

Pastoral Visit to Central Africa

By the **Grace** of our Savior, His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methone, Director of Foreign Missions for the Holy Synod, made yet another necessary pastoral visit to Central Africa, acting as representative of Metropolitan Cyprian, who is ailing. Together with our brother in Christ, Mr. Anastasios Basilopoulos, he went to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) and to the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), in order to visit the multitudinous Orthodox communities belonging to the Holy Synod in Resistance and to enhance their ecclesiastical organization and missionary witness.

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On Wednesday, July 10/23, 2008, Bishop Ambrose arrived by air in Kinshasa, the capital of the Congo, where he was met by Hieromonk Mark—a brother of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, who left Greece nearly two months ago to return to his native country—, Father Léonide Kaseya (Father Mark's father according to the flesh), and Father Théodore Lumpungu.



On Thursday, July 11/24, 2008, His Grace arrived by air in Kananga, in Western Kasai. Here, in the area where our mission's monastery is being built, he was warmly welcomed by clergy and faithful.

On Friday, July 12/25, 2008, Bishop Ambrose liturgized with members of our clergy in the Church of St. Nicholas, in Nganza (a suburb of Kananga), during which he ordained Deacon Father Grégoire Bantu to the Priesthood and Nectaire Tshioto (fifty-eight, a married man with nine children), to the Diaconate. He also elevated Father Prodromos Kanumpetshi to the rank of Protopresbyter.

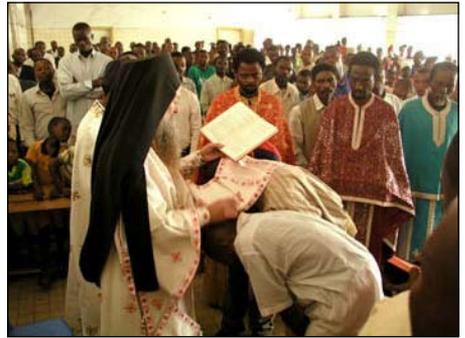


After the Divine Liturgy, Bishop Ambrose had a discussion with the clergy regarding possible solutions to immediate problems which they face in their everyday lives, since the poverty and various difficulties and needs of the region are quite incredible—by European standards. They also discussed the possible means of purchasing the site on which the Church of St. Charalambos, which has collapsed, is located. The site must first be purchased in order for the Church to be repaired.



On Saturday, July 13/26, 2008, during the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Prophet Elias, in the village of Mikalagi, Bishop Ambrose ordained Deacon Father Ambroise Kabeya to the Priesthood and Symeon Lupepi (fifty-four, a married man with six children), to the Diaconate.

On Sunday, July 14/27, 2008, His Grace celebrated a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in the Church of the Holy Apostles, temporarily located in a school in Kananga. All of the clergy of this region and at least five hundred faithful were in attendance, accompanied by a fine choir of native chanters. Bishop Ambrose ordained Deacon Father Nectaire Tsh-oto to the Priesthood and Jean Ntambue (thirty-nine, married with five children) to the Diaconate. At this time, Hieromonk Mark Hagiokypr-ianites was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite.



That afternoon, Bishop Ambrose met with landowners in the region.



On Monday, July 15/28, 2008, during the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at the temporary Church of the Dormition of the *Theotokos*, in the monastery that is being built in the region of Kananga, Bishop Ambrose ordained Deacon Father Symeon Lupepi to the Priesthood and Paul Baleyawalelu (fifty, married with three children) to the Diaconate. He then held a gathering with the clergy.



On Tuesday, July 16/29, 2008, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was again served in the Church of the Dormition of the *Theotokos*, during

which Bishop Ambrose ordained Deacon Father Vitaly Somi to the Priesthood and Martin Kayoko (forty-six, married with seven children) to the Diaconate. Once again, a gathering with the clergy followed the Divine Liturgy.

On Wednesday, July 17/30, 2008, Bishop Ambrose and Archimandrite Mark flew, in a U.N. helicopter, to Mbuji-Mayi in Eastern Kasai, where they were warmly received by our clergy of this region and many faithful, in the Church of St. Anthony, which is served by the region's Episcopal Representative, Father Antoine Mutumbu. The primitive condition of the roads, however, caused insuperable difficulties and hardships!



