



76 ♀ Sports, music, and prayer

In his fourth year at the Mfuti Institute, a large Catholic school of West Kasai, Jean Bosco Kabulo Kapudi was expelled because of his lack of discipline. The problem stemmed from the big head he admits he got from being a very good soccer player. It was a rough start on the path that would eventually lead him to become a Mennonite pastor in Kinshasa, and the whole journey would have its ups and downs.

Jean Bosco was eventually readmitted to the Mfuti Institute, after learning masonry at a trade school, and he got his education diploma in 1974. He promptly left for Kinshasa to join his older brothers, who wanted him to enroll in the Institute of Buildings and Public Works. But Jean Bosco was intent on becoming a great soccer player. He was recruited by the successful Motema Pembe club, but he soon left it because the club's fetishist practices clashed with his convictions and the advice of his father, who had told him, "To live well on this earth, one must want to have absolutely nothing to do with fetishes and have faith only in God, the sole protector."

The boxing match between George Foreman and Mohammed Ali took place on October 30, 1974, in Kinshasa. Although Jean Bosco didn't get to the match, afterward one of his cousins took him to a church where Foreman was visiting. When asked to speak by the young Protestants of the neighborhood, George Foreman declared, "Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the Savior of humanity and the transformer of the lives of those who believe in him." It was on this occa-

photo—Jean Bosco Kabulo

sion that Jean Bosco would become acquainted with a Protestant pastor, Papa Makanzu, who spoke to him about many things, including “serving the Lord in order to be saved.”

Jean Bosco did become a mason and worked first with one of his brothers and then by himself. He abandoned that occupation a few years later—because, he says, he got tired of working for ungrateful clients. He then became a teacher and was hired to teach primary school in Kivuvu. The school belonged to a Protestant denomination, which required that he become a member of their church in order to get the job. Before joining that church, Jean Bosco could be found by turns with the Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and at various Protestant churches.

In Kivuvu, Pastor Kasenda Mutombo took an interest in the young man, taking him into his congregation and making him its secretary, all the while introducing him to prayer and Bible reading. For this pastor, prayer was not the simple act of reciting words but the precious moment of speaking to God with great intelligence and attention. The pastor also assured Jean Bosco that “all the things that were done by Jesus and are written in the Bible are not fictions, but true things that really happened.”

One day, after three days of prayer with the pastor, a great miracle occurred: the healing of a woman who had been bewitched by an evil spell cast by a rival. This healing gave Jean Bosco something to think about. He wondered if, in the name of Jesus, he too could perform healings. At the scene, seeing that he was stunned, the pastor said to him: “Jesus is alive. He healed this woman.”

Jean Bosco remained with the pastor and would subsequently be made a deacon of his parish. Later a church dispute caused the pastor to leave the denomination. He invited Jean Bosco to stay in touch, even though the young man did not leave with him.

One day, Jean Bosco received a visit from a certain Constantin Mufuta, who had heard him sing, accompanied by colleagues. Mufuta, who was a member of the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM) congregation Ngiri Ngiri, asked him to start a choir. Jean Bosco accepted the request and began encouraging his friends to make music with Constantin Mufuta. But at the same time the authorities of the denomination where Jean Bosco still had his membership asked him to stay with the denomination and promised to make him a pastor.

Jean Bosco Kabulo rejected this idea out of hand, because he considered himself still too young and he was single. So he joined Mufuta at the Mennonite congregation and brought his fellow musicians with him. With a number of other young people from Ngiri Ngiri, Jean Bosco founded the choir called Messengers of the Cross.

For a while, the Messengers of the Cross performed hymns they collected from other groups, because they had no composers among them. Singing your own music is the mark of a prestigious choir. Feeling bad about this situation, Kabulo went to talk to his mentor, Kasende Mutombo, who judged the state of affairs unacceptable and believed that God could change it. He prayed for Jean Bosco, that he might become the composer of hymns for his group.

Upon his return to the congregation, Jean Bosco Kabulo announced to his friends: “From now on, you are supposed to count on me for the composition of hymns for our group. From now on, it will be out of the question to sing songs from groups other than ours.” His friends made fun of him, not seeing how that could be possible. But he invited them to pray and meditate on this idea for three days.

Two days later, it was Constantin Mufuta who arrived with a song he had composed—“Goliath.” He hummed it, and everyone accepted it. Four days later, Mufuta brought “God Created Me and He Gave Me Life.” Two days later, he presented another song.

Every week from then on the group produced new songs, because Jean Bosco himself and another musician joined the team of composers. The choir was powerful and glorious. But because of tensions between the choir and the pastor of the church and its members, the choir would rebel against the congregation and become independent of the Ngiri Ngiri CEM. This move was against the will of Jean Bosco, but he nevertheless left the CEM for a while during the imbroglio. Eventually he came back as a result of the pleading of a number of the faithful.

Upon his return, things were not easy for him, because most of the members still did not trust him. But he held on, organizing choir and an intercessory group. He was named congregational evangelist and undertook a lot of work to reenergize the Bumbu parish in Kinsasha.

Eventually Jean Bosco received the charge to lead the Bumbu congregation as pastor. He is also the author of several initiatives

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that gave the CEM congregation Nouvelle Vision the acceptable status of a local church. His life is full of lessons in God's grace.

Jean Félix Chimbalanga