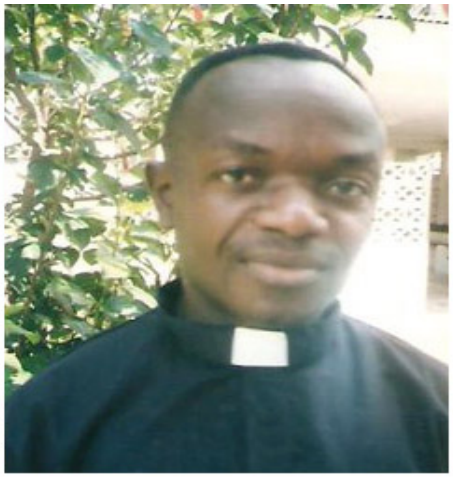






Fr. Edmond Bamtupe Kisughu, 53; Fr. Anselme Kakule Wasukundi, 41; Fr. Jean-Pierre Mumbere Ndulani, 50

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Local Assumptionists from Democratic Republic of the Congo struggled this week to determine why three of their fellow countrymen, all Assumptionist priests, were kidnapped last Friday at home. One week after their kidnapping, the priests' whereabouts were still unknown.

According to a Zenit news report, Bishop Melchisédech Sikuli Paluku of the Diocese of Butembo-Beni, in an interview with Agenzia Fides, assured that, "different lines of investigation are being followed for the three Assumptionist fathers," and added, "we must understand, which is the right one."

The local Congolese and members of the Assumption College community here shared fond memories of their brothers and expounded on the situation in Congo.

The Catholic Free Press was alerted to the abduction in an Oct. 21 email from Assumptionist Father John L. Franck, currently assistant general in Rome and formerly vice chairman of Assumption College's board of trustees and vocation director for the Assumptionists in the

United States.

An attachment said Father Bernard LeLéannec, the Assumptionists' secretary general in Rome, had reported that the three priests – Fathers Jean-Pierre Mumbere Ndulani, 50, superior; Anselme Kakule Wasukundi, 41, pastor, and Edmond Bamtupe Kisughu, 53, pastoral associate – were apparently taken at gunpoint from their rectory at Our Lady of the Poor Parish in the village of Mbau, North Kivu, at 9 p.m. Oct. 19, 2012.

This information came from Father Joseph Katekomundu, the lone Assumptionist who escaped abduction when he refused to answer a knock on his door, the report said. Two of those abducted had been relaxing in the living room, and the third was doing his laundry on the balcony.

"It is thought that the kidnappers were members of a Ugandan rebel group, ADF/NALU (Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces), since witnesses saw a group of them shortly after the abduction traveling in the direction of…their base," the report said. It said that on the same day, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) expressed concern about civilians targeted in fighting that has displaced more than 100,000 people in eastern Congo since April and joined calls on the authorities to do more to protect the population.

On Oct. 23 Father Franck shared with The Catholic Free Press a letter the Assumptionists' superior general, Very Rev. Benoît Grière, sent to the religious of the Province of Africa.

The superior general said the reasons for the abduction were unclear; the priests were innocent victims who serve all without distinction. He said the Assumptionists work for unity and reconciliation.

"We are not greater than our master who knew the horrors of the Passion suffered that all might be saved," he said. He also noted that the Congolese people have been suffering "from a particularly problematic politico-military crisis" for years.

"Dear brothers, may the intercession of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon allow us to live these

distressing moments in faith, hope, and charity," he said, referring to the Assumptionists' founder. "Let us be men of peace. Let us bring the Gospel message to the heart of this troubled world. May the Assumption be a witness of love. Let us pray for our brothers and maintain confidence. God will not abandon us."

Father Dennis Gallagher, Assumption College's vice president for mission, said he sent out a campus-wide request for prayers and that the priests were prayed for at Masses there.

Father Mulumba Kambale Matsongani and Brother Bernard Kambale Musondoli, Congolese Assumptionists studying at Assumption College, said that, as far as they know, this was the first time priests were kidnapped in the Diocese of Butembo-Beni, and they have tried unsuccessfully to figure out the captors' motives. Father Matsongani said he, Brother Musondoli, the kidnapped priests, and the one who avoided abduction, are all from that diocese. So is Assumptionist Father Salvatore Musande, who serves at St. Anne and St. Patrick Parish in Sturbridge.

Father Matsongani said kidnapping is uncommon; usually rebels or underpaid government soldiers loot, steal people's money and possessions, sometimes beating or killing them.

But these abducters did not steal anything, and chose a poor parish, he said. The priests were not likely a threat, he said; they were not involved in politics and two had just been assigned there.

If priests say something bad about rebels, the rebels might threaten them, Father Matsongani said. Brother Musondoli said he couldn't say if the priests did that.

Father Musande said he did not know what the kidnapped priests were preaching, but that the Church in general there is seen as a threat, because it speaks out against violence, kidnapping and "all the injustice going on, both on the government's side and on the rebels' side." This is done through homilies and the two Assumptionist radio stations, he said. The radio stations' journalists have been arrested by government police, he said.

