

Vatican excommunicates former Catholic priest from Zambia

LUSAKA, Zambia – A former Catholic priest from Zambia who is an advocate of optional celibacy for clergy and the ordination of women has been excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

Bishop George Lungu of Chipata, president of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, announced the excommunication of Father Luciano Anzanga Mbewe June 9.

The bishop said in a statement that the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith took the action because Father Mbewe entered into schism for establishing the Catholic Apostolic National Church of Zambia.

"This decision to excommunicate Rev. Luciano Anzanga Mbewe is motivated by two main facts, the foundation of a schismatic church, Catholic Apostolic National Church of Zambia, and his declaration to have received a so-called Episcopal ordination by clergy linked to the old Catholic Church of Europe," Bishop Lungu said.

The bishop said Father Mbewe is no longer a member of the Catholic Church and any religious ceremonies he leads are being done outside of the church.

"Even if signs and symbols as well as attire being used during the services resemble those of the Catholic Church, the services conducted are not part of the Catholic Church," the bishop said.

Bishop Lungu urged Catholics to continue praying for Father Mbewe even though he is separated from the church.

Father Mbewe, 54, formerly of the Ndola Diocese in Zambia, was forced to resign from the priesthood in 2001 by Bishop Dennis DeJong, now deceased. At the time, Bishop DeJong said Father Mbewe was "having difficulties in being faithful to mandatory celibacy" after the former was discovered to have fathered two children while serving as a priest.

However, Father Mbewe still continued to perform pastoral duties and advocated for what he termed “the restoration of a married priesthood in the church” as well as the ordination of women to the priesthood.

In 2006, Father Mbewe was ordained bishop by excommunicated Zambian Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo. Together they founded a splinter church, known as the Catholic Apostolic National Church of Zambia, which they launched in December 2007 with a call for more Catholic priests to join them.