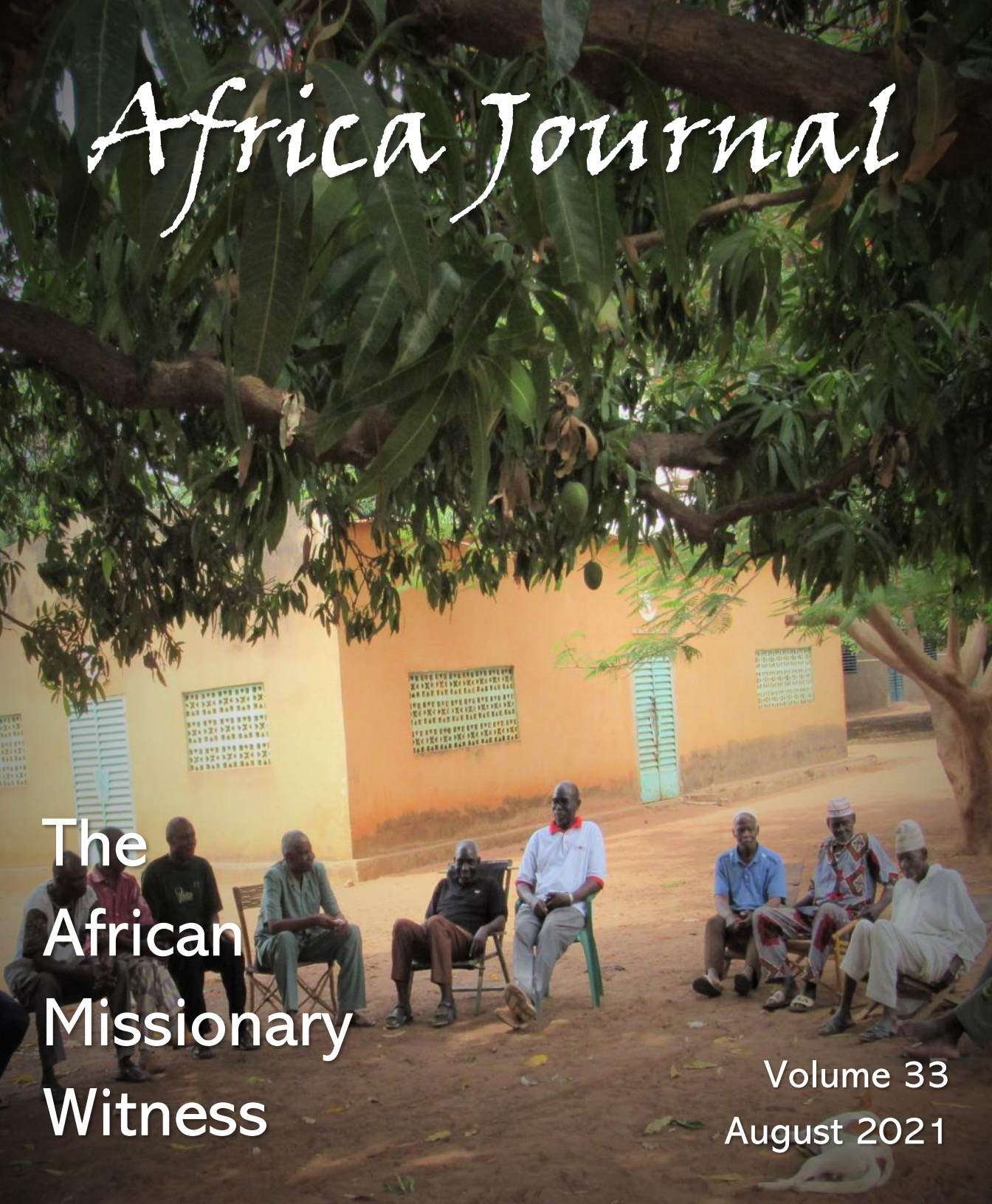


Africa Journal

The
African
Missionary
Witness

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Children at school in Mai-Ndombe

Missionary Work at Kiri

By Reverend Nathan Mudiji Makumbi, MB Church of the Congo Mission Department Director

In 1998 the Mennonite Brethren Churches of the Congo started evangelization work among indigenous people at Kiri in the Mai-Ndombe Province of the DR Congo. The church chose Reverend Nyoka Mbudikila as missionary for the task. Since then, he has planted 25 local churches in an environment that has been hostile to the Gospel. Through this work the church has trained and ordained several Batwa/Pygmy pastors and evangelists.

