

## **The Katako Kombe Camp Meeting**

The Camp Meeting site near the Katako Kombe mission station of Dinglele, of the United Methodist Church in Central Congo, was established in the mid-1940's, just after Dr. Alexander J. Reid began the Methodist work there in 1943. Dr. Reid was a graduate of Asbury College, class of 1927 and was deeply committed to the Holiness Movement, and in particular to the tradition of camp meetings that had come out of that movement from the 1800's. His own life and calling had been deeply affected by the "revival meetings" on campus at Asbury while he was a student there.

He and his wife Hazel began their ministry in the Belgian Congo in 1930 at Wembo Nyama where they participated in the famous "Revival across the Unvalambe River" in 1932. That particular camp meeting had a deep impact on the Methodist Church in Central Congo for more than a generation. It also had a deep impact on Dr. and Mrs. Reid.

"Uncle" Alex and "Aunt" Hazel became firmly committed to the strategy of camp meeting style revivals throughout the Central Congo area. During their entire missionary career of 40 years, the Reids organized and participated in Revival camp meetings throughout the Congo and elsewhere in Africa.

After more than a decade of meeting in "Brush Harbors" and other temporary shelters, Dr. Reid decided in the mid-1950's to build more permanent structures to accommodate the camp meeting. Cottages were built for visitors, a dining room served special guest and a tabernacle replaced the meeting place under shade trees with logs for benches. The metal roofing created the possibility of capturing rain water during the rainy season to serve the camp during the dry season and a large cistern was installed.

Dr. Reid's vision was that the more permanent installations would encourage the continuation of the "Camp meeting" tradition and make it easier for Congolese church leaders to organize meetings with a spiritual objective there. This proved to be the case and for years after his retirement the "Mbulo", (Revival) as it was known, was a gathering place for spiritual retreats of various kinds. He, himself, would return, year after year, from his retirement in Wilmore, KY. to participate in these annual meetings.

Executive Committee meetings, Annual Conferences, Conference Youth retreats and missionary gatherings all took place at this historic site of spiritual renewal. Each year the "Mbulo" would meet in mid-summer, during the dry season, and a multitude of villagers from all around the area would come to meet and pray together. They would build their own temporary shelters for shade and to keep from being drenched by the early morning dry season dew. They would also prepare their own food and bring mats to sleep on.

Prayers would begin in the early hours when a camp meeting "Crier" would call people to prayer and repentance well before dawn. At first light the people would begin gathering for the early service and the day's schedule would begin. It would include preaching services late morning, afternoon and then the main service in the early evening.

This tradition continued until the recent years of turmoil and war in the Congo. Foreign soldiers and rebel troops moved through the area and quickly noted the quality of the roofing and the isolation of the camp meeting site. It wasn't long before the roofing, doors and windows were all gone and the buildings began to deteriorate.

With the election of new Episcopal leadership for Central Congo in February 2005, a renewed interest in the "Mbulo" was born. Bishop David K. Yemba set as the number one priority for his Episcopal Area, "the Spiritual Renewal of the United

Methodist Church in Central Congo”. With this renewed emphasis there naturally arose an interest in renovating the historic sites where much of the spiritual impetus of the United Methodist Church of Central Congo had come from originally.

Bishop Yemba has expressed an interest in the renovation of both the Katako Kombe “Mbulo” and the site of the 1932 “Revival across the Umvalambe River”, near Wembo Nyama. The decision was made to hold the 2006 Annual Conference at Dingle, near Katako Kombe, and to begin it with a week long “Camp meeting” revival. This desire on the part of the Bishop and the Conference leaders has created the urgent need to renovate the camp meeting site. It needs to be ready for use by mid-August 2006!

The plan is to use the existing walls where possible and to re-roof the cottages and replace the doors and windows. Lumber will be needed to replace rafters and purlings. The Tabernacle will also need a new roof including rafters and, in some places, new columns to support it. The cistern should be useable, but will need to have the guttering replaced to channel the water into it.

A diesel powered brick making machine is available that will allow the making of a practical brick from cement and local soil to rebuild the buildings that cannot be salvaged. Cement will be purchased in Kinshasa and shipped up river and then trucked to the renovation site. All of the materials need to be purchased at least 3 to 4 months ahead of the Work Team’s arrival to assure enough time to have them on site for their visit.

A portable sawmill belonging to the Church can be rebuilt and will produce the necessary lumber for rafters, doors, windows and benches for the Tabernacle. There will be expense involved in this operation as fuel, oil and saw blades must be provided and a team of Congolese workers paid. The sawmill must be operational by the first of June. It has also been decided that the team will repair the water system at the mission station near the camp meeting site in preparation for the Annual Conference.

The renovation of the Katako Kombe “Campmeeting” is a significant undertaking and will require a concerted and co-coordinated effort. The significance of this project cannot be overstated. It represents not only a tie with the spiritual history of the United Methodist Church in Central Congo, but will also be an important step in both the physical and spiritual “renovation” of the Church into the years ahead.

Submitted Feb. 15, 2006  
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