



FAITH IN ACTION

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. —Ephesians 4:32

A regional dignitary shakes Rod Hollinger-Janzen's hand during the ceremony of confession and reconciliation in Kandale, Congo. Overseeing the greeting is Mennonite Church elder, André Ndjoko, who was one of the event organizers. Photographer: Charles Buller.

Congolese Mennonites initiate reconciliation with mission workers

More than 60 years ago, two Congolese nurses risked death to negotiate for the lives of three missionary families. The *Jeunesse* rebels attacked as night began to fall, captured the families, and were taking them to stand trial in the jungle before the rebel tribunal.

The *Jeunesse* rebels were part of a movement of disillusioned Congolese youth who accused North American workers of being collaborators with the corrupt national government and of destroying African culture.

The two nurses convinced the rebels to allow the mission families to stay in the clinic instead of the forest. Four days later, the workers were evacuated by United Nations' helicopters. The Congolese who protected them were left behind to bear the consequences of not being loyal to the rebel cause. In the chaos, all parties inflicted pain on others, intentionally or unintentionally.

"These events [the capture and evacuation of the mission families, as well as the abandoning of the remaining Congolese brothers and sisters] divided the Kandale community and created distance between the community and the mission," said Rod Hollinger-Janzen, executive coordinator of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) and part of the delegation participating in the reconciliation ceremony. "The community suffered materially and spiritually from the effects of these divisions."

On Oct. 12, 2017, the Kandale community, the same from which the

mission families had fled, lined the sides of the road to welcome six vehicles completing an arduous 500-mile journey from Kinshasa, the capital city of Democratic Republic of the Congo.

More than 30 Congolese Mennonite church leaders and mission representatives had accepted the Kandale congregation's invitation to attend a reconciliation ceremony.

The reconciliation ceremony was organized by Macaire Kilambo, a lay leader of *Communauté Mennonite au Congo* (Mennonite Church in Congo), Kandale's church and community leaders, and mission representatives. It took several years to pull together. They hoped that by recognizing the negative consequences of violence and betrayal, and then reconciling with one another, the mission representatives and the community could create an environment in which Kandale's people could prosper.

Several traditional dignitaries were present for the ceremony, including a descendant of the leader who had given the land on which the mission was built. Four North Americans, who had been missionary children in Congo, were also in attendance.

André Ndjoko, a Kandale Mennonite Church elder, knelt on the floor before the Congolese and North American Mennonite delegations to ask forgiveness

on behalf of his community for how they had collectively mistreated the missionaries who had lived among them.

"We acted against our doctrine, against our community [in 1964]," Ndjoko said. "We destroyed houses that you built. What we have done is against our ancestors, against our parents, and our God. We need to return to you to ask forgiveness."

Then, Hollinger-Janzen knelt before the Kandale leaders, accepted their apology, and extended forgiveness on behalf of the mission workers. He acknowledged that no one was blameless prior to 1964, or since. He asked for forgiveness for the mission's failings and the neglect of the Kandale community following the rebellion.

"Each of us has acted in a way that has not pleased God," Hollinger-Janzen said. "But today, we need to come together and join hands once again. All of us need each other's strength so that God's Spirit can guide us into the future."

Together they hoped to bring closure to more than a half-century of unresolved remorse for betrayal and strained relationships between mission workers and Kandale's residents.

Kandale was one of the original eight stations of Congo Inland Mission, a predecessor agency of AIMM. AIMM and Mennonite Mission Network are partners in ministry. ■

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Embodying the church, part 3:

Go to our neighbors and love them

This short reflection is the third of a four-part series contributed by Joshua Garber, who serves with his wife, Alisha, and their son, Asher, in Barcelona, Spain. His series explores four core elements that light the way for faith communities as they engage in how to be the church today.

By Joshua Garber

Christ taught us the most important commandments are to love God and love your neighbor—everything else is commentary. However, when Christ calls us to love, he's not talking about kind sentiments or having a generally positive disposition toward others. As Dr. Cornel West—an African-American philosopher, political activist, professor and author—is fond of saying, “Justice is what love

looks like in public.” And, I would add, radical hospitality and mercy are what love *feels* like.


- Host a low-pressure potluck and invite all your neighbors (even the ones you don't know well). Do this regularly.
- Does pretty much everyone in your community share the same background, values and culture?

Consider who in your neighborhood you're not connecting with and ask why.

- Who is marginalized in your community? Connect with them and learn how you can serve them.

Keep up-to-date with Alisha, Asher and Joshua at www.WorthwhileAdventures.org.

Cut out or fold over, post, and use this verse for contemplation and prayer over the next month.



Be kind to
one another,
tenderhearted,
forgiving
one another,
as God in
Christ has
forgiven you.

—Ephesians 4:32

Be the Gospel.



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Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872