



# Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

October 26, 2022

Dear Brothers,

On Sunday, October 23, 2022, the Archdiocese of Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) collaborated with the Priests of the Sacred Heart to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of missionary activities in northern Congo. I represented the US Province for this momentous celebration. Before the liturgy, I was warned that the Mass would be long. True to the warning, the Mass lasted five hours! I only had the willpower for about two hours; after that, it was quite a challenge for me, especially in the African heat and with languages unknown to me. But it was a challenge that I was grateful to be a part of.

In his homily, the archbishop gave tribute to the SCJ missionaries who brought Christianity to the region. Today, people still speak well of the many American SCJs who have served in the Congo, such as David Maher, Gerry Selenke, Charles Brown, and Lenny Elder.

My trip to the Congo gave me a glimpse of the Congolese Province. Their ministries revolve primarily around parishes. But the two apostolates that left me with a deep impression were their schools and orphanages. With the orphans, for example, our SCJ confreres care for their past, present, and future. A psychologist is available onsite to help children deal with their traumas. Older children receive vocational training for life beyond the orphanage.

The Congolese provincial and many members expressed gratitude to the US Province for our continued financial support. Presently, we give an annual grant to form their SCJ students. In my informal conversation with the provincial treasurer, I learned that the most significant expense in formation is travel. Infrastructure in the Congo is underdeveloped. And traveling between cities is expensive. For example, the fastest and safest way to reach Kisangani from Kinshasa—760 air miles—is by plane. Due to the lack of airline competition, a one-way ticket costs as much as \$300. This is astronomical compared to the average annual income of the people, which is between \$2,000-\$3,000. The other option is to get to Kisangani by boat, which would take weeks.

Presently, there are more than 40 students in various stages of formation. The philosophy program is in Kisangani, the city where the SCJs first began ministry.

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The theology program is in Kinshasa, the capital city of DRC. Some students are sent to South Africa for theological studies. Due to financial limitations, the Congolese Province has had to turn away prospective candidates. It is hoped that someday the Congolese Province will not have to turn anyone away who wishes to be a son of Fr. Dehon.

We congratulate our Congolese confreres for their perseverance and dedication. We pray for their success in continuing the mission envisioned and executed by the Founder.

Vivat Cor Jesu!

Fraternally,

