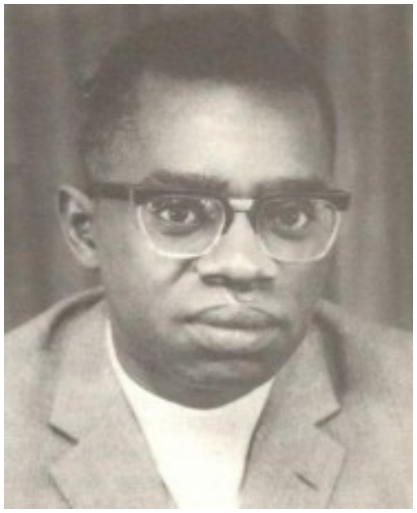


PROMINENT ASSUMPTIONIST Fr. JÉRÔME MASUMBUKO TSONGO-NDARA (1934-1981)
First African/Congolese Assumptionist, Pioneer, Educator

Jérôme Masumbuko Tsongo-Ndara was born in the village of Kamituga in the province of North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, on September 20, 1934. His father had relocated his family to this mining region when he found work there as a nurse. Having completed his primary education, Jérôme entered the minor seminary in Musienene, where he first met the Assumptionists and stayed from 1947 to 1954, with a special emphasis in Latin, after which he attended the major seminary in Baudoinville (Moba), run by the White Fathers, for his philosophy studies from 1954 to 1957. For some time, the young Jérôme had been thinking about Assumptionist religious life, even though the Congregation had a firm policy of directing all vocations to build up the local clergy.



He was not to be denied; his interest persisted, and after much dialogue and counsel, he was accepted into the novitiate. However, that meant leaving his homeland and traveling to far-off

Belgium (Taintegnies) where he took the habit on October 31, 1957 and professed his first vows the following year. But his travels were not over; barely had he adjusted to Belgium than he was sent to the heart of the Catholic world, the Eternal City, where he pursued his study of theology, obtaining a licentiate degree at the Dominican-run Angelicum; the same year he made final vows and was ordained a priest, with great symbolism, on the feast of Fr. d'Alzon, November 21 (1961). But his studies had yet to be competed. Back to Belgium he went, this time to the Catholic University of Louvain where he was to obtain another licentiate degree in philosophy and the humanities (1962-1966).



After ten long years away from his homeland, Fr. Jérôme returned in 1967 where he was named professor at Collège Kambali in Butembo, formerly known as Collège Pie X,opened by the Assumptionists in 1959. He taught upper level classes in Latin, French, and philosophy and not long after his arrival was named head-master. He was an extraordinary teacher, respected, loved, and emulated. His depth of faith, his erudition, his competence as an administrator, and his unquestionable integrity led to his being named secretary general of the bishops' conference of the Congo (at the time known as Zaire) in 1975, a position which required him to take up residence in the capital, Kinshasa.

In early 1980, plagued by headaches and other symptoms, he was sent to Belgium for medical tests where it was discovered that he was suffering from a brain tumor. After receiving treatments, he insisted on returning home, but in December was rushed back to the University of Antwerp Medical Center where he died suddenly on February 5, 1981. His remains were transferred back to his beloved country and he was buried at the entrance of the church of Kitatumba in Butembo.

Two years before his death, the second bishop of the Diocese of Beni-Butembo, Most Rev. Emmanuel Kataliko, himself a diocesan priest who benefitted from an Assumptionist education both in the Congo and in Europe, asked the Assumptionists to begin accepting native vocations from the diocese. Fr. Jérôme provided many of these early candidates with an edifying example of what an Congolese Assumptionist could look like. As such, he was a pioneer whose example

continues to inspire young men.



Just after his ordination, Fr. Jérôme wrote these words:

“Congo, my homeland, I left you in order to prepare myself to serve you better. Priesthood is the way that Divine Providence has shown me to do this. To become another Christ! To participate in the dignity of the One who said, ‘I have come not to be served, but to serve.’ So many others who have remained faithful to their call have preceded me, missionaries who have given their lives for Africa. They have not labored in vain. Is it not thanks to them that young black priests have had stirred within them a desire to follow the same Master? What awaits me at home is the continuation, the further development, of the work they began. Whatever the future may bring, there will be no rupture, no opposition between their language and mine. The inflection and quality of the voice may differ, but the message of Christ that we preach does not. We all proclaim the same Word.”