

The Evangelising Mission to the Luangwa Valley

Bishop George Zumaire Lungu

THE EVANGELISING MISSION TO THE LUANGWA VALLEY

A Pastoral Challenge
For the Local Church in Chipata Diocese
In the Jubilee Year of St. Paul
The Great Missionary & Apostle to the Gentiles
(2008-2009)

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DEDICATION

To all the die-hard, dedicated
and generous missionaries
Who toiled in the heat and mud
of the Luangwa Valley
In order to plant and water
the seed of the Gospel
In the hearts and culture of our people

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special Word of thanks to Fr. Bernhard Udelhoven who carried out an excellent research and whose findings have inspired our impetus to “Launch out once more into the deep of Luangwa Valley for a greater catch.” I am also grateful to all the members of the Luangwa Valley Think-Tank who never ceased to brain storm, research and carry out a critical study on several Pastoral Challenges we are bound to face as we start afresh our **“Operation Sunthirani Kozamako.”** Our hearts are also filled with gratitude due to the generosity of our cooperating partners in this project, especially Missio Aachen in Germany, who have continued to fund the valuable work being done. To all those who have contributed to this manual in one way or another, I can only wish you my Apostolic Blessings.

+Lungu George Cosmas Zumaire

Chipata Diocese

29th June 2008, The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles.

After a long and frustrating night of failing to catch anything, the fishermen led by Peter were challenged by Jesus to start afresh and ***“Put out into the deep”*** (Lk 5:4). By obeying the Word of the Lord, they scored some dramatic success. As we celebrate the Pauline Year and the two Years of Evangelisation, we must seek to heed the call to launch out into the deep of Luangwa Valley. This document attempts to present the historical background, rationale and the magna charter of our renewed passion to win the valley for Christ.

1. THE PROJECT PROFILE

2003 - Kambwiri Centenary with a research made by the Charismatic Renewal Movement: There was a realisation of how dramatic and urgent the situation is in the valley. Commitment of people in the valley and of the Diocese to a new start was made there and then.

2004 - Beginning of reflections in Deanery Meetings & Presbyteral Council. It was said, “Let us prepare for this new pastoral initiative properly and learn from the past.”

2005 to 2006 - 18 months of full-time anthropological research by Fr. Bernhard Udelhoven: *“Christianity in the Luangwa Valley”* (research report) & *“You reap what you sow”* (video/DVD). The report was distributed to all priests and religious.

2006 to 2007 - A number of meetings of the Luangwa Valley Apostolic Think Tank at Diocesan level were held. Prolonged reflection and several research assignments on the identified pastoral problems were done. These included the issue of early marriages, polygamy, and exclusion from the sacraments, begging mentality, witchcraft, healing ministry, ancestors and family structure attitudes in the valley. The Think Tank comes after much reflection to a common vision that re-

quires conversion on our part of doing pastoral work in the Diocese today.

2007 — In the Pastoral Council, the problematic issues of the valley were presented to the whole Diocese; evangelisation of the Luangwa Valley became a Diocesan project; on all levels there was a certain readiness to be challenged by the situation of the valley.

2008 to 2009 — Celebrating the Year of St. Paul the Great Missionary in the context of the Two Years of Evangelisation in the Diocese: The Year of Action! Now is the favourable time to Act.

2. THE LUANGWA VALLEY APOSTOLATE: A CHALLENGE FOR RENEWAL TODAY

A look at the past 100 years reveals that evangelisation in the valley has had its own share of pastoral frustrations. Yet we also acknowledge with gratitude the heritage and experience on which we can build. We are not going into the valley for the first time. There are Christian communities established there in spite of many setbacks. There are Parishes that have continued to minister to the people of the valley. The issue, therefore, is on how we can build on these efforts that are being made in favour of the valley. It is in this context that this paper wishes to propose to you some of the important issues that need to be discussed and resolved before we embark on this apostolic venture. In other words, it is a call for personal commitment from the laity, religious men and women, and the diocesan priests to this project. People in the valley are calling for a broader commitment of their Church, priests and sisters, but also for Christian teachers and nurses staying with them. This paper is a call for volunteers to live a missionary life in the valley as a part of an overall strategy that grew out of the Think Tank meetings. It is addressed to the Diocesan stakeholders as well as missionary congregations.

