ourselves to the mission of the Incarnate Word. In a world loaded by all kinds of conflicts and divisions, our Trinitarian spirituality inspires and sustains our efforts to give communal witness to unity in diversity.

Mission Statement

Conscious of the problems and challenges of our time, and with hearts free to serve, we proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God everywhere. Amidst the social, economic and political crises of our country, we opt for a special preference for the poor and the marginalized and work for the promotion of the whole human being. In particular we struggle against AIDS, corruption, poverty and illiteracy.

1. Societal Setting

Located in the heart of Equatorial Africa, the DRC covers a territory that is equivalent to 2/3 of the European Union. It is a country with immense resources, with a population of 80 million inhabitants, and has the potential to become one of the richest countries on the African continent.



Kinshasa is its administrative and political capital. Lubumbashi is the economic capital.

Since the independence of the Belgian Congo in 1960, the country has experienced repeated crises which have resulted in a prolonged economic and social slump and the destabilization of the Great Lakes region. In 1999, after many years of war, the Lusaka peace agreements paved the way for the establishment of new institutions (Parliament, Senate, and Provincial Assemblies). Between 2002 and 2006, the country experienced a transition period with power-sharing and institutional reorganization. The new Constitution adopted in 2005 as well as the le-

gislative and presidential elections of 2006 and 2011 crowned the democratic process and the return to a rule of law. From 2017, again the country is immersed in political struggle and uncertainties.

For many years, the Congolese economy has been highly export-oriented, especially thanks to mining products. The majority of the population is still active in agriculture, although cultivated land accounts for only 3% of the territory. The economy has drastically slowed since the mid-1980s because of poor management. From 2010, the economic growth improved. The economy is expected to evolve with an estimated growth rate of around 8%, thanks to the extractive industries (forestry, mining and petroleum sectors).

Despite an impressive economic growth, the poverty rate remains high. The country ranks 176th out of 188 countries in terms of the HDI. Its gross domestic product income is among the lowest in the world. The UN estimates that there are about 2.3 million IDPs and refugees in DRC and 323,000 Congolese living in refugee camps outside the country. Humanitarian emergencies are still relevant in the most volatile areas of the country and the prevalence of sexual violence remains high.

The population has grown from 15 million inhabitants in 1960 to 80 million in 2017, 60% of whom are under 20 years of age. Life expectancy is 46 years, and access to basic health

services is less than 26%. Previously eradicated diseases have re-emerged, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic affects more than 4% of the population between 15 and 49 years of age. Children's education continues to be one of the main challenges facing families, as the education system in the Congo is mainly financed by parents. The situation of children in the street has become very worrying in the main cities of the country. The city of Kinshasa has 12 million inhabitants, 58% of whom are under the age of 18. In 2007, UNICEF identified close to 13,800 street children and youth (BDUs), of whom 69% were between the ages of 12 and 18.

For more than 20 years, the situation in eastern DRC has been lamentable and dramatic. Nearly 8 million people were massacred by a militia, and entire villages were erased. There are many human rights violations. Freedom of expression is threatened because often those who openly speak out against the government face imprisonment, torture and even death. Anti-government demonstrations are often prohibited or violently repressed.

2. Ecclesial Setting

Despite the popularity of Pentecostal Churches and charismatic groups, since the period before independence, the Catholic Church is one of the few forces in the country that faces the government despite threats. It denounces abuses in order to give a voice to the "voiceless". It also seeks to alleviate social ills through its

charitable, educational, and pastoral activities. Christians represent 80% of the Congolese population, 50% of whom are Catholics. Financially, the Church in Congo depends largely on foreign funding. On the other hand, it has a large number of local clergy. It is a dancing Church with its own rite of the Mass. There are many vocations to the religious and priestly life. The laity ensures the succession where the priests, brothers or sisters are not available. The Christians in the parishes are made aware of the responsibility of the Church at the local level. In urban areas, this works quite well, but in rural areas there is still a lot of awareness to be promoted.