Reverend Mbudikila also started two elementary schools to benefit Batwa children. The

church's mission department supports the schools by providing a modest stipend to the teachers while waiting for the government to take on their salaries and by distributing school uniforms, basic school supplies, and flip-flop sandals for the students.

As the pioneer of the church's missionary engagement in Kiri, Reverend Mbudikila has spent 23 years in this mission field. At present, the church is looking for ways to provide some well-deserved assistance to help him retire from this field and to transition to a less active role due to some physical limitations and health challenges.

The African Missionary Witness



Pastor Madou (second from left) with his family

In the story of God's people, there is a theme of mission-oriented witness in which AIMM's ministries are deeply rooted. From Abraham's departure out of the land of his youth to the accounts of Paul's missionary journeys, there is a strong biblical tradition of ministry across national and cultural boundaries. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries European and North American missionaries found inspiration in that witness and ministered in Africa, seeking to found communities of Christians as Paul had done in the first century. It was never a straightforward task, often complicated by cultural misunderstandings and entanglements with colonial systems. The seeds that were planted have blossomed into communities of faith whose reach and ministry far exceed what AIMM's early missionaries might have hoped to initiate or expect.

Today those churches that grew to maturity during the twentieth century are carrying the torch of intercultural witness. AIMM supports the ministry of African churches and their missionaries who continue the work that had



Rev. Kutumbana (center) with literacy teachers

been confined to foreign missionaries over much of the modern missionary movement. Missionaries from Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren churches in the DR Congo and Burkina Faso are reaching out across national and cultural boundaries in initiatives of missionary witness. Some receive support from AIMM's African Missionary fund while others are sustained entirely by local funds. Led by the Spirit, they are following in Jesus' footsteps as they continue the ministry that he confided to those who follow him in every time

and place, and the vibrant life of AIMM's partner churches testifies to God's faithfulness.

The Mennonite Brethren of the Congo sent Mbudikila Nioka to work among the Batwa (sometimes referred to as Pygmies) near Kiri in the province of Mai-Ndombe in 1998. During more than two decades of work there, his ministry has helped initiate 25 churches, which today count

more than 2,000 baptized members.

Reverend Mbudikila is advanced in age and has recently experienced some health challenges. The church is prayerfully celebrating what God has done through his missionary work and is searching for ways to help him transition to a period of reduced workload. Reverend Mbudikila's work is featured on page 2 of this *Africa Journal*.



Reverend Nyoka Mbudikila

The Evangelical Mennonite Church of the Congo sent Bellarmin Ngalula and Mimie Kanku to work in Bandundu Ville, some 400 kilometers Northeast of Kinshasa in 2015. After six years of missionary work in the region, God has blessed their work with two new congregations, and they are in the process of planting a third congregation.

Séraphin Kutumbana of the Community of Mennonites in the Congo has been working in the Batéké Plateau, where a church was inaugurated earlier this year (featured on pages 7-9 of this *Africa Journal*). The church