3. THE VALLEY PROJECT: MISSION OF CHRIST AND OF THE ENTIRE CHURCH AS ONE FAMILY

First and foremost, evangelisation in the Valley needs to be seen from the perspective of Christ's mission as the overriding concern. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21). It is more than the commitment of one or several individual congregations. It is and remains a pastoral project of and for the entire Church.

Secondly, those to work in the valley (individual priests as well as sisters, missionary congregations) must be willing to shape their style of life on the needs of this mission.

Thirdly, there is no room for possessiveness in the valley but a spirit of sharing one's resources and talents in favour of the mission like the first Christians of the New Testament (Acts 2: 44-47).

Finally, the apostolate in the valley can be compared to the mission of Paul and Barnabas to the gentiles that came to have effects also on the "mother church" in Jerusalem. This is the potent that this project has for the entire church.

That is why we need to be open to the following possibilities:

A) MIXED COMMUNITIES IN FAVOUR OF THE MISSION

The different congregations enrich the valley with their different charisma. At the same time, acknowledging the fact that the valley apostolate is a vocation within a vocation, and that not all members of a specific congregation are suitable for the Valley, an individual congregation may fail after some time to find people with this specific vocation from its "own ranks". Openness is required to look for a solution that safeguards the dynamics of the valley mission. In such a case the possibility of mixed communities should not be ruled out.

All people working in the valley are working with a common mission that transcends the mission of any individual congregation. (1 Cor 12:12ff)

B) THE RAINBOW COALITION AS A STRATEGY

The needs of the valley are pressing and urgent and attract a broad spectrum of apostolate (Parish ministry, health, education, etc.) There can be a certain danger of possessiveness about particular realms or institutions. This is OUR Health Centre, OUR School and OUR programme. Cooperation among the different Workers in the vineyard is essential. While God gives different charisma through different congregations to the valley, such charisms are in function of a common mission that has priority. Moreover, before people look at us as “Comboni”, “Teresian Sisters”, “Diocesan Priests”, and “White Fathers,” they see us first and foremost as priests (Azibambo), Sisters (Azimai) or Brothers. Yet among us there is not always that recognition and conviction of the need for an integrated pastoral approach which such an undertaking requires. The most obvious example is the one of finance. All are involved in the same apostolate, in the same vineyard, yet some have access to all possible means, while others don't know how to finance one single trip to an Outstation. People in the Valley see this also. White Fathers share among White Fathers, Comboni among Combonis, Teresian Sisters among Teresian Sisters etc. Yet all live in the same community of Valley people. Our commitment to our own congregation/society/association takes priority over our commitment to a common vision and mission among the valley people. Should it not be the other way round, namely that the common vision and mission in the valley shapes the approach and style of life also of our different congregation/society/association? Coordination for the valley includes sharing resources among us. This demands real conversion.

4. THE PASTORAL STRATEGY IN THE VALLEY

A) OUR MISSION TO THE VALLEY MUST BE VERY CLEAR TO OURSELVES

What are we there for in the valley? What do we want to accomplish in the Valley? Many frustrations arise in the valley because of expectations that are not realistic, and maybe not even biblical. Three different paradigms of mission have been proposed during the history of evangelisation: **(1) saving souls, (2) establishing a (self-reliant) Church, and (3) witnessing to the Kingdom of God.** If our focus is exclusively on the first two paradigms, our work in the valley will meet several frustrations. People in the valley are not saved as individuals, because their ties to the families are so strong that life in the valley is not possible outside the family. Concerning the second paradigm, efforts to create self-reliant Church structures in the valley have also failed. Church structures, prayers, and the Christian faith have rarely linked up with people's own aspirations, values and knowledge of the divine. The third paradigm (witnessing to the Kingdom of God) does not exclude or cancel out the first two paradigms, but if we make God's Kingdom our main focus, our presence in the valley may be less prone to frustration and lead us to discover areas of evangelisation that were not seen or stressed before.

