



Profiles

of Mennonite Faith

Kusangila Kintondo James Jean-Pierre: A Productive Leader

Kusangila Kitondo James Jean-Pierre was born on October 5, 1947, in Kiniangi in the Belgian Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo) in the Panzi sector of the Kasongo-Lunda territory (now Kwango province). His father's name was Mwemba Kavuya and his mother's name was Lubondo. Both were originally from Kiniangi, of the Yaka tribe, and members of the Kiniangi Mennonite Brethren church. Kusangila was the third of five children.

Kusangila began his primary education at the age of five at the American Mennonite Brethren Mission (AMBM) mission station at Panzi in 1952, where he received his certificate in 1957. He made a Christian confession in 1956. Pastor Lusoki Simon's preaching on Romans 3:23 and 6:23 brought peace to his heart.

From 1957 to 1959, Kusangila attended middle school at the AMBM station in Kipungu, Payi-Kongila territory, under the direction of missionary Ben H. Klassen. And from 1959 to 1963, Kusangila attended secondary school in Nyanga, a Congo Inland Mission (CIM) station in Kasai province. Pastor Lusoki baptized him in Kiniangi in 1960. His studies were interrupted by the Pierre Mulele war that began in September 1963. Because of the war, the school in Nyanga was temporarily closed and

the students were relocated by airplane to Kikwit in December 1963.

In January 1964, John B. Kliever, the legal representative of the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches in the Congo (now *Communauté des Églises des Frères mennonites au Congo* or CEFMC), requested and secured special enrollment at the state high school in Kikwit for the students from Nyanga. After experiencing discrimination from some students and teachers, Kusangila applied for admission to the state school in Kenge. When the rebellion ended, he returned to the mission school in Nyanga to complete his high school education.

Kusangila Kitondo married Luboko Mwemba on September 7, 1967, at the CEFMC church in Panzi. Their marriage was strong and the two of them collaborated in worship and other church activities. Kusangila encouraged his wife in ministry leadership and Gospel proclamation. The couple had eight children—three boys and five girls.

As a father, Kusangila was supportive of his children, offering advice and dialogue, displaying temperance. He was a smiling, non-aggressive man who liked to share biblical teachings with his children. He wanted all his children to grow as leaders in their respective professions, advising them to put God before all things.



Kusangila Kintondo in 1991 (1947–2020)

Since Kusangila did not have the financial means for advanced education, he started working as a primary school teacher. The CEFMC authorities assigned him to the Kafumba elementary school in Kwilu and then to the Manzemba school in Panzi.

While he was principal of the primary school in Manzemba, Kusangila received a calling to become a pastor. Other pastors and missionary John Ratzlaff encouraged him in this vocation. From 1972 to 1976, he studied theology at the *Institut supérieure théologique de Kinshasa* (now *Université Chrétienne de Kinshasa* or UCKIN). Upon completion of his theological studies, Kusangila was assigned to the CEFMC Mbandu church in Kikwit from 1976 to 1983. At the same time, he served as a professor and director at the Kikwit Bible Institute. He was ordained in Panzi on March 20, 1983.

Rev. Kusangila rose through all the ranks of the CEFMC's administrative hierarchy. He was elected as administrative secretary and deputy legal representative in 1979, a position he held until 1984. He was then elected general secretary and legal representative of the CEFMC from 1984 to 1991. During this time, he received a scholarship to study at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University) in Winnipeg, Canada. Under his leadership, the church grew. By the end of his tenure, the CEFMC had a membership of 58,000 in three church regions, 48 districts, and 55 churches.

Kusangila accomplished many things during his life of ministry leadership with the CEFMC. He was involved in construction, animal husbandry, development, inter-community collaboration, and establishing churches and educational institutions.

As a CEFMC leader, he and Ernest Dyck led the church's participation in the Protestant Agricultural Program (PAP) initiated by Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services International or MBMSI (now Multiply). He was a breeder of small and large livestock and a small-scale trader and entrepreneur. Kusangila was also involved in several business cooperatives in collaboration with MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates).

Kusangila was a founding member of the Habitat for Humanity project for the population of Kanzombi in Kikwit in 1982, securing loans with Canadian partners. He also helped start the Lukolela Savings and Credit Union and the Protestant guest house, both in Kikwit. Under his leadership, roofs were built for some 20 CEFMC churches, primarily in Kwilu, Kwango, and Kinshasa.

Well-known as a wise leader, Kusangila was able to give concrete recommendations when conflicts arose. For example, during his tenure, the collaboration between CEFMC and the MBMSI missionaries was sometimes difficult, because the mission still held a lot of economic and financial power. Under his leadership, it was resolved that if the legal representative was a Congolese, the general secretary should be an expatriate missionary to represent MBMSI. This contributed to a better collaboration for some time. Eventually, the roles of the legal representative and the general secretary were combined, and the expatriate missionaries withdrew from the leadership roles of the CEFMC.

He served as pastor of the CEFMC church in Bumbu from 2007 until his death in 2020, following a short illness. He is warmly remembered as a productive leader and collaborator.



Profiles of Mennonite Faith: No. 74, Fall 2023.

Written by Malebe Mubwayele Abdon; translated into English by Anicka Fast. This biography was first published, along with footnotes and sources, in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (<https://dacb.org/stories/demreprengo/kusangila/>) and is adapted here with permission.

E-mail: jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca • www.mbhistory.org

Readers are invited to recommend stories for future Profiles and to contribute church and institutional records to the nearest Historical Commission archive (Hillsboro, KS; Fresno, CA; Abbotsford, BC; and Winnipeg, MB).