



57 ❖ A pioneer in West Kasai

Oscar Kanda was born in 1935 to Catholic parents. Moving from Catholic to Protestant, he wandered from the Presbyterians to the Evangelical Mennonite Church, having also been with the Mennonite Church of Congo. Justifying these moves, he explained that he left the Presbyterians because he didn't find love of neighbor in this group, and social life there was characterized by relaxed moral standards. As far as the Mennonite Church of Congo is concerned, he left the church because of conflicts that had made their home there and that set leaders against each other. Without wanting to be, he became implicated in these conflicts. This situation revealed to Oscar that another Mennonite church existed in Congo.

He discovered this through state officials who had been called on to judge the church conflicts. They said that this latter church, the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM), worked in peace and harmony. They told him that if he joined this group, he would be able to work in tranquility. They indicated that this church's headquarters was in Mbuji Mayi in East Kasai. Learning this motivated Oscar and the group that was with him to write to CEM leaders to express their desire to belong to their ecclesiastical community. They received a positive response. In this way, worship services of the CEM began anew in Kananga, where he lived, which is in West Kasai. A previous CEM group had been formed in 1985 but disbanded.

However, Pastor Kanda's new CEM congregation was at first looked down on by believers both within CEM and outside it, because they only had a small number of members and were without denominational identity or church locale. It seemed to others as if this was a gathering of children pretending to behave as adults. As their leader, Oscar Kanda had the understanding, perseverance, and determination to forge ahead in intercessory prayer. With the cooperation of others and the help of God, he succeeded in giving form and life to this group that he had brought back into existence.

Responding to his prayers, God accomplished miracles with Oscar, as in ancient times. This fact encouraged him personally and consolidated his faith in God. We can give as examples the following:

- A child was miraculously healed after a strong intercessory prayer, despite the fact that the suffering child's mother and passersby saw death coming to the child.
- Following three days of strong prayers, a local pastor's wife who was afflicted with strong and interminable hemorrhaging was healed.
- Serpents sent against certain congregational members were neutralized, as was the *tunsonda*, a kind of magic rifle used to miraculously kill anyone whom one wants to eliminate. For these cases, Oscar says, "the authors of these ignoble acts came, in most cases, to confess their wrong actions and ask forgiveness."

Because of his determination to advance the work of the Lord, Pastor Oscar Kanda also traveled in 2006 to Ilebo, a region situated 400 kilometers from Kananga. Accompanied by other believers, he exhorted and encouraged the brothers and sisters of this region to reverse their earlier decision to abandon Mennonite faith. In order to make real this noble project, Oscar and his companions brought them Bibles, songbooks, and other legal and community documents, such as minutes from General Council meetings—all of which were meant to help them understand the current state of CEM. Because of this undertaking, the Mennonites of CEM Ilebo succeeded in creating congregations including Ditalala, Lumu Luimpe, and Kapimbi, which now belong to the missionary district of North Kasai. Oscar Kanda undertook similar actions for the CEM missionary district of South Kasai.

Through sustained effort, Pastor Oscar Kanda is the one who laid the foundations for CEM's presence in West Kasai. As such, he served as provincial delegate for CEM West Kasai. But out of respect for God's word and the juridical texts guiding CEM, Pastor Kanda calmly ceded the position of provincial delegate to Robert Ngoyi. Since that time, he has played the role of director of the department of Christian education for the Kasai Center district.

Oscar Kanda recognizes that development is crucial in order for the church to avoid asking for handouts. He understands that with agriculture and animal husbandry the church in general and Kasai Center in particular would be able to care for its own needs. He underlines, however, that today's church is experiencing technical difficulties on the road to self-sufficiency—things like the nonpayment of salaries, the state of the roads, the lack of means of transportation. And other elements are slowing the takeoff. But Oscar has the conviction that, as God has done with Anabaptist Mennonites in the past, God will assist CEM Congo in general and CEM Kasai Center in particular.

Jean Félix Chimbanga