We don't own that kingdom; it remains God's kingdom, not ours. Knowing this takes a lot of pressure from our shoulders and allows us to measure our "success" not solely in terms of *mtulo* paid or the number of baptisms celebrated.

B) THE NEED FOR AN ENDURING PASTORAL PRESENCE

Missionary presence in big parts of the valley has been erratic. "Give us one real Christian to live here among us, and we will follow him", a headman said in Chasera. People are calling for committed Christians, and for a meaningful presence of priests, sisters, and catechists. The presence of the Comboni Missionar-

ies right in the valley (long-term) is bearing its fruit, but this did not happen overnight. We can also learn from the Baptists in Nyimba areas, where missionaries visit their churches in the valley every single week or at least every second week. We can also learn from the Anglicans in Msoro (100 years of their presence has led to a certain pride in being Anglican, even if the Church also has its difficulties).

Lessons can also be taken from the CCAP in Chikwa, where Reverend Muwowo left an urban life style to embrace life now as a simple village priest on a bicycle. What is needed in the valley from our side is long-term commitment and real insertion rather than mere sporadic visits. Certainly, we reap what we sow.

C) THE NEED FOR AN EVANGELISING PRESENCE AND CORRESPONDING DISPOSITIONS AND ATTITUDES

Our focus of attention will not be, beyond mere preaching, to insert ourselves in communities of the valley in such a way that we may win their confidence and trust. It will be a very important period and an opportune time to clarify our identity. We are not essentially tourists or donor representatives or project coordinators or simply social workers. We are messengers of the Good News. Therefore our life style will be much more convincing than our words. This is more so in view of a history of misrepresentation of the church as being rich and identical with other social service providers. Therefore, what we need so much during this period are the following dispositions and attitudes:

1) THE ABILITY TO CREATE RELATIONSHIPS

When Jesus spoke about God's kingdom, he was speaking about relationships: with God, with our neighbour, and with oneself. All of Jesus' preaching touched relationships. Once we speak about relationships, we are in the realm of culture. To transform his culture and his people's norms, values and aspira-

tions, Jesus inserted himself fully into the culture of his people so as to take the best out of it. This is Jesus' way of evangelisation, the incarnational way (John 1: 14). And so the first step to appreciate who people are and what they have is the question of an enduring presence amongst them. This will help us build a new relationship with the people to whom we wish to minister. In the valley, we need to keep in mind that people rely very strongly on their own families, lineages and clans.

That is why in many places there is a certain apprehension of being incorporated into wider structures, especially when they conflict with the interests of the immediate family. The report has spelled out some of the reasons for this (hunting & fishing, origin traced from many directions, trend of in-marriage, lack of centralisation, etc.) For a pastoral approach, this means that personal contacts with families, lineage and clan-heads are very important in the valley, if we want to touch the nerve of what makes people move. Large-scale Church Organisations (Church Councils, Catechumenate programmes, Seminars, etc.) also have their place in the valley, but without personal contacts they will remain on a very superficial level.

II) READINESS TO "WASTE TIME" WITH PEOPLE

Priests who are mostly remembered in the valley are those who visited families and were able to stay in the village even if there was not much to do in what concerns the Church programmes. Even if priests could not possibly visit everyone, they were described as having visited "all families" and as having been there "for everybody". Coming just for a seminar, a Church Council meeting, or some examinations of catechumens and then leaving again the place after a "little weekday Mass" (often angry about the poor response of people) has not born fruit in the valley; we may call this type of apostolate a waste of fuel. Remaining in the village after a flopped Church Council meeting, visiting someone's little garden ravaged by the animals, showing interests in the activities of fishermen who are

otherwise so distant from our Church, asking questions about people's families, clans and lineages, or praying with the sick in their homes, may prove not a waste of time. Through these personal contacts, we become a relevant coordinate in people's lives.

