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Dear Friends,

We are currently in the U.S.A., speaking in the annual conferences (administrative regions in United Methodist organization) which we did not visit in 2015. This year we have been to Iowa, West Michigan, and Mississippi. We are currently in Georgia for medical checkups and a visit to one church (South Georgia was on last year's list, but we hadn't been to Dublin for eight years), then on to Pennsylvania for more church visits before going to Indianapolis to pack up for our flight back to Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo in mid-November. As usual, pastors and church members in all the conferences have received us warmly, and once again we marvel at the creative ways in which these churches are re-thinking their relationships with the community and the world.

There have been some exciting developments in the projects we work with in Congo. You probably remember (since we have talked a lot about it and since many of you made contributions for this project!!) that The English-speaking School of Lubumbashi (TESOL) purchased its own land for a new campus in 2011 when the French School reopened after an 18-year hiatus and needed its own rooms back, rooms adjacent to our own buildings on the French embassy land. We had been using these rooms in exchange for maintaining the embassy's property. We began building classrooms in 2013. The first classroom building and restroom block were completed in 2014; construction then began on the next building, completed in August of this year for a total of eight large, light, and airy classrooms. In September, our Grade 8-12 students moved into this new space. The move eliminated overcrowding for the classes that remained at the original Golf (French School) campus. We were even able to move Grade 4 to the Golf campus from a borrowed location where the youngest children study in rooms so small that we need two rooms for most grade levels.

However, this is only a first step. We must continue to press forward with construction so that we can move all the school to our own new campus as our other buildings are borrowed facilities or not situated on our own land. We are currently working on improving the water supply to the new campus. A new well has been drilled and work is underway on the steel structure that will hold four large water tanks for a total of 5,000 gallons. Our current water tank sits on a five-meter-high termite hill (a small hill by the standards of our local termites who would win the gold medals for speed and height if the world had Termite Olympics) and has served us well during the construction phase but will not be adequate in terms of capacity and height for the growing number of students on the new campus. We are enclosing a page of photos showing the first weeks of students and teachers in the classrooms (notice: no new furniture yet and no decorations on the wall....) as well as the foundations for the new water tower, which we were speaking about in August as the next priority along with the new well (that already completed!)

Our first assignment as new missionaries in Congo (then Zaire) in 1979 was teaching at the University of Lubumbashi in the history department. Jeff still has a full teaching load there and is an emeritus professor of history. He has been head of the library system (two general libraries and nine department libraries) since 2007 at a time when the university was working to increase educational quality. An aspect of the drive is to train a new generation of faculty to replace the Congolese of our age cohort, trained in the late 1960s and 1970s to replace the former Belgian staff during the period that the university was also expanding hugely

from hundreds of students to many thousands. An aspect of these five-year plans has been to improve library resources and attract students and professors to the libraries through improvements to the physical spaces, modern electronic cataloguing, staff training, longer opening hours, and so on. By now the central library and the department libraries that were most in need of help—due to dirt floors (remember those termites!), no lighting or windows, leaking roofs, books locked away in cabinets or whatever—have been replaced or transformed, and the remaining few will be dealt with soon. Over 7,000 new books have been added, and thousands more have been “rediscovered” and made accessible. All of the books received since 2008 and the entire collections of eight of the libraries have been inventoried and entered into the electronic catalog. The campus internet network has only been installed in one of the libraries until now, but all the colleges are scheduled to be connected by the end of 2016.

We have both continued teaching part-time at Katanga Methodist University (UMK) in Mulungwishi. This long-standing institution is the highest-level training for the pastors who are working throughout our region of Congo and beyond; it offers theological diplomas at the same level and the same quality of staff as Africa University in Zimbabwe, but in French. (AU is an English-medium university, and there are more francophone than anglophone United Methodists in Africa). Jeff’s first library project back in the 1990s was reclassifying the Mulungwishi library and building an electronic catalog, which contains three times as many items as UNILU has titles, although UNILU has 40 times as many students. As a university since 2001, UMK now includes theology, information technology (largest number of students), education/psychology, and agriculture. Some of the pastors trained there have been sent by their local conference or through Global Ministries as missionaries in other countries. Over the years, a dozen have received doctorates in a variety of countries around the world and are now faculty at this institution, half in full-time service and the others with responsibilities elsewhere as well.

We return to Congo in mid-November and have much to do during the next half year. In May 2017 we both turn 70, mandatory retirement age for Global Ministries missionaries. At times like this we are especially grateful for the connectional system of the United Methodist Church. Because our work has always been in positions chosen by and in collaboration with the Congolese church, and because TESOL also cooperates with other international missionaries, we know that the projects we have worked on will continue after our departure. After what will be 38 years in Congo, we plan to settle initially near Jeff’s younger brother, a pediatrician in Colorado Springs. We have always kidded ourselves, asking what we are going to do when we grow up, and it will be a wonderful area to explore as we work on the next chapters of our lives.

Ellen

Jeff

Advance numbers

Jeff Hoover

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