

Africa Journal



Faithful Traditions
and
New Beginnings

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When the Kodeni Church was first taking shape, the impetus came from a group of children. Four siblings walked about three miles to attend a Mennonite church that was planted in Bobo-Dioulasso. In time, they began to meet in Kodeni in a loaned classroom space. More and more children came for worship and Sunday school until there were upwards of 50 children involved, as well as their relations.

On page 8, read more about the Kodeni Church and all that has happened in the past few years, as this church has grown from four children in a borrowed space to having its own building. Praise be to God!



Women in leadership in Kimwampumu

News from CMCo's Batéké Mission

By Reverend Séraphin Kutumbana

On January 30, 2022, nine months after its official inauguration, the Bitá congregation ordained its first deacon, Constant Tsona, and its first deaconess, Miryam Makoko. The church service also included the congregation's first wedding and a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Seven members participated in the Lord's Supper for the first time, after being baptized the night before.

There is now new leadership among the women at the Mennonite church in the village of Kimwampumu. The village is 3 kilometers from Bitá and has been known as the Mennonite village because its chief was the first traditional chief to be baptized in the area. Mrs. Supporter Nzangi was elected to be the leader of the women in the church in November 2021, and the congregation

installed her as the new women's leader in an exuberant worship service on January 23, 2022. Women's groups provide crucial support for the church in the Batéké, and their leadership is important for the spiritual and material health of the Mennonite communities there.

The Batéké women's year-end retreat had an unexpected result. Le Doux Matamba attended, not for his desire to participate as he was an unbeliever, but because he wanted to know what his wife, Louise, was up to in the three-day event. Inspired by the dance-filled worship, he decided to throw in his lot with the church by the second day. As one of the participants observed, "The Lord has several ways of calling people to his work. Le Doux came as a jealous husband and returns converted to Christ." Glory be to God!

Faithful Traditions and New Beginnings

By Bruce Yoder

In October the AIMM International Central Council (ICC) met for its annual meetings as has been the practice for almost two decades. Meeting in Kikwit, of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), this time the group was especially large, with participants from seven different countries. There were old and new, traditions and beginnings, as we sat together to evaluate what we have achieved together and to develop plans and visions for the future. The three AIMM partner churches from Congo are testimony of the faithful traditions of mission engagement that started in 1912. The three churches from Angola, which joined the gathering as official members of AIMM for the first time this year, embody new beginnings as they develop their ministries in the relatively new post-war setting of their country.

The grouping of the new AIMM partner churches in Angola follows the pattern of their older counterparts in the DRC. In fact, the roots of these churches grow out of Angolan refugee engagement with Mennonites in the DRC while their country was in the midst of civil war during nearly three decades after independence in 1975. The **Mennonite Community of Churches in Angola** has approximately 15,000 members in 77 congregations. Lay leaders play important roles as there are currently 30 ordained pastors. The church has started a number of primary schools and is seeking to upgrade

them to attain government support for their maintenance. The **Evangelical Mennonite Church in Angola** has 37 congregations in 13 different provinces and 1 primary school. The **Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church in Angola** has approximately 18,000 members in 72 congregations and 89 pastors. The church is working to increase literacy since most members cannot read.

The presence of the leaders of the Congolese church's youth, women's, and laymen's movements were an added benefit this year. They added their voices as we listened to each other's reports and visions for the future. The youth are active across the different churches. Some have been organizing sports and Bible camps and others have pooled their resources to start agricultural projects. With the Congo Literacy Project, which is supported by AIMM, the women of the three AIMM church partners provide perhaps the best example of collaboration across the Mennonite/Anabaptist communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Today 161 literacy teachers serve 1,962 adults learning to read in 188 different locations, primarily in communities where there is a congregation of one of AIMM's partner denominations. Acquiring reading skills allows formerly illiterate people to read the Bible for the first time and increases their financial earning capacity. There are both spiritual and material benefits. The fourteen supervisors of these centers report that more communities

TANY WARKENTIN, ADOLPHINE TSHIAMA, MARIE FUMANA, & HÉLÈNE JOSÉ MBOMBO talking about the literacy programs in the DR. Congo



are asking for literacy training, so work could well expand as personnel and financial resources can be mobilized.

