

Nov. 2013

Dear Friends,

We are often asked, “What is life like in the Congo?” Maybe the following story, which is played out over and over again throughout the Congo, will give you a bit of a glimpse into what life is like for many of our Congolese neighbors.

When he died, Kasanda (all names have been changed) left behind two wives and 6 children aged 6 – 1. He died of what we in the West would say was stomach cancer but what he and his family believed to be illness brought on by witchcraft. A year earlier, Kasanda had decided to take a second wife. (Polygamy is legal and widely practiced in Congo.) Mbundu Pauline, his first wife, begged him not to but he ignored her wishes and married Ngalula Verro. One year later, he was dead. His brothers, knowing how angry Mbundu had been about the second marriage, concluded that she had engaged in sorcery to provoke Kasanda’s illness and death.

For the most part, Congolese society holds that there is no such thing as a natural death. The assumption almost always is that illness and death have been brought on by sorcery. This applies not just for unexplained deaths but also for those resulting from cancer, old age, traffic accidents, etc. When someone falls ill, the search for the responsible party begins.

In this case, when Kasanda fell ill, suspicion focused on Mbundu and when Kasanda ultimately died, Mbundu became fearful for her life and fled. She took her still nursing baby along with her but left behind the other four children. Kasanda’s other wife, Ngalula, returned with her 1-year-old baby, to her parents’ home. If Kasanda had had a younger brother, she would have become that brother’s wife but because Kasanda was a youngest son, Ngalula was free to take her baby and leave.



Figure 1 Makolo, his wife, mother and 5 of the 9 children

Kasanda’s older brother, Makolo has assumed responsibility for Mbundu’s four abandoned children.

This places an enormous burden on his already struggling household, which before the addition of Kasanda's 4 children numbered 8 people --Makolo, his wife, Kanku, their 5 children and his elderly mother.

Makolo has an 8th grade education. He had to drop out of school at that level because his father died and there wasn't enough money for school. He was employed as a domestic worker by one of the Congolese doctors at Good Shepherd Hospital in Tshikaji but when the doctor moved, Makolo lost his job and hasn't been able to find another one. He and Kanku work in their field while his 72-year-old mother cares for the 9 children. Makolo, Kanku and the children live in a two-room mud brick house covered with second-hand metal roofing sheets. Because it is taboo for a parent to sleep under the same roof as his/her adult child, Makolo's mother sleeps in a small thatched roof hut a few feet from his house.

Makolo dreams of one day having enough money to enlarge his house and cover it with roofing sheets that don't leak. He would like to be able to earn his living by buying goods such as sugar, salt, tea, soap and milk powder to resell from a little stall he would build in front of his house. But with no job, and 12 people to house, feed and clothe, Makolo can barely keep his head above water. Yet in the midst of these challenges, he has an unwavering and fervent faith in God. He expresses his faith not only through hope and confidence in the future but also through tangible acts such as his service as an elder in his church and the literacy lessons he holds so that others can have the joy of reading the Bible.

Extreme poverty, large families, inadequate education, no societal safety net and a belief in sorcery that permeates every aspect of life – these are some of the foundational issues that impact everyday life in Congo. Faith in God, hope for better times, strength in the face of hardship and generosity in spite of poverty - these are also everyday realities for many of our Congolese brothers and sisters.

We sometimes feel overwhelmed by the seemingly endless cascade of problems people face and we are often frustrated and bewildered by customs and beliefs outside of our personal experience. But



Figure 2 - Eleven people live in this home

by God's grace and because of support from people and churches across the US, we have the privilege of sharing in the lives of our Congolese colleagues and friends in good times and bad. If you are one of those supporting churches or friends – thank you for enabling us to be here. And if you aren't yet involved in supporting mission workers, we invite you to journey with us or with others like us.

Blessings,
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