



Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission International Central Council

P.O. Box 744 • Goshen, IN 46526-0744 • 440 Main St., Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5 Canada
Ph: 574/535-0077 • Email: aimm@aimmint.org

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Dear AIMM Family Members,

It is with a heart full of gratitude that I address this letter to you now. You are the hands, feet, and mind of Christ, because his Spirit dwells in each of you. You have been, and continue to be, moved by the Spirit to share God's love with the African members of our family and beyond, through your prayers and your financial gifts entrusted to AIMM.

The generosity of your prayers and your giving are expressions of Divine love- the love that has sustained and motivated AIMM right from its beginnings until the present. Over the last 15 years I have been privileged to experience this love in action on a daily basis. As I reflect back on this last decade and a half, I realize that I owe God everything. I also owe you more than I can count. This work in which you participate actively has been God's gift to me. In the year 2000, Lynda, our children, and I returned to the USA after 14 years of mission work in Benin, West Africa. I thought to myself, "Now what? What kind of job do I look for? What could I possibly find that would use my mission experience?" I thought I would have to close that chapter and try to move on. But how does one simply "move on" from amazing, challenging, and at times frustrating intercultural relationships that form key linkage points in the worldwide Body of Christ? AIMM's Executive Coordinator position then opened, and I was given a wonderful opportunity to live out my deepest calling, together with all of you. I am so grateful.

Isaiah 54:2 encourages us to "enlarge the site of your tent... do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes." AIMM at its best is hospitable and generous in this way. I want to share with you a few of the myriad ways in which I have seen Christ living, moving, growing in and through AIMM over my time as Executive Coordinator.

- In **2006** during our annual meetings in South Africa, AIMM North American partners spent time sitting and listening to each of AIMM's African partner church representatives as they poured out their hopes and frustrations in individual sessions. We North Americans felt we had little to offer to the problems being exposed beyond, "we are listening. We are with you." As our meetings drew to a close, Damien Pelendé, then leader of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo, a "new" church just getting to know AIMM, told us: "Our church is committing to becoming permanent members of AIMM. We want to be in fellowship with you, to support AIMM as AIMM is supporting us." Today, this church has become a solid contributing member of the AIMM circle. AIMM's tent was expanding.
- **2008-2009** saw a significant economic downturn in the Western world, which sent its repercussions everywhere. In an amazing display of tenacity and commitment, your financial support and fervent prayers for AIMM ministries DID NOT DROP during those years. While in the DR Congo the price of diamonds and other raw materials plummeted and local African economies suffered, AIMM was able to continue to extend critical support to our partner churches. In a further development, Brad and Stan Graber, sons of longtime AIMM Congo missionaries Harold and Gladys Graber, started Hope for Congo, an effort to encourage and equip Congolese believers for life and ministry. Other AIMM-associated ministries eventually followed, such as Charles Buller's leadership training work. Talk in Congo about having been abandoned by North American Mennonites, a sentiment felt most keenly during the 1997-2003 civil war, began to fade.
- A particular joy for me has been the privilege of working closely with two other Africa mission administrators, Steve Wiebe-Johnson of Mennonite Mission Network, and Hippolyto Tshimanga of Mennonite Church Canada. The Spirit gave us gifts- the capacity to get along with each other, to

"Following Jesus, Making Disciples, Serving the Church"

The ICC prays for Hippo, Rod, and Steve in South Africa in 2017



have difficult conversations, and to come to consensus about how to handle various challenges. I became aware that if I simply contented myself to react to current problems by helping fund our partners' responses, I maintained those partners' dependence on AIMM. Through many conversations with African partners and between us, relying on Hippo's Congolese origins, experiences, and insights, as well as Steve's background and training in international development, we came to understand that our current priority must be the economic empowerment of our African partner churches. Our goal has become to empower our partner churches so that in succeeding generations they

will have the increasing capacity to finance their own church activities and mission vision.