The ICC gave the green light to the final phase of medical assistance at Ndjoko Punda at its gathering. The city is an historic mission center and the place of the first baptisms and first Mennonite congregation in the DRC. In 2019 it was hit by a wind and rainstorm that destroyed over 1,050 homes as well as many public buildings, such as schools and churches. Congolese and foreign partners, including AIMM, organized and implemented medical intervention to treat the increase in disease that resulted from the destruction of housing and medical infrastructure. The March 2020 medical team treated 2,227 patients but found many cases that needed types of surgical intervention not currently available in

the city. A follow-up visit in July provided 177 patients with needed surgery, and in a third and final visit in December 2021 surgeons operated on 114 patients.

Lawrence Coetzee of Grace Community Church and Mziwandile (Mzi) Nkutha, coordinator of the Anabaptist Network in South

Africa, brought greetings and news from South Africa. South Africa suffered more from the Covid-19 pandemic than did the other AIMM partner countries, and ministry there was disrupted disproportionately. Lawrence noted that Grace Community lost four prominent leaders but that church activities were set to return to normal in the new year. AIMM missionaries had ministered alongside African Independent Churches in southern Africa for four decades and more recently developed contacts with churches attracted to Anabaptist understandings of the faith. Mzi is now the primary coordinator of the Anabaptist Network and provides leadership that keeps people connected with one another and edits the Network's publication. AIMM's missionary tradition in southern Africa continues but with new hands and feet dedicated to the task.

Muslim-Christian Hearse Update: a dream come true

By Siaka Traoré



Church leaders and Muslim leaders with hearse

When we arrived in Bobo-Dioulasso in 2006, our constant prayer was that God would send us to those who want to hear from him or that God would send them to us.

Our life here on earth is full of adventures. The life of our Lord Jesus Christ was also full of adventures. His encounter with Zacchaeus is a good example. Jesus, going from place to place announcing the Good News, encountered an adult who had climbed a tree. He invited himself to Zacchaeus' home, ignored the criticism of public opinion, and the result was a complete transformation of a life. Jesus dared. We must dare for the Lord. We must dare to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Thus, Muslims and Catholics came to us as Mennonite Christians to help them acquire a hearse, a need they had not been able to meet for thirty years.

As soon as we shared this need, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ from near and far supported our witness, our ministry to our Muslim and Catholic neighbors, and not only them, but also to other evangelical Christians in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso for a good approach to relationships.

After a long journey, the hearse is here, available and functional. The journey was long, but we arrived at our destination. At this point, we want to say thank you to God who is the source of the desire and will to act in all of us. Many have heard God's call to assist. The dream has become reality. Our plan to buy a hearse at the request of the neighborhood where the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Bobo-Dioulasso is located has become a reality.

The resources to purchase the hearse have more than covered our needs. We will use the remaining funds to build a garage roof to protect the hearse. We have set up a management and monitoring committee that regulates its use. May the grace and peace of God be our strength.

CEM Dedicates New Church Location

By John Fumana

On Sunday October 31, the Evangelical Mennonite Church of the Congo (CEM) held a special worship service to dedicate to the Lord a new piece of land recently acquired for the construction a place of worship for the Nouvelle Vision (New Vision) congregation in Kinshasa.

The CEM president, Pastor Jean-Felix Cimbanga wa Mpoyi, cut the ribbon to open the ceremony. Participants to the worship service included lead pastors of the CEM,

Kinshasa Provincial Vice-president of the Federation of Protestant Churches (ECC), and about 80 members of the Nouvelle Vision congregation. Co-Executive Coordinator John Fumana represented AIMM.

