



## 51 ❖ I've been invited to a banquet on Thursday

Pastor Moise Kabangy was in his second term as the president of the Mennonite Church of Zaire in the 1970s. Through his deep pastoral concern for all members of his church, regardless of their ethnic origin or dialect, he had won the confidence and respect of the sprawling church that he served.

He traveled a lot, always making sure to visit the more isolated rural areas, sitting with clusters of village believers, asking after their well-being and dealing with any friction among them. He would assure them that they were important to the broader church, no matter what their tribal origin, and lead them in a brief Bible study.

But all was not well for President Kabangy personally. He had been diagnosed with bone cancer. At one point the femur of his left leg had snapped while he was walking. He was flown to Kinshasa for emergency surgery to reposition the severed ends with a plate and screws. He was immediately put on a regime of oral drugs. Upon his release the doctor told him that his leg would heal, but the long-term prognosis was not good.

When he returned to church headquarters at Tshikapa, President Kabangy went back to work. But as time passed, those close to him noted that he was leaning more and more heavily on his cane as he walked.

---

photo—Moise Kabangy with his wife Berthine Kimbadi

Another issue troubled Pastor Kabangy even more than his bone cancer. He was estranged from a fellow Mennonite leader, Pastor Boniface Muhaku. After early demonstrating leadership skills, Muhaku was sent to the Kalonda Bible Institute and then named lead pastor at Nyanga station. His ideas about local and national church policies and program began to diverge from those of President Kabangy. After several rounds of acrimonious letters, Pastor Muhaku announced that he was going to leave the Mennonite Church of Zaire and lead a splinter Mennonite group.

With passing time, however, Pastor Muhaku's following drifted away. Furthermore, his health had deteriorated too. He had persistent fevers and was diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis. With many hours for reflection, he one day wrote a letter to President Kabangy tracing the events that had driven them apart. He expressed his regret and sorrow, accepted responsibility for what he had done, and sought forgiveness.

Pastor Kabangy immediately responded, expressing his joy and assuring Pastor Muhaku of his forgiveness. He concluded his letter by saying that their alienation had weighed on him across the years and telling Pastor Muhaku how grateful he was that they could face their respective diseases with peace of mind and heart.

The condition of the two men deteriorated with grim speed. In mid-February of 1979 Pastor Kabangy noted a small mass growing on his ribcage. A week later he was transported to the AIMM hospital across the Kasai River at Kalonda. Meanwhile, Pastor Muhaku had also been admitted to a hospital in his area. By Wednesday, February 28, both men lay at death's door.

At Kalonda Pastor Kabangy was drifting in and out of consciousness. One of the last times he rallied, he summoned his family and co-workers to his bed and said, "I have some final words for you, and I want you to listen carefully. I am not afraid of death, because I know that Jesus is my Savior. I do not hold anyone accountable for my illness and death, and I forbid that any of you do so. I accept my death as the will of God for me. When I leave you, I want all of you to remain at peace with each other and to do all you can to strengthen and carry on the work of our church."

On Wednesday, February 28, just before daybreak, Pastor Kabangy breathed his last.

A few hours later the same day, sixty miles to the north, Pastor Muhaku stirred in his bed, summoned his wife, and asked her in a hoarse whisper “What day is it?” She told him that it was Wednesday. He then struggled to tell her that he’d just had an amazing dream, which filled his heart with joy. “I’ve learned that I’ve been invited to a banquet feast with Pastor Kabangy tomorrow, Thursday. I’ve seen a robe that has been prepared for me. It is beautiful like nothing we’ve seen on this earth, a robe we’d never have enough money to buy. The robe is ready for me. I’ve seen it, and tomorrow, Thursday, I’m going to wear it at a banquet with Pastor Kabangy.”

Later that day, Wednesday, after sundown, Pastor Muhaku also died.

Jim Bertsche