

November 24, 2014



**EDUCATION** - The Luzolo Centre for the specially challenged persons, is one of the first missions in the Province of Congo Kinshasa; it has been in existence since 1976 in the tourist city of Boma. What then has been going on between the children who attend it and the Lord, that in spite of their handicaps, we feel called to praise Him with them?

This school was created so that children with handicaps living in the city might find improvement through physical, psychological and social rehabilitation. With time, the school, the Luzolo Centre, became an integrated school, although it maintained its special characteristic, that is, the objective of its foundation. This is why children with handicaps and normal children from poor families are living side by side one another. As a matter of fact, there is both the teaching tailored to specialized needs and teaching structured according to the national program. In order not to favour one category at the expense of the other, the “normal” children follow the primary cycle until they are awarded their Certificate, and then go on to secondary and higher studies. The children with a motor handicap that has not affected their intellectual capacity study with the others and that does not create any problems with respect to adaptation.

With regard to the teaching adapted to special needs, in the name of equality of opportunity and of human rights, there is no age limit. In general, we accept youngsters from 5 to 25 years of age. The oldest ones are accepted in the Centre for as long as they wish to stay. They stop coming when they get tired of it or when their family leaves Boma for another city or village. In many cases, the parents prefer that their older children spend their time at the school rather than wandering in the streets at the risk of being victims of abuse. It also happens that the school asks the parents to keep them at home when their behavior represents a danger for other children. However, this latter is rarely the case, since most of these children are very affectionate and closely attached; they like

to have company.

When there is a new case, he or she undergoes a test that permits the identification of the handicap, so the child may be directed to either primary or specialized education. Specialized education is presented in the following manner:

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preparatory year: in this class are those with psychomotor problems, language difficulties, behavioural problems or those suffering from Down syndrome... At the end of one school year, if there has been progress, the child moves into the second preparatory year.

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preparatory year: on this level, what was received in the beginning is strengthened. When the result is favourable, the child is guided to the first year of primary education; special attention is required on the part of the teacher. In the two preparatory classes, the courses emphasize psychomotor skills.

This year, seeing that the older boys and girls were becoming quite numerous and they were not leaving, we regrouped them in one classroom. These are the ones that were not able to cross the threshold of the two preparatory classes and the first year of primary education. They know the rules of hygiene and of courtesy and know how to protect themselves from danger, even though most of them have problems with the dimensions of space and time.

Among them we have the famous Rivoly, who is 24 years old. He began attending our institution at the age of 7. A good person and handsome, very polite young man, he is loved by

many in his section of the city and in that of others. He is able to count in order to 5; the rest is left to your imagination... He knows all the letters that spell his name and surname, but it is a real problem for him to write them. He suffers from a severe mental deficiency, which renders him unstable and subject to memory loss. That is more noticeable in activities requiring an intellectual and manual formation. However, he is aware of all that happens in the diocese and in the life of the Church. It is with great exactitude he gives information about the diocese; he knows quite a few of the priests and the names of their parishes, but also the FMM Sisters who replaced one another as head of the school. Present at all the meetings held for young people and for the ceremonies in the diocese, he is quite independent and disturbs no one; he follows the Masses with unflagging attention and composes spontaneous prayer intentions related to the daily readings. He loves all that relates to spiritual life. Nothing else appeals to him, nor offers him an occasion to show interest...

His plan is to become a priest, the chaplain of Luzolo Centre, and when he speaks of that, it is with passion and often with expressions such as these: "When I am the chaplain, I will pray to the Holy Spirit so that all those impossibly retarded ones stop troubling the Directress and the teachers..."; "I am mentally retarded and the others are just plain retarded." When he points out the difference between the two, he says: "I do not slobber. I have a very small problem with my memory, but the others slobber."

When they hear that, the others clap and laugh loudly, and he himself, raising his arm and two fingers in a victory sign, goes out of the classroom with his followers. When they are asked to return to the classroom, Rivoly says: "Now is the time to praise God for everything! Why not give Him praise?" And he always adds: "Lord, when will you open up my memory so that I may serve you as a priest, your servant?" Although the others go into the classroom, he remains walking about here and there, observing nature, like a contemplative. With the Sisters in our community, we are thinking of directing him to the catechesis of persons living with a handicap, but how can he do that "without a minimum of instruction and formation"?

Yes, why not give praise to God, who puts in our heart the desire to collaborate with His work. Why not give Him praise for what we are! Why not love Him, adore Him and serve Him. The psalmist also says: "We who are the living, let us bless the Lord!"

Why not give You praise, Lord?

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Source: FMM