On Thursday, July 18/31, 2008, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the Church of St. Anthony, the Liturgy being somewhat delayed on account of car troubles on the way to the Church... Bishop Ambrose ordained Deacon Father Emmanuel Kasanda to the Priesthood and Jean Kayembe (thirty-eight, married with seven children) to the Diaconate.

On Friday, July 19/August 1, 2008, during the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at the Church of St. Basil, in Mbuji-Mayi, accompanied by the beautiful chanting of the native choir, Bishop Ambrose ordained Readers and Subdeacons. He also ordained Deacon Father Jean Kayembe to the Priesthood and Cyrille Ntambue (forty years old, recently married) to the Diaconate.

His Grace then visited the Church of St. Ambrose in the village of Boya, forty kilometers from Mbuji-Mayi, where he was given a





kind reception by numerous faithful. The journey there was excruciatingly difficult, on account of the terrible condition of the roads and various other troubles.



On Saturday, July 20/August 2, 2008, a gathering was held with the clergy and laypeople in Mbuji-Mayi. The next day, a truly hazardous return flight was made to the capital of Kinshasa....



On Monday, July 22/August 4, 2008, discussions of administrative matters were held with the clergy, regarding the improvement of the legal organization and coverage of our mission.

On Tuesday, July 23/August 5, 2008, following a lengthy walk through sandy roads, which made car travel impossible, Bishop Ambrose



celebrated a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in the rudimentary Church of St. Nectarios, in Bibwa, Kinkole, on the outskirts of Kinshasa, in which other clergy also took part. After the Liturgy, His Grace performed the Baptism of the daughter of the Director of the St. Cyprian Mission School. A believer of Greek descent from Australia, who supports the needs of our mission with self-sacrifice, served as sponsor.



On the same day, Bishop Ambrose had an unexpected meeting with one of the clergy who broke away from our mission some two years ago and joined an uncanonical group based in America. The clergyman expressed his and others' disillusionment, repentance, and desire to return to our jurisdiction. It was, however, explained to him that this matter requires special consideration and caution with regard to some of them, since certain persons cannot be received back under any circumstance.



On Wednesday, July 24/August 6, 2008, a visit was made to a missionary community with a view to purchasing a plot of land for the building of a Church. On Thursday, Bishop Ambrose held another meet-



ing with the clergy, and also visited the of St. Cyprian Mission School, where a Church dedicated to our Saints is being erected through the efforts of the aforementioned believer from Australia. His Grace was welcomed by teachers and a fair number of the pupils, the majority of whom were away on summer vacation. Addresses were delivered during the course of a modest ceremony organized for the visit.

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On Friday, July 26/August 8, 2008, following a truly eventful crossing of the Congo River, Bishop Ambrose and a number of Priests entered the Republic of the Congo, where he was welcomed at the Church of the Great Martyr George. The Church, now painted and well-cared for, presents a better picture than in the past. Bishop Ambrose held discussions on spiritual matters with the mission's clergy (Fathers Emmanuel and Georges) and faithful. They also examined the sanguine prospects of building an office, accommodations for guests, and a medical clinic.

On Saturday, July 27/August 9, 2008, Bishop Ambrose baptized twelve catechumens—eight adults and four children—in a river.



On Sunday, July 28/August 10, 2008, His Grace celebrated a Divine Liturgy at the Church of St. George, during which he ordained the local Deacon, Father Luc Buekasa, to the Priesthood.



On Monday, July 29/August 11, 2008, following yet another eventful crossing of the Congo River, Bishop Ambrose and his companions returned to Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from which he safely flew to Greece, with God's help, on Wednesday, July 31/August 13, 2008.

This was, over the course of nearly three weeks, a marathon of spiritual and material aid, with very great expenses and unbelievable hardships, in the field of our mission abroad. Eight new Priests and four Deacons, among others, were ordained, bringing the total of our clergy in Central Africa to twenty-seven Priests and six Deacons, in order to respond to the tremendous pastoral needs of the many thousands of indigenous Orthodox.

May the Lord abundantly bless the Vineyard of True Orthodoxy in the African continent!