The Episcopal Conference of the Congo is well-structured and takes an active part to ensure good decisions for the running of our country. It encourages peace and development initiatives and denounces social injustice and inequalities in the democratic process in the country. There are 41 dioceses, 6 archdioceses, and 50 bishops in the country. The Association of Major Superiors (ASUMA) and the Union of Major Superiors (USUMA) regularly gather to analyze the challenges of the mission in Congo. Efforts are being made for the canonization of Blessed Sr. Anuarite Clementine Negampeta (assassinated in 1964) and Blessed Isidore Bakandja (a layman who was martyred in 1909). The week for Christian unity organized in January in the context of ecumenism is experiencing a massive participation in the Congo.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	15	22.7	28.8	29.2
Education	3	4.6	5.5	4.6
Schools	2	-		
Universities	1	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	10	15.2	10.9	9.2
Administration/ Support	9	13.6	9.5	23.1
Other Apostolates	15	22.7	12.3	21.5
JPIC	4	-		
Bible	2	-		
Communication	2	-		
Mission Animation	3	-		
Others	4	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	6	9.1	12.4	4.6
Retired/Sick	3	4.6	4.1	0
Others	5	7.6	16.5	7.7

October 9, 2016 marked the 65th anniversary of the arrival of the first SVD missionaries in Congo. Since 1951, Congo moved from being a land of receiving missionaries to being sending missionaries. After 65 years, we are in a transition period. The "expatriate confreres" who worked for many years in the province gradually returned to their provinces of origin. Thanks to both elder confreres and the young confreres who are mostly Congolese, we are reassured that the future of the province is promising.

Since our arrival in the Congo, parish ministry has occupied a special place in our missionary activity. We have served and built many pa-

They (lay partners) also strive to know our joys and the challenges of our mission.

_____ rishes and missions, especially in the diocese of Kenge. Most were returned to the local clergy. Presently, we serve nine parishes and one chapel in three dioceses: Kenge (4), Kikwit (2), and Kinshasa (3). The province has taken steps to expand its presence in rural Idiofa diocese and in the bush of the diocese of Kenge. In Bandundu, the province hopes to have an SVD parish in Bimbidi chapel, to promote the SVD Characteristic Dimensions and identity.

Three centers serve the ongoing formation of the laity, seminarians and religious. These are Liloba in Kinshasa, Emmaus in Bandundu, and Sychar in Ngondi in the Kenge Diocese.

Characteristic Dimensions

Biblical Apostolate: A publishing house, *Verbum Bible*, publishes spiritual books and the Bible in different languages of the country, Africa and Madagascar. The Liloba Center assists in the formation of parish leaders, and offers the *Dei Verbum* course to priests, religious and lay people from different dioceses and neighboring countries. It offers a basic biblical seminar and a language program to help participants deepen their knowledge of scriptures. A confrere is working with the National Episcopal Conference of Congo in this field.

Mission Animation: Our vocation ministry promotes the SVD mission in the world. The mission secretary sensitizes our parishes and schools on the responsibility of the faithful to support missionary works. In recent years, the Ngayime studio and our seminarians initiated the FESTARJA to popularize the lives of Saints Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz and our blessed martyrs. One confrere is the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

JPIC: Some confreres work in a network with other congregations and at the level of each diocese for the promotion of human rights; protection and conservation of nature; preparing for elections and fighting corruption in our schools; the supervision and care of street children; and pastoral care with people living with HIV. Our province is a member of *VIVAT International* in Congo.

Communication: Two studios operate separately for biblical radio and television broadcasts, but also for recording vocals and the like.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

Family and Youth: By choosing this priority, the province of Congo thinks that the problem we have is that of the human person and education. Ideas should therefore be shifted to concrete actions. To do this, we must address this problem at the grassroots level, that is, the family and the children. Concretely, we appointed in each district a youth SVD chaplain for our schools and parishes, who works with the diocesan chaplain. We also decided to introduce the Christian initiation course into our parishes; initiate trades training for youth in the environments where we work; organize youth Masses once a month; strengthen our presence in CEVB (small Christian communities); and raise awareness among families and young people about HIV/AIDS.