In his sermon, Pastor Cimbanga stressed that the church to be built on the property should be a place of peace, worship, praise, and prayer. At the end of the service all CEM pastors and church members raised their voices to express gratitude to the Lord and say thank you to AIMM for this gift.



Pastor Jean-Felix Cimbanga, CEM President (L) and Pastor Benjamin Kabuya, Head of the CEM Kinshasa District, and Pastor of the Bitabe local church in Kinshasa (R), during the land dedication

Kodeni Church in Burkina Faso Update



The worship space before painting

The church in Kodeni was started through the efforts of children in 2016. We met with Ousmane Hié, a teenager from Kodeni, and three of his siblings in a classroom given graciously by a pastor who is a friend. Since then many more children and adults have joined this church and we outgrew the classroom.

The building project started in 2018 when our local sister church, Faith and Life of Bobo, bought us a piece of land. Then in 2019, we received money from AIMM to make blocks of bricks. In 2020, the Faith and Life Church helped us build the walls. After this step, we did not have enough congregational money to continue, and it was not good to let the building sit in that state. With the help of Mennonite Mission Network and the Partnership Council, we were able to build the roof. The local sister church,

Faith and Life, donated doors and windows.

After these different steps, we were at our limit and had exhausted the funding from our own congregation. We started to worship in the building, but it was not totally finished. In July of 2021, we got money from Evangelical Mennonite Conference to complete the house of God, so we built the baptistery, an



The worship space after painting, with baptistery complete

external toilet, a wall around the building, and a store. We also did some painting inside the building. We have just painted the front of the church, but the other three sides are not painted, as the money is not enough to do all the four sides.

God loves our beautiful place, and we are happy to welcome everybody in His House.

Our Muslim neighbors, with whom we have a friendly and supportive relationship, congratulate us for getting this far. They are happy to have us as neighbors, and we are happy to be their neighbors.

Thank you for being a part of this achievement. May God bless you.

Siaka Traoré

The outside of the Kodeni Church building



CEFMC of the DRC Provides Supplementary Food to Children Suffering from Malnutrition

The Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo (CEFMC) provides supplementary food to children suffering from malnutrition. These are children of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from Kasai who fled because of the Kamwina Nsapu violence in the DRC Province of Kasai.

Cathy Kafutshi (in white below) is the Deputy Project Manager (Malnutrition Project) and member of the CEFMC's Development Committee. She is holding a child suffering from malnutrition. In the back center is Pastor Antoine Kimbila, CEFMC's President. They are with a group malnourished children who are being served a supplementary meal.



The OHE Orphanage's Story



Jacob Kabey and Simplicie Mbamvu, from the Kamayala mission station, founded OHE (Oeuvre Humanitaire Emmanuel) in Kinshasa in the year 2000. They wanted to provide a loving home for children whose families did not care for them: orphans or other children who had been abandoned, sometimes because they were accused of being witches. They also sought to provide educational opportunities and make the children feel valued. This contin-

ues to be the mission of OHE, whose motto is "without love all is vanity," drawn from I Cor 13:1-8.

There are currently 37 residents at OHE, ranging in age from 3 to 25 years of age. They attend school as soon as they are old enough and a few have advanced all the way to university studies or vocational school. OHE owns 14 hectares of land outside of the city, on which Jacob and Simplicie hope they will be able to raise crops and livestock to move the ministry towards financial autonomy. At present, support comes from friends in the DRC and in North America.



Spotlight on Jeremie

I am Jeremie Kabeya Musungayi, and I am from Kisangani, in the Tshopo Province in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After my parents were killed in the war and my brother and I were separated, United Nations Peacekeepers found me and evacuated me to Kinshasa. A few days later I was transferred to the OHE orphanage, which became my family. I found love, joy, and peace there.