III) THE IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISING "AFRICAN HOSPITALITY" WITH ITS RISKS

People welcome us very well in the valley. We can eat and sleep in their families. If however our own houses are closed to people, if they do not feel welcome, we should not be surprised that people see an unbreakable barrier between our lives and theirs. Our touring in the villages is seen as our "work" for which we are paid, get allowances and benefits (even if we tell them that we don't), like the many other NGOs touring the villages and designing programmes. Our real life however may be seen as proceeding somewhere behind the gate or outside the valley. Jesus invited his disciples to his home: "come and see". In the valley, relationships entail eating together. If our own tables are closed to people (not sharing one's food and table incidentally is the sign of the anti-social *mfwiti* in the valley), then people may regard our message as they regard our food: as relevant for ourselves but not for them. The community of the Teresian sisters in Lumimba has proven to us that this type of hospitality is possible. Though they lived on the tiniest budget, their table was open: open not only to catechists and leaders, but also to ordinary people from the parish. Because people value hospitality, they also guard it against abuse.

IV) THE ABILITY TO LISTEN WITH A RESPECTFUL HEART AND MIND

More than offering specific solutions to pastoral problems, the Think Tank proposed most of all a listening with a respectful heart. Surely not all is good in the valley. But too often people have been regarded as primitive, uneducated, irregular, not yet up to standard or not yet quite in line. If the way people lead

their lives in the valley does not make sense to us, or if our clever solutions are not followed by people, it simply means that we have not listened enough and that we have not yet understood properly what is going on. A priest or a sister asking a question has more success in the valley than the one giving answers. When we go to the valley, we have to realise that we have entered holy ground. Real listening demands a readiness to put our own concepts into question, and readiness to live a bit in the dark or at least in some grey zones.

Reflecting on real life enabled Jesus to see that the categories and answers of the Pharisees could not catch people's experiences and that God's kingdom was in fact very different from what the religious elite imagined.

The question then arises as to how we can keep this sense of respect and a listening heart alive. The valley seems to favour communities where pastoral agents can share their experiences; where they can laugh at their own mistakes; where experiments are encouraged; where each significant experience contributes something to the whole team. Sharing across communities enhances the chances to keep our hearts and minds open, and so does the chance to stay back, retreat at times to have some distance and reflection. In the past the White Fathers were keeping diaries for this very purpose, a habit that should be compulsory also today for all pastoral agents in the valley.

V) OPEN MINDED AND NON-JUDGEMENTAL TOWARDS PEOPLE'S CULTURE

People in the valley have preserved their culture better than people on the plateau. The Think Tank is investigating a number of issues that could be explored in a pastoral approach, for example the sense of pride and identity in the ancestors; the link between the ancestral shrine (*kavuwa*) and the headmanship as well as the traditional initiation rites (*cinamwali* "ca

cikunja”). To have a presence there and say a prayer of blessing rather than words of condemnation, may allow change (if needed) to happen from within rather than forced on the rites from the outside. Much still needs to be explored in the valley that would give us a glimpse into the moral universe of people. A general condemnation of tradition as “*cikunja*” (pagan) has contributed to the superficiality of faith in the valley.

There will always be conflicts between tradition and the Christian message. But if the “owners” of tradition are given a place in our Church and feel at home and understood, then there is a chance that traditions change from within and that the Christian message makes sense to people. Jesus’ approach was to affirm people, to believe in them. He did not command Zacchaeus what to do, but once he felt accepted, Zacchaeus knew himself what he could do.

VI) ABILITY TO EXPLOIT THE AVAILABLE POTENTIALS AND BUILD ON THE STRONG SIDES AND TALENTS OF PEOPLE IN THE VALLEY

Often people in the valley have been belittled as being backwards. Maybe too few efforts have been made to identify the strong points that we find in the valley, that reinforce a sense of pride and a sense of belonging, and that create community. People have been made powerless in the valley; the research brought out that their positive sense of identity and pride is often situated in an unreachable golden past of their “*makolo*” while they see the present times characterised by hunger (*njala*) and foreign interests. Sociologically speaking, powerless people are more inclined to behave as beggars or to withdraw from positive community action. Moreover, having little access to official channels, they are more inclined to make their voice heard through illegitimate and secret means (witchcraft, poison, slander, etc.) that are very much present in the valley, and which also spoil our Christian communities. The Think Tank proposed some examples for exploring people’s strength.

