

## Newsletter from Fr. Willibrord

Dear Confreres,

As Fr. Charles and Fr. Richard sent their best wishes for Christmas en New Year, with news about their region or their project, I would like to talk about what I am doing and how I am.



Last November 26<sup>th</sup>, my 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday, I was suffering from malaria in the Academic Hospital at Ghent. The doctors in the dialysis in Geraardsbergen could not find the reason of my high fever. So after a couple of days I was transferred to the University clinic and at one a.m, I had at last a room and a bed. I was most unhappy and though this was going to be the end. The gardener of our house had already told that they were not going to see me back. But after some days, still going on with the dialysis sessions of four hours on the artificial kidney, I got better and could go back to Geraardsbergen. But I had lost my enthusiasm for Africa and for life. How could malaria come back after so many years? And yet, Mr. Jan VANSINA, who lived

two years in Mushenge and is now a retired professor in Wisconsin – Madison, happened to have the same problem two years ago.

I have recovered at last and again busy on my computer, sometimes in the kitchen, and in different parishes and rest homes where I celebrate every week or fortnight.

I had decided that I should stop shopping for the community, as I could no longer carry heavy boxes. On Saturdays, when Bro Willy Mikobi is here, he goes with me shopping. The gardener goes for apples and the housemaid to the bakery.

I have of course to prepare every week my homily. One of my sisters is again in a hospital with a broken hip; my other sister lost her husband some weeks ago and my sister in law is now in a rest home: that means I have also duties in my family. Happily, I can still drive a car.



I never am boring myself. I started writing my souvenirs of all the Josephites (they are 57) who have worked in the Congo. Written in French, because one day, our African confreres are going to wonder how their province was built up. Fr. François corrects my text. I am at present at number 38, Father Guibert. As I have a good memory, and as most of these con-

freres have lived at Geraardsbergen for their philosophy, it is rather easy for me to write; also as I am supposed to have the memory of an elephant.

I am finishing the library about the Congo and Africa, there are already about 200 books and Mr. Jan Vansina is going to send me books he wrote himself about the “Bakuba”. Here in Geraardsbergen, from where so many people went to the Congo, there will be activities as 100 years ago, the “Independent State of the Congo” became a Belgian Colony. I will have two sessions next Saturday for visitors in our Bakuba Art Museum.

As Fr. Theophile De Paepe, the 8<sup>th</sup> Superior General, died in this house, and Father Leon De Henau, who was for years a member of the general council also, I found many archives upstairs. I found also a lot of letters written by “Camille Melloy”. All those documents are classified now and worth reading. There also two cabinets of archives about our “missions” in the Congo.

In our community with Fr. Jacob Beya, Vicar General, and Fr. Francois Mbiyangandu, Chaplain of the Chapel on the hill, and two “old timers” of the Congo, and with a housemaid born in Kasal, Africa is never far away. Both fathers are very appreciated in the deanery of Geraardsbergen and are every week on duty in a parish.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> December, the members of the Congolese Fraternity of Geraardsbergen will have their meeting on the “Oudenberg”, as it is our tour to receive them, and have a Congolese meal.

And in the weekends, Brother Willy is with us and sometimes also Fr. Martin Tshindaye, student at “Louvain la Neuve”.

With my best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New year,

Fr. Willibrord J.Geysels c.j.

