**February 11, 2020**

Dear Friends,

I pray that everyone has gotten off to a good start in this new year. There is both good and bad news from our brothers in the Congo. First of all, the good news. The school in Beni continues to grow. I will report on the statistics in a minute. The bad news is that there has been an uptick in violence in the Beni area that has left nearly another 1,000 innocent villagers dead. What complicates the situation is that no one really knows who the instigators are. It is simply to know because of the complex political history of this region.



Pre-kindergarten students outside of construction site

In any case, let us return to the good news. The new Assumptionist director of the Beni School Complex, Fr. Kambale Kalondero Matabishi, recently sent me a comprehensive report for this 2019-2020 academic year. In pre-kindergarten, the numbers have grown from 45 to 92 students

at two different age levels. At the elementary school level, there are 211 students from grades 1-4; an increase in the first grade pupils has required two sections to be formed. In addition, in the afternoon sessions, the school is now serving 169 high school students and adult learners seeking basic secondary school skills (up from 132 last year). Included in these statistics are students who have fled insecure zones and need remedial classes. In total, therefore, the student body at all levels has reached 472…in just 4 years.

The school is also providing employment to more than 25 local citizens.



Primary school students

The increase in numbers reflects the capacity of the school to provide a quality education to all those who have, in one way or another, been affected by this ongoing war and continues to meet our expectations of providing hope in what can at times seem a hopeless situation.



A group of secondary school students

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, finishing touches are being put on the 5th- and 6th grade classrooms. Bathrooms are being completed and we just received a substantial gift to build a library/computer room. Plans are also underway to build the first wing of a planned high school. This first wing would house 7th- and 8th-graders. It would provide adequate space for our current afternoon high school students and relieve pressure on the elementary school facility.

Fr. Matabishi concludes his report with a heartfelt word of gratitude to all of the school's benefactors.

With best wishes,
Fr. John Franck, A.A.