

The Oblates Sisters arrived in Beni-Paida (Belgian Congo at the time; today the Democratic Republic of the Congo) on December 23, 1935. Two days later, an infant was left on their doorstep. That was the beginning of an orphanage that has survived to this day. The following is an interview with Sr. Françoise Bichunchuma, an Oblate Sister with detailed knowledge of this facility.

By Sr. Zoé Vandermersch, O.A.

ZV: Could you tell us a little about the arrival of the Oblates in the Congo and the beginnings of their orphange?

FB: In 1929 the Assumptionists arrived in the Belgian Congo, in the Vicariate of Butembo-Beni in the eastern part of the country. Soon thereafter, they felt the need for sisters to collaborate with them especially for an effective promotion of women. Fr, Henri Piérard, the superior of the Assumptionist mission, asked Mother Berthe-Marie Paré, the superior general at the time, to send some Oblates to help out. Immediately, three sisters began preparing for the mission --- Sisters Marie-Laurentine and Philomène (Belgians) and Sister Marie (French). On board the ship that would take them from the Belgian port of Antwerp to the Congo, they spent their time learning Kiswahili, the local language. They arrived in Beni-Paida on December 23, 1935. Two days later, On Christmas day, a baby orphan was brought to them. That is the humble beginning of the orphanage. From the earliest days the sisters have continually welcomed between sixty and eighty children. For lack of means that number has diminished in recent years to between twenty-five and thirty-five.