Upon completing primary school and high school, I passed my exams to receive my high school diploma. I attended driving school and drive well now. Currently I am studying at the National Institute of Vocational Training where I am specializing in gasoline motor vehicle mechanics.

Thanks to OHE, I have become useful to society, and I have a family. May God bless OHE and those who support it!



Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo Initiates Village Savings & Loan Associations

In November 2021, the Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo (CEFMC) received funding from AIMM to facilitate the economic integration of the vulnerable population in the DRC Province of Kwilu by creating Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). The VSLA project was launched on December 27, 2021, in the Kwenge agglomeration and started with raising awareness among the population to explain the benefits of VSLAs. VSLAs are microfinance investments in rural communities that have ripple effects not only for the individuals involved in the VSLAs, but also for the families, churches, communities, and countries in which the VSLAs operate.



As a condition of receiving loans for their small-scale market activities or agricultural projects, participants in the VSLAs contribute regularly to their savings programs, which augments the amount of capital available to them for their business ventures. Specifically, the Congolese church partners are targeting women and women with families as potential beneficiaries of the VSLAs to help them take more control of household income, which in turn increases access to healthcare and children's schooling opportunities.

The VSLA project started with raising people's awareness of the project, as well as training about the organization and operation of a VSLA. As a result, two VSLAs have been created in each of the following cities: Bandundu city, Kenge, Masimanimba, Idiofa, Gungu and Kahemba. The project also provided a management kit (strong box, notebook, etc.) and will ensure technical support in the operation of these VSLAs. There are currently 200 VSLA members, including 155 women and 45 men.

In all of the sites, the population has welcomed the VSLA initiative with joy. The members of these VSLAs are pleased with the structure, as it allows them

to save and obtain micro-loans to increase their economic activities. Participants blessed the Lord for the CEFMC and AIMM for bringing them this economic project.



MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH OF THE CONGO SENDS MISSIONARY TO BAMBENGA PEOPLE

By Rev. Nathan MUDIJI MAKUMBI
Mission Department Director, CEFMC

The Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo (CEFMC) has decided to send Reverend Joachim Masu Matakani to establish new congregations among the Bambenga (Batwa) in the Sud-Ubangi Province, located in the northwest of the DRC. He is scheduled to leave by the end of March 2022.

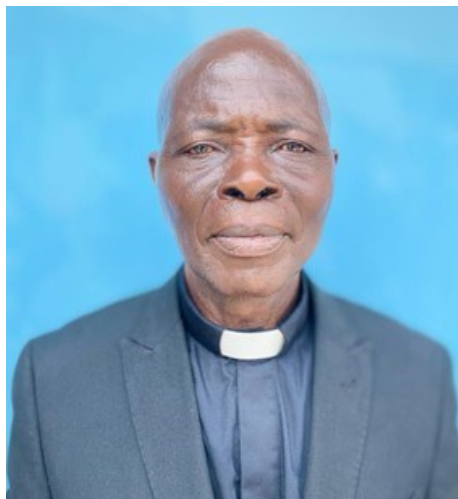
The Bambenga in the region have been largely unreached by the gospel. The CEFMC Mission Department believes that the evangelization of these people is urgent and that this sending initiative will motivate the church to respond positively to the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20).

The Department has identified eleven sites where evangelistic outreach among the Bambenga might be fruitful. They are scattered in the forest of South Ubangi and along the Ubangi River, from its estuary on the Congo River at Malange to Libenge, not far from Zongo and Bangui, the capital city of the Central African Republic. Literacy programs

and health care will be key in this ministry to invite the Bambengaso to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Reverend Joachim Masu has been designated to carry out this missionary work. He is a missiologist by training, but is also a qualified nurse, a public health worker, an educator, and a livestock farmer.

The CEFMC's Mission Department is inviting the faithful to prayer and generous spiritual and financial support for Reverend Masu.