- The **2012 Centennial** celebrations of AIMM and Mennonite Church of Congo, and the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo's 50th anniversary, were also significant "markers" along the road. Once again, your support was tremendous, as a delegation of over 25 persons from North America and Europe traveled to the DRC to celebrate with the churches there. AIMM also held 8 well-attended regional events in North America toward the end of that year. AIMM Administrator Emeritus Jim Bertsche and I worked together to organize those events and we also collaborated on the collection of stories published in conjunction with the celebrations, *The Jesus Tribe*.
- In **2013**, your prayers and contributions enabled AIMM to begin training agriculturalists from each of our partner churches in sustainable and economically viable agriculture, animal husbandry, and marketing at the Songhai Center in Benin. Six persons received this training and each of our African church partners now has someone who is available to train others and strengthen farmers' economic gains.
- **2013-2015** saw tremendous growth in the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Burkina Faso, as baptisms added 30% more members in little over a year! The quality witness and relationships of many believers over time in a majority Muslim context allowed such growth while largely preserving good relationships with Muslim neighbors. Parallel to this numeric growth was the start of a successful micro loans project. From its beginnings in 2013, this program has successfully loaned the equivalent of \$130,000 U.S. to several hundred individuals in the church, helping them to improve agricultural yields and expand businesses. AIMM's North American and European partners provided the capital for these loans, and the church has done an exceptional job of managing the repeated distribution and repayment process.

Lydie Yougbaré is baptized in Bobo Dioulasso

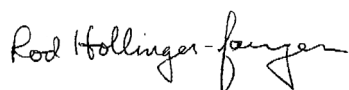


- **2016-2018** AIMM focused on the humanitarian crisis in the Kasai region of the DRC, as the conflict between Kamuina Nsapu, government soldiers and various ethnic militias saw thousands of people killed and over 1.5 million displaced. The combined Mennonite response was led by Mennonite churches in Congo and administered by MCC. You participated wholeheartedly in this effort that served to turn many persons' grief, loss and bitterness into new life and hope through provision of food, shelter, human caring, and land upon which to work toward increasing self-sufficiency. The strong testimonies of Congolese Mennonite churches who welcomed and cared for numerous refugees, and administered assistance, led to growth in these churches.
- In **2016-2017**, the Congo Literacy program was visioned, conceived, and administered by Adolphine Tshiana, Marie Fumana and Hélène Mbombo, Mennonite women leaders of the 3 major Congolese Mennonite denominations, with the help of Joseph Nkongolo, a trained expert in development. So far this program has mobilized close to 200 persons, mostly women, who volunteer significant amounts of time and use their expertise, motivated by God's love, to teach literacy in their local churches. Over 3,500 students, mostly women and children, have benefitted from this program to this point. As COVID-19 restrictions are loosening, current plans are to hold 4 teacher training events before the end of 2020. Your prayers and support have been instrumental in mobilizing the needed funds and expertise to begin and maintain this work.
- In **2018**, the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Burkina Faso held its 40th anniversary event in November. A new church building in Orodara, built with help from your support, was packed as nearly 1,000 people, including members from across the church as well as Burkinabé guests joined with international partners to celebrate God's faithfulness in building the church. The church's pioneer leader, Siaka Traoré, challenged the younger generation to take up the leadership mantle and to carry the church forward by growing vision, commitment, and hard work.
- In **2019**, there were informal contacts between Angolan Mennonite leaders and AIMM over a number of years, but at the 2019 AIMM annual meeting of our International Central Council, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" to invite 3 Angolan Mennonite conferences into relationship with AIMM. On November 12 we will hold the first Angola Partnership Council (online). The Spirit continues to expand the AIMM tent! This decision was made in faith and trust that the Lord who has provided for this ministry for 108 years will continue to do so into the future.

The God who used pioneers of faith to mobilize, send missionaries, and fund Congo Inland Mission/ AIMM in 1912, will continue to walk with, call, inspire, and bless the AIMM family. I will be leaving the AIMM office as Executive Coordinator at year end or early next year, as I hand over responsibility to a new Coordinator. But I will not be leaving the AIMM family. I will continue to support this work prayerfully and financially, as I have since I joined the family in 2005.

I want to encourage each of you to likewise continue your prayers and contributions through this year end and in future years. Your support is a central part of AIMM's ongoing life and witness. AIMM is an experiment in being the church together interculturally and internationally. There is still much to learn, much work to do before Jesus' prayer is answered in fullness: "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Let us continue, moved and inspired by the Spirit, to work toward the fulfillment of all things when love and justice will reign and when "all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

My deep gratitude to each of you,



Rod Hollinger-Janzen
AIMM Outgoing Executive Coordinator

Your prayers and financial support of any amount empower us to partner with a growing number of African churches and support their flourishing as lifegiving communities of faith. **Estate gifts and IRA distributions are two especially significant ways that you can participate with us in this growth. These gifts continue your legacy as a mission partner and are an investment in the future of the church in Africa.** If you have any questions about these or any other way to partner with us, please contact our office so that we can find the best solution for you. You are an essential part of the AIMM family.

