

□ Reading time: 5 min.

We put a few questions to Fr Aurélien MUKANGWA, Superior of the Africa Congo Congo (ACC) Vice-Province, for readers of the Salesian Bulletin OnLine.

Fr Aurélien was born on 9 November 1975 in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo. He completed his novitiate at Kansebula from 24 August 1999 to 24 August 2000. He then made his perpetual profession in Lubumbashi on 8 July 2006 and was ordained a priest on 12 July 2008.

At local level, he has held the positions of Headmaster in Uvira, Kinshasa, Lukunga and Le Gombe, and of School Principal in Masina. Before the establishing of the current ACC Vice-Province, he was chosen to be the Superior of the DRC-WEST Delegation for four years, and at the time of this appointment, he was again the Provincial Delegate in the new AFC East Delegation, based in Goma.

Fr Mukangwa is the son of Donatien Symba Mukangwa and Judith Munyampala Mwange, and holds a Diploma in Pedagogy. He has taken on this new role of leadership and governance of the ACC Vice-Province – covering part of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo – for the six-year period 2023-2029.

Can you present yourself?

My name is Mukangwa Mwanangoy Aurélien, and I was born in Lubumbashi (Haut Katanga) in the Democratic Republic of Congo on 9 November 1975 to my late father Donatien Symba Mukangwa and my mother Judith Munyampara Mwange. I am the second of 11 children, 7 boys and four girls.

I became a Salesian of Don Bosco nearly 24 years ago, on 24 August 2000. And since 24 May 2023, I have been installed as the second provincial superior of the vice-province of Mary Help of Christians Africa Congo-Congo (ACC). Immediately after my initial formation, I worked in Uvira, Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Goma, and now I'm at the Vice-Province headquarters in Kinshasa.

What is the story of your vocation?

Thank you very much for this beautiful question, which I find very essential, because what's important for me is the encounter with Don Bosco that led to my being called a Salesian.

The vocational influence I've had depends on the place of my birth, my childhood

and my youth. I was born and grew up in a district that was pastorally served exclusively by the Salesians of Don Bosco. At the time, all the parishes in the commune of Kenya (Lubumbashi-RDC) were run by the Salesians of Don Bosco. My first contact with the Salesians was at kindergarten (aged 4), where I met Salesians such as Fathers Eugène, Carlos Sardo, Angelo Pozzi and Luigi Landoni. In my parish of Saint Benoit (Kenya), when I was very young, I used to go to the oratory and the playground, where I also met Father Jacques Hantson, SDB, and the young Salesians in formation who came from Kansebula (post-novitiate). In the same parish, I also met Father André Ongenaert, SDB. Around 1987, the family moved to the neighbourhood behind the Cité des Jeunes de Lubumbashi, founded by the Salesians. And there I had the privilege of getting to know many African Salesians and missionaries.

So, from an early age, I harboured the desire to become like these Salesians who came to do pastoral work in my parish, because they inspired me so much by their way of doing things and being with us, their way of welcoming children and the availability they had to listen to young people, especially their commitment to the service of poor young people and the joy they put around us all.

How did you get to know Don Bosco / the Salesians?

As I said earlier, I got to know Don Bosco through the Salesians of Don Bosco in my parish, in my school, in my education through the Salesians, books and films about Don Bosco.

Do you remember a particular teacher?

Father Jacques Hantson, for the Salesian and missionary spirit with which he guided us in the oratory of the parish of Saint Benoît in Lubumbashi. Father Hantson was a Belgian missionary and today he rests with his heavenly father.

What were the greatest difficulties you encountered?

The greatest difficulties we have encountered so far are the poverty of young people abandoned by the state, their parents and adults; young people who have become victims of war, unemployment, drugs, prostitution, poverty and exploitation in various forms. The other difficulty is the lack of real solutions to the problems of young people and the lack of human, material and financial resources to provide proper assistance to these vulnerable young people in difficulty.

What is your best experience?

My best experience in my Salesian life has been as an assistant in the pre-novitiate

house, in oratory activities, and in school and social pastoral work.

Over time I've learnt that from both positive and negative experiences, we need to draw good lessons for life and try to be positive in order to make Salesian optimism a reality.

Are Christians in the region persecuted?

I have to say here that the geographical area of our vice-province is, by grace, predominantly Christian. So Christians are not persecuted here. However, they are sometimes victims of the socio-political and security situation in the countries that make up our Vice-Province.

What are the major challenges of evangelisation and mission today?

Today the great challenges of evangelisation and mission are those of the digital world, where we find a fairly large number of young people confronted with Artificial Intelligence, with all its pitfalls.

Another specific challenge for our Vice-Province is the expansion of the Salesian mission throughout our geographical area. There are young people on the periphery who need Don Bosco's charism. But for this to happen, we need to invest heavily in the formation of quality Salesians who are truly "passionate about Jesus Christ and dedicated to young people".

What role does Mary Help of Christians play in your life?

As a Catholic Christian and a Salesian of Don Bosco, Mary has an important place in my life. Thanks to Salesian spirituality, I have learnt to deepen the dimension of devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Every morning, at the end of our meditation, we pray the Salesian prayer to Mary Help of Christians, and I find time during the day and in the evening to ask the Virgin Mary for help with my vocation, the Salesian mission, the Salesian family and especially young people. I have great confidence in her. She is my Mother. She is intrinsically linked to my vocation; in fact, I owe it to her.

What would you say to the young people of today?

In view of the challenges facing young people today, there are many things to say. To young people, I say that God has given them a great gift in the person of Don Bosco through the Salesian charism. Every young person who meets Don Bosco has a duty to build his or her life on Salesian values. I don't need to remind you of the command Don Bosco left us: "Teach young people the ugliness of sin and the beauty of virtue." Anyone who has not yet met Don Bosco should contact a Salesian

organisation. Dear young people, you are the protagonists of your future, a better and radiant future! So don't waste time. Get involved. Take advantage of the Salesian charism. It's there for you.