People turn to the radio for information when something happens and to hear denunciation of the violence, he said. He said he thinks broadcasts are effective; otherwise the government and the rebels wouldn't consider them a threat. But he said the radio stations were not attacked, nor was the palm plantation to which Assumptionist Father Omer Mbusa Sivendire returned a few years ago after earning degrees at Assumption College. He said he talked to Father Sivendire after receiving the news, and he was safe, though worried. Brother Musondoli said the government respects priests. Father Matsongani said the Church speaks for the people, who listen to and trust it.

"In that sense the Church is kind of a threat to both the government and the rebels," he said. "The Church is a voice proclaiming peace and justice. Whoever is not building peace, the Church is threatening him. The message is impartial." But it is the rebels, and sometimes individual goverment soldiers, or civilians, who loot and kill, he said.

Father Musande advocated calling on the kidnappers to identify themselves and what they want, and to leave people alone. He also said he thinks the government and rebels need to negotiate. "I don't think this conflict can be solved militarily," he said. "This conflict has been going on and on. Warlords are in control of the mines, so they can have income."

Meanwhile, Father Matsongani and Brother Musondoli told The Catholic Free Press about the kidnapped priests. Father Musande also said he knew them well. Father Matsongani said he was an altar boy for Father Kisughu, one of the first black Assumptionists to work in his parish. He inspired many vocations, including his. He said Father Kisughu worked in most of the seven Assumptionist parishes in the diocese. Brother Musondoli said he also worked in Tanzania, and had been at his present parish two or three years.

Father Matsongani said he and Father Wasukundi studied and lived together as Assumptionists from 1996-1997.

"He's a hardworking person, committed to religious life and pastoral work," he said. The last five years he worked on a master's in history, preparing to teach in the Assumptionists' college and high schools, and helped at parishes on the weekend, he said.

Father Ndulani was a very good pastor, Father Matsongani and Brother Musondoli said. Young and old loved him, and some cried when he left their parish. After serving several years in Congo, he was a missionary in Ecuador for a few years, and for about five years has been studying in Scotland, they said.

"One month ago he called me, before he left Scotland," Father Matsongani said. "When he reached Congo, he wrote me a long letter."

Brother Musondoli said Father Ndulani was the one of the three abducted whom he knew best. When he was studying in Niarobi, Kenya, a couple years ago, Father Ndulani visited the Assumptionists there. "He would visit the communities," Brother Musondoli said. "He said, 'I want to know people.'"

By Tanya Connor

‘Think Congo’ campaign informs college community
By Tanya Connor
The Catholic Free Press

Many minerals from mines in Democratic Republic of the Congo are smuggled out of Congo and used in electronics, so legislation has been introduced in the United States to encourage companies not to use minerals from that area, Assumptionist Father Salvatore Musande, who serves at St. Anne and St. Patrick Parish in Sturbridge, said.

Father Musande, who is from the Diocese of Butembo-Beni, in Democratic Republic of the Congo, knows the priests who were kidnapped there last Friday. He asked that people here continue to take an interest in knowing about the conflict in his native country.
Assumption College has already done that, and there are plans to do more.
Vincent Sullivan-Jacques, a campus minister and co-chair of the college’s social justice committee, said the committee partnered with Campus Ministry and the Assumptionist community in a “Think Congo” campaign last spring.

Father Matsongani said campaign activities were held because of the Assumptionists’ decision to have their ministries around the world collaborate with each other, with special emphasis on their two colleges – Assumption in Worcester and Institut Superieur Emmanuel d’Alzon de Butembo in Congo, where he worked for four years.

For the campaign he told people at Assumption about ISEAB and the situation in Congo, Father Musande spoke, a film about “conflict minerals” was shown and Lenten almsgiving raised money for ISEAB, he and Mr. Sullivan-Jacques said. Emails informed members of the college community about legislation aiming to make Massachusetts “conflict-free” in the use of minerals.
Mr. Sullivan-Jacques said the kidnapping shows the need for continued awareness campaigns and for developing a stronger twinning relationship with ISEAB.

“We’re looking to have another event this fall,” he said. He said the social justice committee might work with peace and global studies classes to further educate the broader campus

community.

“These are trying times for our brothers in the Congo and for all of us, said Assumptionist Father John L. Franck, assistant general in Rome and former vice chairman of Assumption College’s board of trustees. “It brings home all the more, if we even needed it, the tragedy of the conflicts rending the Congolese nation and the daily violence and tension to which its people are subjected, often without adequate awareness on the part of the world.

“How many people are aware of the recent UN statistic that since war broke out in the Congo in 1997 some 5 million people have died as a result of the conflict through direct acts of violence, disease, or malnutrition? International attention remains focused on the crises in the Middle East and rightly so, but unfortunately it has drawn attention away from the equally sad, if not more devastating, crisis in the Congo,” Father Franck said.

The Catholic Free Press