also has sent Lenda Gizungu Keita as



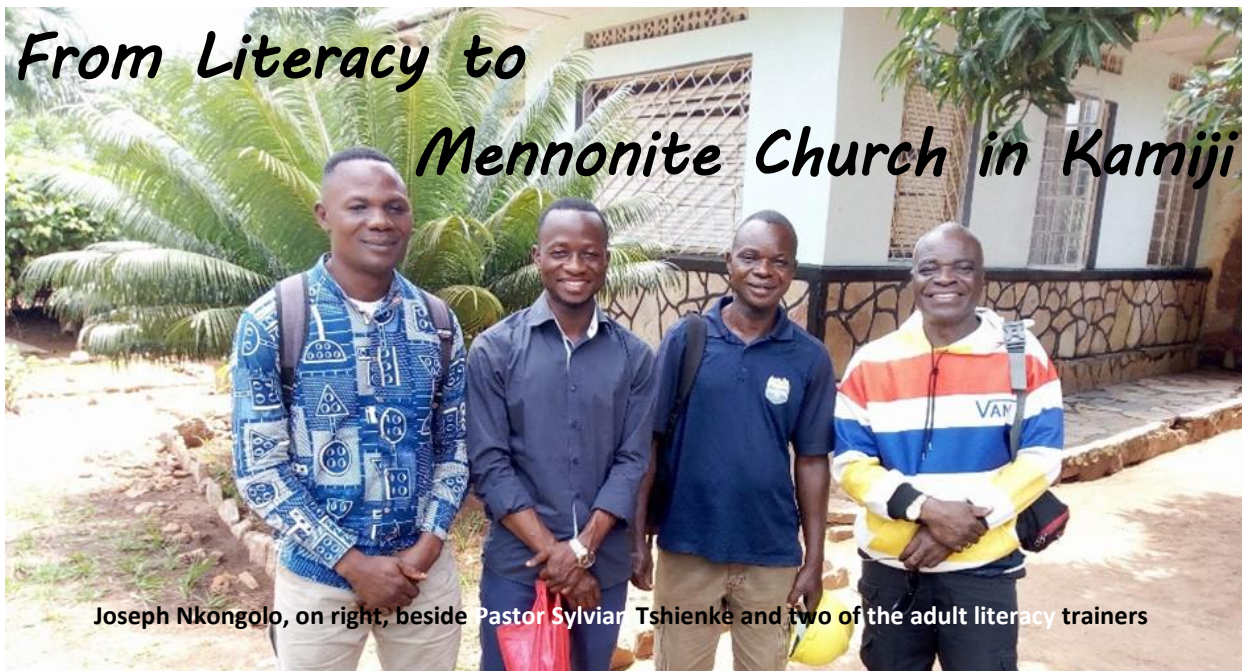
Lenda Gizungu Keita (center) in worship

missionary to the Kisangani area, a region in the Western Province that has suffered many casualties and much destruction during periods of violence of the past few decades. Since the start of this missionary initiative in 2016, nine churches with some 450 members have developed. Lenda supports his family with fish farming.

Pastor Madou Traoré has been working in the N'Dorola region among the Nangere, sent by the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso. His work has birthed a number of new congregations. Siaka Traoré, Evangelical Mennonite pastor in Bobo Dioulasso, travels periodically to the region on the Guinea/Mali/Senegal boarder where he is part of a church-planting initiative among the Yalunka people. The Yalunka team includes workers from the United States, Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Pastor Siaka returned from a recent visit encouraged by the progress being made and with the good news of five new believers there. The team is prayerfully considering the sending of a long-term missionary from Burkina Faso to minister in this initiative.

Compiled by Bruce Yoder

From Literacy to Mennonite Church in Kamiji



Joseph Nkongolo, on right, beside Pastor Sylvian Tshienke and two of the adult literacy trainers

Kamiji is a village and surrounding area located in the province of Lomami, DRC. The Mennonite Church in Congo's (CMCo) evangelization efforts had not previously reached this village. CMCo had, however, created the Kabolesha primary school as part of philanthropic work to meet the need for children in the area to be educated.

Patrice Yamba, director of the primary school, took part in the first workshop to train teachers to do literacy training with adults. The training was held in Mbuji-Mayi in April 2018, after which Yamba opened the first adult literacy center in Kamiji with 110 adult students. Thereafter, neighboring villages and groups came to him requesting literacy centers for their communities. Yamba trained two teachers and opened two centers, which promptly enrolled 122 adult students. In January 2021 the literacy project held a workshop in Kamiji, and the teachers came from surrounding areas to be trained. They subsequently opened literacy centers in their villages.

From the literacy training program, the first Mennonite Church has been planted in Kamiji, with 68 members including 25 women, 15 men, and 28 children. Literacy activities continue despite a scarcity of textbooks, blackboards, chalk, Bibles, etc. The congregation looks forward to having its own church building, parsonage, and school, which could house primary school students in the mornings and adult literacy students in the afternoons. In Kamiji there are few of some resources but much enthusiasm and faith. From local church members to AIMM donors, we can all help.

