

NOVEMBER 2024
ISSUE NO 1

New School Year at the St. John Paul II Theological Seminary of Lodja (D.R. Congo)

*I will give you
pastors after my
own heart (Jer.
3:15)*

October 22, 2024 marked the official opening of the New School Year 2024-2025 at the St. John Paul II Theological Seminary. The following events were celebrated:

- *The Solemn Holy Mass for the feast St. John Paul II, the Patron Saint of the Seminary, and the opening of the school year*
- *The welcoming of the new members of the community, namely, Father Laurent Okitakatshi as the new President-Rector, 16 new seminarians, and 3 new Franciscan Sisters*
- *The 40th Anniversary of the founding of the Seminary (1984-2024)*



Long Procession for the Solemn Opening Mass on the Feast of St. John Paul II

***Shepherd, Lord, and
shepherd with me
(St. John
Damascene)***

The Seminary opened its doors on October 15, 2024, but we still followed the tradition of celebrating the Solemn Opening Mass on the Feast of Saint John Paul II, our Patron Saint. The Very Reverend Raphael Okitafumba, Vicar General of the Diocese of Tshumbe and Spiritual Director of the Seminary, was delegated by Bishop Vincent Tshomba, Bishop of the diocese of Tshumbe, to celebrate Mass. At the end of Mass, the new President-Rector, Father Laurent Okitakatshi, took the oath of fidelity to the teachings of the Church as a Theology Professor at the Saint John Paul II Seminary.



Fr. Laurent taking the oath of fidelity to the Church's teachings as the new President-Rector and Theology Professor at the Saint John Paul II Seminary.

After the Solemn Mass, a banquet was offered in honor of Saint John Paul II and the new members of the Seminary community. Seminarians beautifully performed the play entitled “Le prix d’une cruauté” (The Price of Cruelty), a drama that teaches the need to lead with love and to serve in humility. The president of seminarians gave a speech in which he welcomed the new President-Rector, introduced the new seminarians, and highlighted the hopes and goals for the new school year from a student perspective. Father Laurent Okitakatshi also gave a speech in which he thanked the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Kasayi for appointing him the new President-Rector of the second largest seminary in the region. He presented his vision for the Seminary and urged the staff, faculty and students to collaborate for the success of the noble mission of forming future priests for Holy Mother Church. He paid homage to all former rectors and formators who worked at the St. John Paul II Seminary since its foundation in 1984.

For those unfamiliar with the history of our Seminary, Father Laurent Okitakatshi is the eighth President-Rector. Before him, seven priests led our Seminary. Father Nicolas Djomo was the first President-Rector and builder of the St. John Paul II Seminary. From acquiring the land to completing the entire construction, Father Nicolas Djomo left an indelible mark on every aspect of our house of formation. After fourteen years of service, he was appointed the Bishop of the Diocese of Tshumbe. He is currently the Bishop Emeritus of the same diocese and a close friend of the Seminary. After Father Nicolas Djomo, the following priests took turn leading the Seminary as President-Rectors: Father Louis Djemba (1997), Father Daniel Okashoko (1997-2004), Father François Kitenge (2004-2009), Father Médard Lokalo (2009-2015) Father François Pongo (2015-2023), Father Didier Okito (2023-2024). Father Laurent and the entire Seminary community look forward to the 50th anniversary of our Alma Mater. We hope that the readers of this newsletter and many more friends will become faithful and generous partners in the Seminary's mission to raise form holy, happy, and healthy priests for the Universal Church

Important dates in the history of the St. John Paul II Seminary

- 1981: Bishop Albert Yungu, Bishop of the Diocese of Tshumbe, initiated the idea of having a Seminary in his diocese. The idea was accepted by the other bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Kasayi and Rome gave its approval.
- 1983: Bishop Albert Yungu acquired land, 1 square mile, in the village of Shapembe, 7 miles from the city of Lodja. Father Nicolas Djomo, the appointed President-Rector, started the construction of the new Seminary.
- 1984: The Seminary was blessed and the first inaugurated. The school year started on October 30 with men from six different dioceses sent to start their college in Lodja. Only Philosophy was offered at the time.
- 1986: Rome sent the Nuncio to visit the Seminary
- 1991: The School of Theology was open
- 1995-1996: The College of Philosophy was transferred to the diocese of Kabinda
- March 3, 1996: First Diaconate Ordination at the St. John Paul II Seminary
- 1999-2000: Because of war, roads were closed and no seminarian was able to travel. Consequently, the St. John Paul II reopened its three year college program for philosophy until 2005.
- From 2005 until today, the St. John Paul II Seminary is only a school of theology. Next academic year (2025-2026), the Seminary will become a department of Theology of the University of Notre de Tshumbe. With this accreditation, our students will start receiving University degrees accepted around the world.

“Africans, be your own missionaries.”
(Pope St. Paul VI)



Fr. Laurent, Fr. Raphael, and a group of seminarians borrowed a truck to go gather sticks for cooking. The Seminary doesn't have modern stoves.



Fr. Laurent in the kitchen adjusting woods in the traditional stove as the cooks prepare dinner for students.

Staff, Permanent formators and faculty

The St. John Paul II Seminary has 21 employees, 6 six permanent priest formators who, together with the 15 visiting Theology professors, form the faculty. The names of permanent formators are: Fr. Laurent Okitakatshi, PhD (President-Rector) New Testament Professor ; Fr. Raphael Okitafumba, PhD (Moral Theology Professor and Spiritual Director of the house); Fr. André Odimola, PhD (Pastoral Theology Professor and Academic Dean); Fr. Didier Okito, PhD (Church History Professor, Librarian, and coordinator of sustenance farming); Fr. Médard Lokalo, PhD (Canon Law Professor and Music Director). The six formators work for free. They only get room and board.



Emile Nsombo, Seminarian in Theology IV, gave a brilliant presentation on Pope Francis' new encyclical entitled "Dilexit Nos." It was a delightful moment of learning and discussion among seminarians and professors.





The Seminary community gathered around Fr. Didier Okito, one of the permanent formators, to pray for the repose of the soul of his father, Joseph Okito, who passed away on All Saints Day. It was a moment of consolation for the Okito family and a witness of faith for the local community in Lodja.



Fr. Laurent with all seminarians after the first Sunday Mass at the Seminary. They are standing between classrooms (the academic area), in front of the Chapel.

More information to come in the future via our website in progress (www.seminairejpji.org). Please follow us on facebook (Grand Séminaire St. Jean-Paul II de Lodja) and like our YouTube channel soon to be launched (Grand Séminaire St. Jean-Paul II de Lodja). Other contacts: rectorat@seminairejpji.org; okitakatshi89@gmail.com; +243 81 616 0066 (same number for WhatsApp, replacing Fr. Laurent's US number). Please pray for us as we pray for all of you who will receive this newsletter. God bless you!