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In his youth there was little to distinguish Bukungu Mishumbi from the thousands of other village boys who across the years attended simple thatch-and-stick schools in their villages and pursued further education on the CIM/AIMM mission posts of their areas. As a matter of fact, in his younger years he was easily overlooked among others of his age group. A bit short and quiet, he was content to let activities and conversational topics be determined by his more noisy, extroverted companions. But when school was in session and their teacher was up front standing by a blackboard nailed to the forest pole structure of the front wall, Bukungu was all attention. This quiet schoolboy was a quick learner. What was more, he was particularly attentive when his teacher talked to the class about “Yesu Kilisto.”

Upon baptism at the Banga station among his Lele people, he took the new name of François. He was among a handful of Banga students sent to enroll in a two-year teacher-training school at Ndjoko Punda, and he then taught for six years back in Banga. He always came to class well prepared and brooked no foolishness on the part of his students. When he started earning a salary, it became evident that he used his earnings wisely, to the obvious benefit of his family. He was soon elected treasurer of the Banga church district.

It was at a general assembly of the church in 1964 that elections were held for officers who would replace missionaries in roles of leadership and responsibility. The position of treasurer was enor-

photo—François Bukungu

mously sensitive, requiring someone who not only knew bookkeeping but also could be trusted to handle large sums of money in the name of the church.

During a break in the sessions, a small delegation sought out mission treasurer Art Janz for his advice. His response was immediate. "I would suggest François Bukungu from Banga. Among all of the district treasurers I've worked with, his reports have always been on time and have always been clear and accurate." This was how Bukungu, the quiet teacher from Banga, was elected to serve as the first general treasurer of the Mennonite Church of Congo.

Bukungu moved to Tshikapa and began months of intensive training at Art's shoulder, working his way through the weekly, monthly, and annual rhythms of the general treasury. In the process Bukungu was occasionally reminded that "all this money is not our money, it is the church's money. We are only caretakers." His personal convictions were only deepened in the process. But after François Bukungu was on his own at church headquarters, both missionary and African communities wondered how he would deal with the pressures that all knew would be coming.

For instance there were times when someone in financial difficulty came to his office to arrange a loan. Since Bukungu had access to "all that money," he surely could help? The answer was always sympathetic but firm: "All that money in the church box belongs to the church. Sorry."

Or someone from his distant village would express delight that now one of their own had access to "all that money" and would surely respond to the loyalties of a blood brother with a small donation on the side. Again Bukungu's response was understanding but equally firm: "There is no money amid 'all that money' that can be doled out as gifts. If I did that, both you and I would be stealing."

Now and again someone wanted to be reimbursed for something he had purchased for the church. The conversation invariably played out the same. "If you spent money for the church, where is the receipt?" Bukungu asked.

"Oh, there is no receipt. You'll just need to take my word for it."

Bukungu's response was always the same: "No receipt? No money!"

Word spread within the church that Bukungu was "a man of the box" who could be trusted. The fictitious claims for handouts ceased.

He was reelected for a second term and then for a third, although officers were technically limited to two terms. This signaled the delegates' trust and respect for a man who had demonstrated unquestioned integrity in handling their funds.

Throughout his tenure, Bukungu insisted on an annual audit. Sometimes friends would question this and wonder why he was inviting trouble. His answer was unequivocal: "I invite trouble if I do not have annual audits!" Every audit came out on the dime.

In 1978 Bukungu let it be known that he wanted to retire as church treasurer. The delegates resisted, but Bukungu was firm. It was time for someone else to take his place. With reluctance the church accepted his request, but with the stipulation that he would stay on a year or so to make sure that his successor was well trained and oriented.

Leaving Tshikapa he made his way to home territory and settled at a river port named Ilebo, where as an unpretentious layman he began a business enterprise that immediately flourished. Meanwhile, he rallied local Mennonites to build a chapel in permanent materials, a project to which he contributed generously. The local church ordained him as a deacon. Then at a general assembly he was proposed and affirmed for ordination as a pastor, a mark of high respect, although he had no formal theological training. For the balance of his life he served his church as Pastor Bukungu.

In his later years he was sought for counsel when thorny issues surfaced within the Mennonite Church of Congo. He was simply known and respected as a man of God.

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