By John Fumana and Joseph Nkongolo

Building Bridges During a Time of Tension



Pastor Joseph Sinou (on right) next to Pastor Siaka Traoré, meeting with leaders of Muslim faith community

Mennonites in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina

Faso were surprised when Muslims approached them with an idea for collaboration. The Muslim community had been trying to obtain a hearse for some time. When someone died, they were obliged to approach other communities to find an available hearse. Burkina Faso has experiences

significant violence in recent times due to terrorist attacks linked to jihadist groups, which has heightened tension between Muslims and Christians. So when the Muslim community reached out to the Mennonites of Bobo to propose that the two communities together acquire a hearse to use collaboratively, the church was surprised.

After consultation, the Evangelical Mennonite

Church of Burkina Faso decided that such an initiative would be one way to build positive relationships with their Muslim neighbors and would be a witness for peace. One Mennonite pastor noted that the help from his Muslim neighbors had been important for his family at the death of his brother. A used vehicle purchased from Europe that would serve as a hearse costs about \$8,000 USD, and the two communities in Bobo calculated they could raise about \$800 of that amount. The church reached out to friends in North America, principally through Peace Africa (an informal group of Mennonite/Anabaptist individuals and groups working to improve relationships between Muslims and Christians in Africa), inviting contributions for this collaborative venture. People responded generously, and it did not take long to

raise the necessary funds. Members of the Muslim community were so enthusiastic that they contributed \$1,650, almost three times what they had thought they could raise. One of the Muslim leaders remarked that Christians are extraordinary people. He was amazed that the church would collaborate and assist people of his faith in a noncoercive way, without requiring that they first convert to Christianity. Surely this collaborative interfaith project is an example of unconditional love and an important witness in a place where there is much tension between Muslims and Christians!

Compiled from email messages from Siaka Traoré, Mennonite pastor in Bobo-Dioulasso

On the Batéké Plateau, Long-awaited Bitá Church is Dedicated

By Séraphin Kutumbana

On Sunday, March 21, 2021 the Mission of the Mennonite Church in Congo (CMCo) had a joyful celebration for the dedication of the temple of the Bitá Church, located on the Batéké Plateau. The event was celebrated with songs, praise, and worship to thank God for this house of prayer built in the village of Bitá. There were so many people attended the dedication that people took turns being inside the worship space so that all could participate, and those who waited outside watched the ceremonies through the windows until it was their turn to enter.

Reverend Fidèle Yongo preached the Gospel by referencing Mathew 21:13 when Jesus said, "My house will be called a house of prayer...". Reverend Yongo concluded by saying, "This

house will be a house of prayer when all the faithful look in the same direction for the glory of the Lord. This house is not an individual's house. It is for everyone [all the faithful]”.

Many church leaders were in attendance to witness the dedication of God's temple. Reverend Idor Nyamuke, the first Vice-president of the Church of Christ in Congo ECC (the Federation of Congolese Protestant Denominations); Reverend Fidèle Yongo, the President of CMCo; CMCo and other senior leading pastors and laypeople including CMCo-Kinshasa's Provincial President, Reverend Michel Vunda; Macaire Kilambo, the National President of CMCo's Laity, and his wife; the Bita Police Commander; and others attended the celebration. Reverend Idor Nyamuke led the ceremony and cut the ribbon to dedicate the chapel to the Lord. Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) was represented by Co-Executive Coordinator, John Fumana, and his wife, Lucie. AIMM has supported and encouraged CMCo in this Batéké Mission initiative.

The Batéké Mission is led by Reverend Séraphin Kutumbana and Reverend Bernard Thambwe. During the worship service, Reverend Kutumbana told the story of the Batéké Mission and emphasized that the people of Bita must remember the past and look to the future as they continue to follow the way of the Lord.

The History

The Batéké Mission began around 1984 as a field of evangelization, but was interrupted in 1986



(L to R) Rev. Idor Nyamuke, Macaire Kilambo, and Rev. Fidèle Yongo at the dedication

because of internal conflicts and lack of funds. It restarted in 2000 as a gospel work by Reverends Kakhenda and Séraphin Kutumbana. In 2002, this work was transformed into an Experimental Mission Field with the appointment of Reverend Kutumbana as missionary. In 2004, CMCo created the National Department of Mission and Reverend Kakhenda was appointed to lead the department. The Batéké Mission remained under the leadership of Reverend Kutumbana who was joined by the late Reverend Sambu. The work of the Batéké Mission continues to this day under Reverend Kutumbana and Reverend Thambwe.

