



66 ❖ A living example of repentance

André Kabasela was born to a good Mennonite family. His father is a pastor in the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM) and a director of schools. André entered secondary school in the CEM system but never finished successfully. At times a traveling salesman and then a diamond miner, André also became a family man. He is married to Marie Bienda, and they have six living children.

André was baptized as a young man of seventeen, but he says now that he hadn't really encountered Christ and committed his life to him. He continued to smoke and drink alcohol with his friends as he had before. Nevertheless, he often told his peers, "In spite of everything I'm doing with you, I am going to become a pastor sometime in my life." When he was feeling bad after getting high he often joked around by interpreting biblical passages for his friends in crazy ways.

Little by little, though, André left these sinful practices behind and lost the taste for smoking and drinking. He separated himself from his old friends. In effect, following the advice of his father but above all by his own will, he broke definitively with that group in 1992.

In 1998 he and several of his brothers and sisters formed a choral group and began to sing in church. An older brother was the group's composer. The group fell apart when the composer moved away from Mbuji Mayi.

Two years after the dissolution of the group, in 2004, André Kabasela was elected president of the youth of the Bupole congregation. The responsibilities given him, along with the need for the word of God that had taken hold in him, created in André the desire to serve God as a pastor and teacher of the word. It was when Elder Jean Baptiste Muluimba became head of the congregation that André revealed his thoughts about serving in the pulpit. He asked the pastor how that comes about. Elder Muluimba assured him that leading hymns, leading worship, and interpreting scripture would come to him easily enough when the time came.

Indeed, André learned the basics of leading hymns and worship in two days of apprenticeship, and two weeks of practice was nearly enough to lend him a real professionalism. As for teaching the word, Pastor Muluimba recommended that he study the syllabus of sermons the congregation kept in the pulpit. André pored over this document in the light of the Bible.

One day, when Pastor Muluimba and other congregational leaders were unavailable to lead the service, the pastor surprised André by asking him to preach that Sunday as well as lead worship. André pulled it off admirably, using as his text the story of the replacement of Elijah by Elisha. “Everybody’s admiration of the message that I gave convinced me of my talents as a teacher of the word of God,” he says.

André’s greatest accomplishment at Bupole was to revive all the activities of the congregation that had collapsed or gone dormant. This accomplishment was a result of that very first sermon. With this teaching he exhorted the faithful to stand up and serve God, because in serving him one has everything, happiness and eternal life.

In April 2010 André was ordained as an elder of the church by Pastor Benjamin Mubenga, president of the CEM. And in July of that year he was named pastor of the Tshidiendela congregation. He says, “With this consecration and nomination I have seen my dreams come true and my desire to be a servant of God materialize.”

Everywhere he goes and in every circumstance, he is always ready to do something for the Lord. For example, he went to his home village to mourn his paternal uncle. He learned there that one of his cousins had also died and was going to be buried without a sermon for the survivors, so he volunteered to preach.

André is convinced that the money he earned mining diamonds, although it was substantial, was not as valuable as his unstable and unpredictable earnings as a servant of God. Besides, he says, his brothers, who never used to give him money, now do so without being asked. He maintains, “My present life is peaceful, because the little I receive in working for the Lord is managed and spent in good faith.”

Jean Félix Chimbalanga