Yet the question of how to build more positively on people's strength, bring empowerment and awaken a positive sense of identity deserves ongoing attention. Considering the importance of the above factors for the success of the mission it is therefore imperative that the people ready for this mission must be at home with these human qualities or at least most of them.

E) THE NEED FOR AN ORGANISED INSERTION.

We hope to achieve and grow in this common mission through a team that encourages reflection across the valley, institutions and parishes, that keeps us open and ever ready to question our ways of doing things, that helps us listen more to the people in the valley, opens us to the cultural diversities across the valley, and that helps to evaluate and adapt our apostolate. This team will work for a unity in diversity.

However, the question is about a long-term coordination in the valley, without which all the "good ideas and resolutions" will simply evaporate in the coming months and years. The need is felt for a framework concerning the whole valley that facilitates coordination and reflection in the valley, and that keeps the valley in focus for the whole diocese. In fact the Think Tank proposed to make the valley a focus of the Years of Evangelisation. A new start provides new opportunities, but there is also the danger of just falling back into the old traps. The proposal has been made to establish (at least for the duration of a few years) a full time coordinator or a team of coordinators for the valley, who would visit all valley parishes, stay in touch with them, encourage sharing, coordinate policies, and help with integration with the Diocesan desks. The full-time coordinator with his team would help the parishes and communities to revisit their policies in line with an overall valley framework and keep reflections alive. Policies may be different from one part

of the Valley to the other, but the coordinators could work for transparency, accountability and for unity in diversity.

5. OTHER RELATED ISSUES:

A) EVANGELISATION BEYOND PARISH BORDERS:

Life in the valley is fluid; people are on the move. The research revealed especially the fluidity in movements for men: some weeks fishing, some weeks resting in the village, some months in town looking for some job, some weeks doing piece-work at a safari lodge, some weeks with relatives here and there. We think a lot in Parish structures, and it surely brings benefits to create in people a sense of identity of belonging to a Parish community. But people's worlds are much bigger than our geographical Parishes. Life in the parish is but a part of their lives; they go by bicycles onto the plateau, into Malawi, to Mpika and jump on the train to Nakonde and even into all directions. In other words, valley people do not believe in boundaries. They do not believe much in Parish boundaries either. They like being visited by different priests and sisters, to whatever Parish they belong to, talk with them, celebrate the Eucharist with them when they are passing through, an event they have too rarely in any case. People look for a wider integration than the Parish level. Yet our systems of record keeping punishes the people who are on the move, makes them irregular and unfit for our stable church. Many could not be baptised for ten years and longer, because they never managed to follow the catechumenate through until the end in their parish. It engraved on them the awareness of being unfit for our Church and many just gave up; "it's not for me". Jesus who was himself always on the move, travelling beyond boundaries, surely sympathises with the pilgrims of the valley.

B) RE-POSITIONING OF MISSION STATIONS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW MISSIONS

Looking at the valley of Chipata Diocese as a whole, the area of Lumimba Parish seems to be the most neglected area at large. But also Chikwa (belonging to Kanyanga) and Ukwimi need to be put more visibly on the map of the apostolate. And the Parishes of the plateau that reach into the valley (Nyimba, Minga, Katete, Kanyanga) find it an ongoing struggle to keep a meaningful presence in the valley. Finally, thinking beyond the valley, also other neglected areas of Chipata Diocese need a renewed impetus, for example along the border with Mozambique from Vubwi to Nyimba and along the border with Malawi from Chipata to Chama. Our moving into the Luangwa Valley will also pastorally demand two important considerations: (i) Redrawing parish borders, and (ii) Establishing new Mission stations/ Parishes.

This is another very important pastoral programme that will have to eventually be faced either at the same time as we look at the Valley or at a later phase in the life of the Valley project.

C) EVANGELISATION THROUGH SOCIAL SERVICES (EDUCATION, HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES) BY COMMITTED LAY-PEOPLE AND RELIGIOUS BROTHERS AND SISTERS

This paper has dealt much with the required attitudes of the Church Hierarchy working in or called into the valley. This however is not to lose sight of the fact that evangelisation often depends on committed “migrants” who take up positions in the valley as teachers, nurses or development workers. To be a Catholic teacher or a Catholic nurse in the valley is a real vocation that goes far beyond a job-description that one holds in a particular institution.

