

## **Word from the Rector**

In 2019 we set out to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Université Catholique de Bukavu (UCB). However, many events that later followed up the celebration day on 21 November proved to be far from happy. First, we saw the passing away of our former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Augustin Bashwira. Then, although year 2020 started well and saw many lectures and exams be successfully organized, starting from March 2020 came a period of personal tragedies and general uncertainty as the Covid-19 pandemic reached all countries and regions, including ours. The pandemic disturbed our normal daily life; the University had to close during the following 5 months. Lectures could not be given, little research could be carried out, and all UCB anniversary and other celebration plans (e.g., the bestowing of the Doctor honoris causa title to five laureates) had to be postponed. But, “à quelque chose malheur est bon”, the forced closing of the University led us to introduce and implement an online teaching system. Although online provision of teaching was an objective long sought by the University, in order to allow our students to continue studying from home and not to lose the year during the university lockdown, we were led to implement this teaching system in emergency, with the known technical limitations due to lack of computers or smartphones by many students, and to the high Internet expenses. Since then, our staff has become used to holding meetings online instead of on campus. During the pandemic, many of us lost relatives and friends, but, “pauperes Deus amat”, the pandemic did not reach the catastrophe level or pandemonium situation that had been predicted by many on the basis of the poor socio-economic conditions and the poor medical infrastructures of our African countries. As of August 2020, doors to auditoria reopened and normal lectures resumed. However, in order to cover for the time lost during the University closing, and to catch up with lectures that could not be given online, the 2019-2020 academic year was extended, and the opening of the 2020-2021 year postponed up to this 14 December 2020.

What is to be expected of the new year? Which way are we going to be heading? It is clear that some of the uncertainty of 2020 will continue to prevail in 2021. For example, we do not know how the Covid-19 pandemic is going to evolve. Will there be more waves of spread of the disease, and are the eventual future waves going to relatively spare us as the first wave did? Now as vaccines against the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 have started to be administered in some rich countries, will vaccination also become accessible to poor populations such as ours? On the socio-political front, we do not know whether our country is finally going to enjoy stability and progress instead of the insecurity and personal interest-driven present corruption and struggles led by some politicians. It is very likely that our University will continue to have limited financial means to carry out its projects. But whatever the situation nothing will stop the ambition of all of us to try and achieve excellence.

Let us, at the start of this new academic year, first wish warm welcome to all our students, especially to those newly registered. Also welcome into this new year to our staff, especially the newly appointed members. Second, despite the above-mentioned uncertainties, at UCB we shall keep the same commitment to fulfil, to the best we can, the three main missions of the University: education, research, service to the community. As already stated during the last year, in all activities, students and their interest will remain the core target of our action. We shall pursue our efforts to promote self-study by increasing access of students to digital

material, as well as to facilitate their physical mobility to distant campuses. All efforts will be done to improve student-teacher communication, and to have final year students complete their dissertation work in the first and second examination sessions. Using locally established programs but also opportunities through cooperation with our international partners, we shall promote further training of our young staff to Master and PhD levels. Administrative staff will not be forgotten in the efforts to improve competence through continued training. We shall try to further stimulate income generating activities of UCB, such as the increased exploitation of our agricultural lands. We shall also continue to promote human values such as honesty, hard work, respect for everyone, equity, etc.

We wish to all a healthy and productive year.

Kanigula MUBAGWA,  
13 Dec 2020.