Unless a Grain of Wheat: A Story of Friendship Between African Independent Churches and North American Mennonites

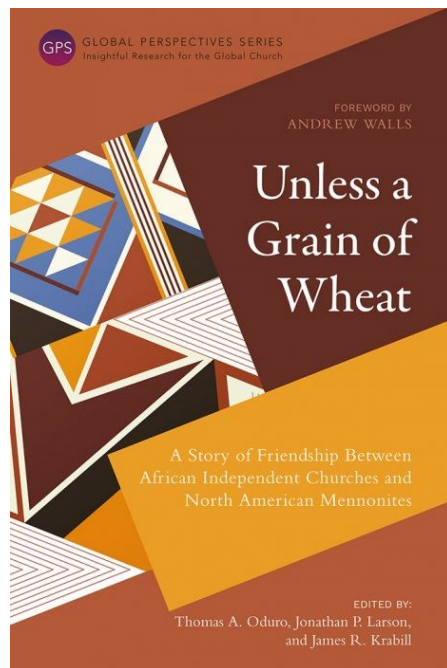
A book review by Bruce Yoder

Unless a Grain of Wheat: A Story of Friendship Between African Independent Churches and North American Mennonites is a collection of reflections that grew out of collaborative ministry initiatives between African Independent Churches (AICs) and North American Mennonite missionaries and service workers from 1960 to 2020. AIMM missionaries were a large part of this unique and forward-looking mission engagement. The story of their involvement highlights the importance of shared experiences of biblical study, a sense of mutuality between co-workers, and the significance of inter-confessional ministries of reconciliation.

AIMM missionaries contributed a significant portion of the stories in this book. The volume's title is inspired by the biblical verse John 12:24, "Unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Jonathan Larson's explanation of the title's backstory in the preface provides the theme. It is that the self-giving posture of North American Mennonite missionaries, who set aside their denominational and sectarian priorities, was a faithful and productive mission approach, despite its seeming incongruity with traditional mission strategy. Furthermore, AICs, suspicious of foreign missionaries, who had often labeled them sub-Christian, experienced fruitful partnerships when they took the chance of embarking on this collaborative ministry initiative.

The reflections in this volume demonstrate how the values of African Christian initiative, missionary identification with African cultures, and fraternal collaboration have been embodied in the Mennonite/AIC engagement. Those values allowed AIMM missionaries and African Christians to work in ways that was fruitful and appropriate in the post-colonial era.

Several themes stand out across the volume. Nearly three-quarters of the authors, African and North American equally, mention occasions of biblical study, often as part of programs of theo-



tions voice appreciation for the way collaborative study with African counterparts enriched their understanding of Christian faith. In a relationship in which there were significant differences in cultural and religious assumptions, the biblical story became a shared touchstone around which North Americans and Africans could gather to seek better understanding of Christian belief and practice. Studying Scripture together became a fruitful mission approach in the post-colonial epoch.

A second theme that nearly three-quarters of the contributors highlight is their experience of mutuality. Both North American missionaries and African Christians express their amazement and gratitude for the mutuality and respect that they felt in their engagement with each other, a significant achievement given the legacy of colonial rule and the context of Apartheid in South Africa, which spanned much of the period this volume represents. Some of the writers convey surprise that such was possible. It became possible as collaborators worshipped together, shared their lives with each other, and learned from each other. Over half the contributors highlight the importance of the relational nature of their collaboration, undergirding the mutuality theme. Eleven of the Africans and six of North Americans describe the relationships as friendships; they were more than co-workers.

One third of the contributors note the importance of peace and inter-confessional relationships. Ministry to heal division and animosity among AICs, and between them and the mainline churches, motivated the beginning of this Mennonite/AIC ministry. The focus continued in the years that followed and included fostering trust between white Mennonite missionaries and black AIC members in southern Africa, where suspicion between whites and blacks was high.