The area of Nabwalya, for example, was evangelised to a great extent by a married couple, a teacher and his wife, who took up

their appointment to the valley as a vocation coming from God. Education and health services have, since the beginning of the Catholic Church in Zambia, been an integral part of holistic evangelisation. A Catholic teacher is called to mark a student far beyond what is written down in the school syllabus; equally sisters and brothers giving themselves for health and education in the valley offer through their commitment much more than a materialistic conception of health and education could ever offer. The call for volunteers for schools, health centres, and other social services in the valley stands.

CONCLUSION: BE PART OF THE MISSION. A CALL FOR A DEMANDING AND URGENT RESPONSE.

After the Centenary celebrations of Kambwiri, there were three years of deliberations, a major study, and a number of Diocesan seminars and meetings of reflection on possible ways of a meaningful evangelisation in the Valley. One veteran missionary wrote to the chairperson of the Think Tank: "Time to continue discussing this project is over. Now is the time to go and be roasted in the heat of the Valley and get soiled in the mud of the Valley." This surely was a passionate call for our urgent action. One would easily understand the feeling of frustration of those individuals who would like to have gone to the Valley yesterday. Time has elapsed since I promised the people of the Valley that the Church will 'soon' come back to the Valley and stay for good. I am therefore sharing with you some of the insights gained in this important pastoral endeavour and invite you to give this challenge a serious thought. However, let us not forget that the Valley is a special pastoral destination. It demands a vocation within a vocation. Inquiries among people who have worked in the valley made it clear that the valley is not a place for everybody. To work in the valley requires a specific vocation (Acts 13:2). There exist no pre-fabricated solutions for the valley. A person appointed to the valley, but unable to adapt to the necessary style of life (respect, hospitality, open house, team work, a non-paternalistic attitude, able to put

his or her own assumptions aside, etc.) will be a hindrance rather than an asset. Nobody should be appointed against his/her will to the valley. Before taking up an appointment, dialogue is needed, and the person in question must be aware that the valley apostolate has its own dynamics which he/she has to make his/her own. A good example and an inspiring text is that of St. Paul:

To the weak, I made myself weak, to win the weak. I accommodated myself to people in all kinds of different situations, so that by all possible means I might bring some to salvation. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others. (1 Cor 9:22-23)

SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS COMMUNITY

1. The valley should concern all, but not all are ready for the valley. If people are found to make the valley their life, they are surely a sign and a gift from God. ***How can we encourage those, who experience this vocation, to go and live it out in the valley? Under which conditions can they be released for the valley?***
2. We are so used to identify our mission with our Associations, Societies, and Congregations through the provision of our own human, financial and material resources. Yet our common experience in our institutions and ministries is that more often than not we need a helping hand from outside our immediate community. ***This project is essentially about sharing what we have for the life of the community. Are you ready to commit yourselves in this way of going about our mission in the valley?***
3. It is also a common assumption that security is crucial for the success of our pastoral ministry. We need sufficient funds to buy basic needs of our members; we need proper tools of evangelisation for ministry; we need proper accommodation for staff; we need adequate provision for a

good holiday as an incentive to retain staff; we need proper communication tools in case of an emergency situation calling for S.O.S., etc, etc... Yet this venture seems to favour just the opposite: insecurity. ***Are you ready for this position of vulnerability and insecurity?***

4. In case the Luangwa Valley project is not your preference, ***is it possible for you to consider either taking over parishes or institutions on the plateau or opening new ones in the needy areas?***
5. Whatever the case may be, this project is the concern of the entire Church. It means we can contribute to its cause in many different ways. ***What are you prepared to contribute to the mission as an individual, an Association, a Diocese, a Congregation, or a Society? Are there any particular conditions that you demand to be fulfilled before you commit yourself in any particular way?***
6. ***In what ways can sharing, coordination and maybe even mixed communities be envisaged?***

Bishop George Zumaire Lungu

