

**Charlotte priest worries about Congo genocide**  
**by Katya Lezin, The Charlotte Observer**  
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Father Andre, as he is known at St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, hopes the Charlotte community will pick up the call for action in his homeland of the Congo.

Andre Mangongo, 39, is a world traveler. He was born in the Congo (formerly Zaire), and has lived in Cameroon, Belgium, the Philippines, Taiwan, China, Mongolia, Canada and the United States.

He is fluent in French, English, Mandarin, Lingala (a dialect of the Congo) and Ewondo, the language of Cameroon. He now calls Charlotte home, where he serves as one of two priests at St. Gabriel's Catholic Church in South Charlotte.

Mangongo went to a Catholic high school in Kinshasa, the Congo's capitol, where he dreamed of becoming a priest because, he says, "I wanted to say the Mass."

Upon graduation, he joined an international missionary group that traveled the world "preaching the gospel and working with the poor."

After finishing his 13-year training to become a priest in 2006, Mangongo fulfilled his dream of earning a frock and being able to celebrate Mass. He continued to travel as an international missionary, returning to his former home in 2004 and again in 2009 to visit his parents and three siblings. He was appalled with the conditions in his home country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"The poverty was so much worse," he says. "The level of corruption, the lack of human rights, it was just awful."

While stationed in Winnipeg, Canada, Mangongo worked on a Catholic program to welcome African immigrants to the country and help them get acclimated to life in North America.

Whenever he encountered fellow Congolese, he told them, "We have to band together to save our home."

With his family keeping him abreast of the deteriorating conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mangongo feared there would soon be no home to save.

Mangongo moved to Charlotte in October 2010, working in the diocese of Charlotte.

"The people at St. Gabe's were my first contact with the American people," Mangongo says. "They embraced me and made me feel right at home."

Mangongo also likes the Charlotte weather and he has become fond of Southern biscuits. In March 2011, he made the decision to stay, joining the priesthood at St. Gabe's.

Part of Charlotte's appeal, is its vibrant Congolese community.

"There are about 3,000 Congolese living in North Carolina," Mangongo says, "and several hundred living in Charlotte."

The concern about conditions back home is universal, as is the frustration that the plight of their country does not seem to be on anyone else's radar.

"There is a common feeling among Congolese people abroad," says Mangongo, "that we cannot be happy if things are not good at home."

To that end, Mangongo is working with Congolese churches and leadership communities to launch an awareness campaign “so that people know what is going on in the Congo.”

Mangongo is frustrated that the Congolese genocide (more than six million people have died since the civil war of 1997) “does not seem to register with the American people.”

He is doing everything he can to change that. He urges people who care about the ongoing genocide in the Congo, the deplorable poverty and that so many children cannot go to school to become “friends of the Congo” and join his effort to get politicians, the media and the American people aware and involved.

“I have carved out a nice life here in Charlotte,” Mangongo says, “but I cannot be happy while so many people in the Congo are suffering.”

He worries about retaliation against his family in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but he knows his efforts are important.

“I believe in what I’m doing,” he says.

Katya Lezin is a freelance writer.

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