

Fr. João Ladeira, Verbite provincial,
Fathers Luiz Gonzaga and Marcelo

At the end of January, Fathers Marcelo Marciel, assistant general, and Fr. Luiz Gonzaga da Silva, provincial of Brazil, flew to the capital of Angola, Luanda, to begin exploring a possible foundation in this former Portuguese colony in central Africa. The foundation is foreseen to be a collaborative effort of the Province of Brazil and the Province of Africa and the first Assumptionist foundation in a Portuguese-speaking country on this vast continent.

Angola is located due south of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and like the DRC is rich in natural resources. It has large reserves of oil and diamonds, hydroelectric potential, and rich agricultural land. Despite this, Angola remains very poor, having been ravaged by a bloody civil war from 1975 to 2002. Angola was a Portuguese overseas territory from the 16th century to 1975. After independence, Angola was the scene of an intense civil war from 1975 to 2002. The country is the second-largest petroleum and diamond producer in sub-Saharan Africa; however, these riches remain largely in the hands of a few: Angola's politicians, miners, oilmen and the associated multinational corporations.

Although there are some 1,000 religious communities in Angola, the vast majority are Christian and the Catholic Church numbers about 50-55% of the population (i.e. 10 million Catholics). There are 19 dioceses, including 5 archdioceses. The first Catholic missionaries arrived in 1491. The attitude of the Angolan regime toward religion has been inconsistent. The governing party’s commitment to Marxism-Leninism, 1977–1991, meant that its attitude toward religion, at least officially, corresponded during that period to that of the traditional Soviet Marxist–Leninist dogma, which generally characterized religion as antiquated and irrelevant to the construction of a new society. The government also viewed religion as an instrument of colonialism because of the Church’s close association with the Portuguese. Since 1991 and the adoption of a

constitution that provided for multiparty democracy (albeit in a highly presidentialist version), restrictions on the liberty of religion have all been but abolished. However, the government, still dominated by the members of the former communist party, maintains a certain monitoring of the religious communities, through the Instituto Nacional das Religiões.





Fr. Marcelo with "newfound Angolan friends"

During their visit, Fathers Marcelo and Luiz Gonzaga have been well received by the members of the Divine Word Missionaries (Verbites). They have already visited the dioceses of Caxito and Viana on the outskirts of Luanda, the capital, and will also be speaking with the archbishop of Luanda, Most Rev. Filomeno do Nascimento Vieira Dias, and the apostolic nuncio, Most Rev. Petar Antun Rajič.

Foundations in countries where the Assumptionist do not exist will be one of the topics of the upcoming general chapter which will be held from April 27 to May 17 in Lyon, France.