

Farewell, Father Guillaume

I was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Father Guillaume Ndayishimiye Bonja on 26 August. He had been a very dear and loyal friend for a long time. I believe I first met him at the international gathering in Quebec in 1998, and since then our paths have crossed on numerous occasions, mainly in Africa, the most beautiful of all continents! He served for many years as chaplain to the East African Province.

He was a Jesuit priest, originally from Bukeye, some fifty kilometres north-east of Bujumbura.

He was in Kigali when Marie-Hélène Mathieu and I came for a formation session thirty years ago, and we met up very often: at the international meetings in Madrid (2006) and Lourdes (2008), at a formation session in Alexandria in 2010, and at meetings and assemblies in Kigali and Bujumbura. All this led to a great friendship developing between us.



The last time we met was in Rwanda in 2014, in Kigali for a provincial assembly and in Kibeho for the solemnity of 15 August.

We have corresponded frequently since then, and it was always a joy to receive his messages.

My fondest memory is of the visit we made together to his family in Bukeye in August 2009; this took place following the provincial assembly held at the Jesuit Spiritual Centre in Kiriri, in the hills above Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi. This assembly took place just after a gathering of Jesuit alumni from around the world, attended by Father Adolfo Nicolas, the Superior General of the Jesuits at the time.

He was the one who had stayed in the room where I was accommodated!

Father Guillaume took me to see his father, who lives on a hill on the other side of the pass where the Nile and Congo rivers divide. I was able to discover how families live in the hills of Burundi, as we were invited to lunch by his sister, the mother of five lively boys! Before heading back down, we visited the parish church where Guillaume was baptised, confirmed and ordained. To mark his ordination, a road was built to connect his parents' house to the village! I also have fond memories of the conversation we had on the way about the events of 1994 in Rwanda...

Recently, Guillaume had left Burundi to go to Butare, and then to the Christus Centre in Kigali, Rwanda. It was there that the first part of his funeral services took place; the rest will be held at the Jesuit Centre in Kiriri, Bujumbura, on 7 September.

Farewell, dear Guillaume; I know you wanted 'Faith and Light' to begin in Tanzania, where you often travelled... now you will continue to help us! May God keep you in His peace! ■

Ghislain du Chéné
Former international coordinator