This volume raises the question of the legacy of the Mennonite/AIC encounter. Together these reflections suggest an approach that might inform or even provide a model for future collaborative mission initiatives, in Africa and beyond. They also highlight dynamics that help explain the emergence of world Christianity as an interpretive framework, a way of understanding the Christian movement as the global ensemble of culturally and linguistically specific expressions of the faith and the transnational networks that inform and sustain them. This collection shows that Mennonite missionaries accepted AICs as authentic Christian communities when others were yet hesitant to do so, and that their collaboration helped affirm and legitimize those communities. Finally, Mennonite/AIC collaboration birthed several African institutions that continue today and maintain links with individuals, congregations, and agencies on other continents.

Unless a Grain of Wheat is a volume of rich narrative content that provides a sense of the nature, texture, and significance of the AIC/Mennonite encounter, just as the editors intended. It is available at <https://langhamliterature.org/books/unless-a-grain-of-wheat>.

Remembering Martha Claassen

February 20, 1926—November 7, 2021

Martha E Claassen, age 95, of Mountain Lake, MN died on November 7, 2021, at Good Samaritan Society-The Village in Mountain Lake. Martha (Buhler) Claassen was born February 20, 1926 to Aron and Mary Buhler in Mt. Lake, MN. She was the oldest of 6 children. She accepted Christ at an early age and felt a call to missions as a teenager. She graduated from Wheaton College in 1950 and earned her teaching degree. She then went to teach at Berean Bible Academy in Elbing, KS. While in Kansas she met the dashing Melvin Claassen who was farming in Whitewater, KS. They were married August 14, 1952 in Mt. Lake, MN. In 1958 they left for language school in Belgium and then headed to Congo (Zaire) where they served with CIM/AIMM



as missionaries for 16 years. One of Martha's favorite memories of their time there was working with the women, teaching sewing and Bible classes. In 1974 they returned to Mt. Lake and were active in the EMB (Cornerstone Bible) church as well as serving other churches in the area. They also spent time in Omaha at Grace College of the Bible as well as 13 years pastoring Woodland Hills Community Bible Church in Crescent, IA, before returning to Mt. Lake again in 2007. Throughout her life, Martha enjoyed leading and taking part in Bible studies with different groups of ladies. She had a real passion for God's word. She also enjoyed music. One of her favorite things was when the family was home and would sing together around the piano as she played. Martha was an incredible prayer warrior and prayed daily for her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren as well as her extended family, even up to her last days. Martha's children all have different memories of asking her to pray for specific needs and seeing how God answered her prayers. Martha and her twin sister Mary were separated for most of their adult life as each was called to ministry in different locations. After Melvin passed away, Mary and Ventura moved back to Mt. Lake to be near Martha, which was a blessing for Martha.

She is survived by her twin sister Mary Saenz of Mt. Lake; her brother Paul Buhler of Denmark; daughter Vangie Claassen of Indonesia; son Steve (Kathy) Claassen of Denver, CO; son James (Caryn) Claassen of Sioux Falls, SD; daughter Ruth Claassen of Colorado Springs, CO, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren whom she adored. She was preceded in death by her loving husband Melvin, parents Aron and Mary Buhler, sisters Lillian (Klaassen), Eleanor (Gardner), Agnes (Tharp).

- adapted from *The Kansan*, Nov. 10, 2021



The medical team at Ndjoko Punda, DRC, poses for a picture with CMCo's Joseph Nkongolo (the organizer of the medical project, on the right) after the last round of surgeries in December 2021. After Ndjoko Punda was hit by a wind and rainstorm that destroyed homes, schools, churches, and medical centers in 2019, there was an increase in disease that AIMM and partners have been working to alleviate through coordinated medical intervention.

Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission International Central Council

Phone: +1 (574) 535-0077 ▪ Email: aimm@aimmint.org ▪ Web: aimmint.org

PO Box 744

Goshen, IN 46527

USA

440 Main Street

Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5

CANADA



Cover image of Pastor Samuel Traoré's son in Kodení Mennonite Church in [Burkina Faso](#).