



68 ❀ An explosive evangelist

Roger Tshilumba was drawn into the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM) Sangilayi Bipemba congregation by the music he heard one day in a choir rehearsal in 1983. The young high school student joined the choir and the church and was baptized in 1986. But the Christian life was not easy, at first, for this talented young man.

There was the problem with his maternal uncle, who had become Roger's guardian when he came to Mbuji Mayi to study. The uncle urged his nephew to leave the CEM Sangilayi, of which he had already become a member, to become part of "Animat," his own religion. Because of Roger's refusal to abandon what he already loved, he found himself in jail following a legal process initiated by the guardian.

The Sangilayi congregation interceded in his behalf and got him released after two days, at the price of a deposit. Because his relations with his uncle had disintegrated, the congregation took responsibility for getting him through school and helping him survive, providing rations when he needed them. He continued living with his uncle, sharing all of this with the household. Thanks to the support given to him by the church, Roger Tshilumba succeeded in finishing his secondary studies. At the same time he had the opportunity to take biblical training for planting new congregations.

Then there was the matter of his marriage. He married a young woman from the congregation but left her, saying he found her “not submitted.” He then married another woman in the congregation. Because of the complications, Roger was excommunicated. This pushed poor Roger into a remarkable state of church homelessness. Thus he found himself for a while with the Pentecostals and other groups. It was Pastor Benjamin Mubenga who finally helped him reconnect with the CEM where he remains to this day.

Throughout this youthful turmoil, however, Roger found ways to use his remarkable gifts to serve God. Pastor Célestin Kabengela,¹ with whom Roger works as an assistant pastor, declares, “In spite of the fact that he has an exaggerated dose of audacity which gives him the boldness to have no consideration for individuals superior to him, Roger Tshilumba remains until proven otherwise a powerful servant of God and a man with a great imagination for God’s service.”

Beginning in 1986, the young Tshilumba helped found an intercessors group in the Sangilayi congregation. The group prayed for the difficult times through which the congregation was passing and for the conflict that had shaken the CEM since 1975, which was on everybody’s mind. Roger believes this intercession led to “the reconciliation in 1993 of the opposing parties.”

But Roger Tshilumba’s greatest contribution to the CEM has been bringing souls to Christ. “Evangelism, social outreach, intercession, and winning souls are very important roles I have played, given that the CEM is an evangelical community. The work that I have accomplished has its weight in gold and its real meaning.”

As evangelist and social officer, Roger carried out many initiatives that proved to be productive in winning souls, first in Sangilayi and then in Inga, which he founded in collaboration with Célestin Kolela in 1993. Roger was among those who took charge of evangelistic mini-campaigns organized in the streets of Sangilayi, fifty to 200 converts at a time. In the same vein, while serving an interim pastorate in the Muindila congregation, Roger Tshilumba, in collaboration with the youth, initiated gatherings such as days of praise and marathon prayers, inviting particular individuals, most of whom ended up becoming members of Muindila.

Constantly using his gift for evangelism, he increased the numbers of the Dipumba congregation from thirty to 157, when he served

1 See “Saved from suicide by a vision” (chapter 70).

with Jean Richard Muteba in a 2006 interim. Six months later, still using his gift, Roger founded the Disanka congregation and the Musawula Evangelical Circle, after having constituted an evangelical group in the Bufuki congregation of Mwene Ditu, where he works to this day.

Outside the CEM, of which he is a member, Roger Tshilumba has served God in many ways in other churches, where he is often invited to preach, and in international Christian organizations. He has worked since 2009 as coordinator of Christian children's activities in Mwene Ditu for Children in Christ (CIC), whose goal is to teach the word of God to Christian children so they can teach it to other children. In CIC Roger has already trained twelve children, age eleven to fourteen, who are able to pray, sing for Christ, and preach the word of God. He says the children also become counselors in their families. One young girl, he says, was successful in reconciling her father and her mother, who had earlier lived "like dog and cat."

Roger declares: "I was not in the beginning a man of peace, but thanks to my membership in the CEM, which in its doctrine advocates peace, I have become a peacemaker." In fact, he successfully reconciled, as recently as 2010, members of his own family who had been in conflict for many years. He never stops saying, "It is God who chose me to use me for his work."

Jean Félix Chimbalanga