In June 2002, the visit of Garry Prieb, who was Executive Secretary of AIMM at that time, opened the way to build the roofs of two chapels on the Batéké Plateau: Balumu and Kimwa Mpumu. These roofs were placed on wood infrastructure and did not last long. Both roofs collapsed three years later. In Kimwa Mpumu, however, the roof was rebuilt and has lasted to the present, but the mission in Balumu encountered many difficulties in spreading the gospel of Christianity. Despite the difficulties in disseminating the Christian gospel in the Batéké Plateau, the Batéké Mission continued to work to establish a constant missionary presence in the region. These efforts bore fruit in many instances, not the least of which was in the church of Kimwa Mpumu, whose choir came to the dedication of the Bitu Church to bless participants with their singing.

Seven years after Garry Prieb's visit to the Batéké Plateau, Rod Hollinger-Janzen, who was the Executive Coordinator of AIMM at that time, visited the area and found ongoing interest in the local mission to continue to spread the word of the Lord. Hollinger-Janzen worked with the board of AIMM to provide funds that helped the Batéké Mission purchase a piece of land in the village of Bitu. This land is where the Bitu Church and the missionary house are built.

The need to have a house of prayer started with the education by extension training which was an initiative of the International School for Evangelism under Reverend Idor Nyamuke. The project helped to support evangelization work in the Bitu and the Batéké area. Once the goal to build a chapel was defined, the search for additional funding began. With financial help from North American partners, specifically from AIMM, former CIM/AIMM missionaries who had continuing interest in the Congo, and Wilmer Sprunger and a group of his friends, the Christian community in Bitu was able to realize their goal of having a place of worship in which to gather. Additionally, the Bitu Church community built a missionary house where pastors, missionaries, and others involved in trainings can lodge whenever there is a need.

The Future

In looking to the future, the Bitu Church committee and the Batéké Mission are planning to add a healthcare center, a Sunday School building for children, and potentially a school. Many people have already joined the church at Bitu, and many more are interested in joining. The Bitu Church is an active part of the community with a committee of local leaders and a choir.

As Deut. 31:6 reassures us, "the Lord your God goes with you"; He is really among His children. There is nowhere these words ring more true than in Bitu, where the faith and patience of God's people has been rewarded with a place to gather to worship His name.



*Empowering Sierra Leone
Christ Salvation Mennonite Church
for Holistic Mission*

Pastor Timothy Koroma and other participants in ABCD training

From May 9 to 17, 2021, AIMM Co-executive Coordinator John Fumana traveled to Sierra Leone to visit Christ Salvation Mennonite Church and to conduct a training workshop on “Assets-Based Community Development” (ABCD). The early relationships between the Mennonite church in Sierra Leone and AIMM began through Canadian church member Brian Dyck, who spent some time in the country for business purposes. As contacts developed the then-called Christ Salvation Bible Ministry expressed the desire to become a member of AIMM; later on, its name was changed to Christ Salvation Mennonite Church. The church is an associate member of AIMM.

Under the leadership of Pastor Solomon

Bandor as General Overseer, Christ Salvation Mennonite Church has three main branches: Aberdeen, Newton, and Six Mile.

The overall goal of the four-day training workshop was to build the capacity of church leaders and help them discover their local potential in order to lay a foundation for sustainability. A very active and motivated group of 26 participants, including 16 men and 10 women, attended the workshop with the following expectations:

- help Christ Salvation Mennonite Church to grow in development initiatives,
- learn in order to deliver knowledge to the community,

- practice and implement what was learned during the training,
- transform life in the community,
- learn how to improve life in communities.

During the workshops John Fumana led the group through the ABCD process. The session covered ABCD as a paradigm shift in order to have participants change the mindset of dependency on foreign aid and start to look within to discover and mobilize resources needed for mission and community development initiatives. The training journey included the following: completing an inventory of local assets (skills and resources), engaging in assets mapping, linking assets to opportunities, working on community building, and developing a plan of action based on local resources by starting with low-hanging fruits (resources that the community can easily access). Participants were also urged to use foreign resources later in the process, as

leverage, to promote what they have already built with local potential, which helps to consolidate ownership and sustainability.

The training offered participants an excellent opportunity to learn how to build sustainability and make good use of local resources, while considering foreign assistance as a support for local initiatives. At the end of the program the group designed a community development plan of action for Christ Salvation Mennonite Church and made a commitment to practice what they learned.