Education and Research: Knowing that education is declining and that by working in this field the province can reach many young people and thus contribute to the development of the country, it has asked all its members to collaborate to put into practice the following decisions: to take good care of the religious studies in our schools; organize recollections during the high points of the Church in our schools; ensure the training of teachers and catechists in our schools and parishes; have an annual meeting of the teaching and educational staff of all our schools in the framework of collaboration. For the

CEEBA, which is more than 50 years old, a confrere has been prepared for its continuity in the research framework and its reopening will be effective in 2018.

Collaboration with SSpS and Others

The CNG province is open to work with other congregations and diocesan priests in various fields. We want to enlarge this collaboration to the SSpS; their presence will be of great help to the CNG province.

SVD Lay Association

The group "Friends of the Missionaries of the Divine Word in the Congo" (AMIVEDIC) has existed for 10 years. It is well organized and booming and it is officially recognized by the province. Its members share our spirituality and charism. They also strive to know our joys and the challenges of our mission. We wish to involve them more in our work and strengthen collaboration with them for the good of our mission.

4. Intercultural Life —*Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	1	1	1
Clerics	54	58	53
Brothers (final vows)	11	13	11
Brothers (temporal vows)	5	4	3
Scholastics	19	22	26
Novices	7	4	2
Total	97	102	96

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	48.4	46.0	41.7
Nationalities	11	15	20

Spirituality: In our communities, contact with the Word of God is made at the individual level, in Bible sharing, through meditation and Eucharistic celebrations, and also in contact with people in our apostolate circles. Each confrere was encouraged to join the basic Christian community (CEVB) in his neighborhood. At the district level, the confreres meet to celebrate together the feasts of the congregation. They also hold monthly meetings during which they celebrate the birthdays of the confreres and have recollections. The province organizes two annual retreats. Those who do not attend any of them are given the opportunity to do individual retreats.

Community Life: Although the majority of the confreres are Congolese, the province makes an effort to ensure that each community has at least two confreres and a brother of different nationalities. It is necessary to strengthen this international character of our congregation at the province level, to prepare young confreres to live the realities of intercultural communities, and to foster cultural exchange among the confreres of the same community and encourage communities with diverse cultures and nationalities. Thus, the province is requesting the generalate to assign young confreres from other provinces to Congo in order to strengthen internationality in our province. We also invite young confreres

throughout the world, especially from India, Indonesia, and Vietnam, to come for their theological formation at CFC Kinshasa. Our province encourages young confreres from other African countries to include Congo in their choice of mission countries. As confreres advance in age and number, the province is building a home for the elderly confreres in Bandundu/Bimbidi.

Leadership: Religious life in Africa and elsewhere is going through a period of crisis. In Africa, congregations that were formerly run by "expatriate" confreres are now 80% owned by indigenous people who face uncertain socio-economic and political realities. We realize that we need prophetic leaders to preserve our spiritual heritage, our intercultural wealth, and our SVD identity. In its preparatory prayer for the 2017 province assembly, the province invites the confreres to transcend the bonds of affection for a commitment to serve.

Finance: After 65 years of existence, the Congo province has inherited a considerable infrastructure, capable of making it financially autonomous. But political instability does not promote economic stability and investment progress. The province encourages confreres to become aware of what they are receiving and how to manage our finances. Our schools, which should support the missionary effort, are still struggling. A finance committee already exists, but we need to involve external expertise to make our resources more profitable. We encourage financially sound parishes. Confreres who work in various fields are invited to contribute to the budget of their com-

munities. A common policy on the assistance of the confreres' families' needs to be defined.

Formation: Formation in Congo began eight years after the arrival of the missionaries in the new region. Following the bad political climate of the 1960s, the formation center was closed down. It was only in 1980 that the recruitment of candidates resumed. Since then, all stages of formation have been re-established (propaedeutic, philosophy, novitiate and theology), including brother formation. We have a considerable number of brothers in formation. For several

years already, our formation houses have also welcomed students from other countries, especially from Africa. A one-year French language course is organized for future novice candidates, theologians, OTPs and new missionaries. Our province is ready to welcome young people from other provinces who wish to continue their formation in the novitiate, theology and OTP in Congo. Some confreres are being prepared to work as formators. Confreres from all over the world who are interested to work in formation are welcome to our province.