



## 6 ❁ Death on an evangelism mission

**D**aniel Kitamba was one of the first three people baptized by the Nyanga mission in 1921. He thus opened the way for many others who would follow. That event, which happened in the first decade of Mennonite evangelization in Congo, takes on particular significance when one knows that his people were situated at the intersection of traditional religion and Christianity.

Daniel was born around 1904. His parents were followers of traditional African religion, firmly believing in the omnipotence of life energies and engaging in a range of worship practices and values that have the goal of guiding and safeguarding the life of their community.

Raised in Ndjoko Punda, he did his primary and biblical studies in the first missionary schools there. In Nyanga he married Ruth Isaka in 1926, the first religious marriage celebrated at the Nyanga mission. Ruth was the daughter of the chief of her husband's village. To this couple were born three boys and three girls.

As a married man, Daniel Kitamba had to find work to support his household. After faithful service as a teacher at all four stations the Mennonite missionaries had opened by then—Ndjoko Punda, Nyanga, Kalamba, and Mukedi—he was employed by the missionaries as a supervisor of the different schools opened in the villages depending on the Nyanga outpost.

Because of his dynamism, dedication, and sense of responsibility, he took part, on behalf of his church, in conferences on teaching organized in the capital city, Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), and in Rhodesia. The church decided to consecrate him as a deacon. His contribution was great in the expansion of the evangelical work of Congo Inland Mission in the large province of Kasai and elsewhere.

But his life was brief. Like Jesus Christ, Daniel Kitamba would spend only three decades on this earth. While he was on a mission of evangelization, this devoted man was struck by lightning on October 5, 1936, in the village of Jimbo Kimbuanda. The church of Nyanga, which had a good opinion of this pioneer, did everything possible, bringing his remains back to Nyanga and finally to the village Kipoko, where he would be buried in honor. Thus ended the short life of a man serving his Lord who died on the battlefield, like a soldier at the front, leaving a widow and six children.

But the story repeats itself in a different way. After his father's death, Daniel Kitamba's eldest son, David Bieng, became active in politics. When the country achieved independence, he was among the people most in the public eye in Kasai. But one morning in the year 1961 he was assassinated at the Tshikapa airport, bringing on another unexpected round of mourning.

It can be said of Daniel Kitamba that he died in the line of duty, practicing his faith. Many have given their lives, freely or forcibly, for ideals other than the Christian faith. But dying for the one who died on the cross because of our sins remains a great sacrifice.

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