Most of the members comprising the leadership team of the Mennonite Church in Sierra Leone are young people. Their youth offers the church a good opportunity and strong potential for ownership, growth, and sustainability. AIMM's involvement in empowering these leaders and building their capacities will contribute to a strong foundation for holistic mission work in the country.

Pentecost Sunday Baptisms in Burkina Faso

“The family is growing. Thanks be to God!” was the message that came from Mennonite congregations in Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso in late May. Twenty-eight people from the three congregations at Colma, Kodeni, and Belle Ville were baptized on Pentecost Sunday. Immediately following, the gathered communities shared the Lord's supper. Bobo-Dioulasso is the second largest city in Burkina Faso and is the major trade center in the western part of the country, which has experienced increasing insecurity over the last years due to terrorist attacks. Growing Anabaptist communities of faith are an important witness of hope in this growing urban center.



Pastor Joseph Sinou (left) and Pastor Siaka Traoré (right), baptize Pascal Ouattara



All members of the congregation help with the building process

Building Activity at Samogohiri: The Latest Story in the Life of a Young Mennonite Congregation

There is increased hustle and bustle in the village of Samogohiri these days. After a few years of planning, gathering materials, and preparing the site, a recent grant from Mennonite Men's JoinHands program has increased the pace of construction at the Samogohiri Evangelical Mennonite Church.

The beginnings of this congregation date to 1987 when Paul and Martine Solomiac arrived to live in the village. They were missionary Bible translators sent by Mennonites in France

to study Dzùungoo, the local language, and subsequently translate the Bible into it. After analyzing the language, translation started in earnest in 1993 with the help of two assistants, young men from the village. The first passages to be translated were stories from the Old Testament, due to the strong presence of Islam in the region and familiarity with those stories. After four years of work and the influence of Scripture, both assistants became Christian. While the Solomiacs were on an extended stay in France, Pastor Siaka Traoré of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of

Burkina Faso took their place. Pastor Siaka set about organizing the beginnings of a congregation, arranging prayer meetings on the porch of the Solomiacs' house. Soon they moved their meetings from the Solomniacs' house to the yard of the extended family of one of the translation assistants, Fabé Traoré, to guard against the possibility that people might associate their newfound faith with foreign ways of living.

After Pastor Siaka moved back to his home, Fabé and the other new believers continued to reach out to people in their village and beyond. They shared the newly translated Bible stories, and the group that worshipped in the Traoré yard grew. Even Fabé's mother became a Christian. Until then supportive of the group meeting in the Traoré courtyard, Fabé's father reacted to his wife's conversion by opposing the worship services. The group found another location in the village and built first a straw shed and later a mud structure for the congregation's meeting place. When the



government surveyed the village to clarify property rights in 1999, lots were set aside for places of worship. With the help of Pastor Siaka, the congregation obtained one of those lots. This was a great relief to the congregation since its members were now assured that they could no longer be forced to vacate their place of worship. They built a small worship space along with a workspace for the translation team. The congregation has long since outgrown the worship space and sometimes meets outside to accommodate all those who want to attend. Today Fabé continues the translation work that will provide people the Scripture in their own language and is also the pastor of the Samogohiri church.

In 2016 the church members began to plan for a more adequate meeting place. They collected money among themselves and saved up for building supplies. They also gathered sand, stone, and gravel and made cinder blocks. The recent grant from Mennonite Men has provided the resources to dramatically increase the pace of construction and a new church building is taking shape. Pastor Fabé responded to the JoinHands grant by expressing what a great blessing it is for the Samogohiri Mennonite community. He wrote, "I sincerely lack words to express my gratitude. Only the Lord will know how to bless the donors."

- from *A Brief History of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Samogohiri* by Fabé Traoré

Remembering Fern Ewert

Fern Fay Ewert passed into glory on January 28, 2021, just short of her 90th birthday. She was born to Jacob J. and Martha (Enns) Bartsch on February 2, 1931, in Carson Township, MN. She attended Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, NE, and completed her RN at Immanuel Hospital. At Grace she prayed at the deathbed of a friend who had dedicated her life to missionary service in Congo. Fern committed herself to go to Congo in place of her friend, despite her great fear of snakes. She became engaged to Ralph Ewert and they married just before Ralph completed his MD.

In 1961 Ralph left for Congo for a short term of service and Fern stayed in Mountain Lake with their young daughters, Susan and Miriam. In 1962 she flew to Brussels, Belgium, where Ralph joined her. They studied French and tropical medicine, and had a third daughter, Jeanne, before journeying together for Congo.

Ralph and Fern served in Tshikapa from 1964 until 1967, and Rachel was born there. Fern studied Tshiluba and would later teach it. In 1967 the Ewerts returned to Omaha on furlough. A year later they packed up their Chevy pickup with a DIY topper, and Ralph drove it to New York with Susan for company, while Fern and the girls followed by air. They loaded the pickup onto a ship and returned to Congo for another term.

The Ewerts started their second term in Tshikapa, and then moved to Ndjoko Punda where they spent three years. Ralph's great aunt Sarah Kroeker Andersson had been a pioneering missionary at this station. At Ndjoko Punda, Ralph was in charge of the hospital, and Fern helped in the dispensary as well as giving Tshiluba lessons to new missionaries and PAX workers.

Fern encountered many snakes in the Congo, and while she was not precisely brave in these meetings, God gave her grace to deal with her terrible fear.

In 1972 the Ewert family returned to the US on furlough and felt called to remain. Ralph worked at the University of Nebraska Health Center until retirement. Fern was very active in their church. She and Ralph were sponsors of the junior high youth group, she coached a Bible quiz team for a number of years, and she served on the Missions Committee for many years. From their time in the Congo, the Ewerts maintained life-long friendships with former missionaries and continued to support AIMM. They also retained a fiercely competitive need to play Rook.

Fern is survived by Ralph and their four married daughters, along with 22 grandchildren and many, many great-grandchildren.



Family photograph, taken Christmas of 1966 in Tshikapa

Erwin Rempel Remembered

Erwin H. Rempel, 76, died June 25, 2021, at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community in Harrisonburg, Va. In March, Erwin learned he had both bladder cancer and metastatic pancreatic cancer.

He was born Aug. 8, 1944, in Bell, Calif., a suburb of Los Angeles, to Henry H. and Elisabeth (Eitzen) Rempel. At the age of 12, after his father and mother died just 15 months apart from different cancers, he and his two younger siblings moved to his uncle and aunt's farm in northeast Montana. Erwin graduated from Grace Bible Institute, Omaha, Neb., where here he met Angela Albrecht from Bloomfield, Mont. They were married June 4, 1966, in Omaha.

Completing seminary, he served as a pastor, international mission worker, and as a mission agency administrator. Erwin and Angela served with Mennonite Mission Network and Commission on Overseas Mission from 1975-2009. Erwin served on the board of AIMM from 1982-1994 and 2004-2021. Erwin was a member of First Mennonite Church in Newton from 1982-2011.

In 2011, he and his wife moved to Harrisonburg, Va., and he became a member of Ridgeway Mennonite Church where he applied his administrative skills to support a variety of Ridgeway's outreach ministries. In most of the various places he lived, he enjoyed gardening and planted berries and fruit trees.

Erwin is remembered by former colleagues for his humility, his conscientious and faithful leadership, and his administrative abilities. He is also remembered for his love of nature's beauty and the wonder he found in the flora and fauna of all the places in which he lived.

Erwin is survived by Angela, his wife of 55 years; his daughters Marcia (John) Weaver and Carla (Micah) Hurst; his son Marc (Hannah) Gascho Rempel; his grandchildren and his sister.

Memorial gifts may be designated to Mennonite Mission Network at 718 N Main St. Newton, KS 67114-1703; the Erwin Rempel Fund for AIMM Ministries at Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, P.O. Box 744, Goshen, IN 46527; or Virginia Mennonite Missions at 601 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.



Erwin and Angela in their office in Gaborone, Botswana

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?

It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

Mark 4:30-32



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Cover photo by Siaka Traoré. The photo shows church leaders of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso visiting with elders in the village of Tin. Church leaders met for a retreat from May 18-21. In addition to visiting leaders of the village, the church leaders prayed together, read the acts of incorporation and bylaws of the church, as well as discussed other topics.

The Africa Journal is designed and edited by Tara Burch.