

12 ❖ Mama Ruth, mother of orphans

In many cultures, including many in Africa, women have been despised and undervalued, considered as objects of pleasure, cooks, unpaid babysitters, and incapable of rational speech. These erroneous attitudes have greatly restricted women's freedom and limited their accomplishments in certain areas.

Yet the traditional roles of homemaker and mother assigned to women in such cultures are tremendously important. Raising a child correctly requires love. It is in love that God has given to women the important assignment of accompanying men and teaching children. Proverbs 1:8–9 underlines the importance for children of teachings received from a mother as well as a father: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (NIV).

Mama Ruth Makanga played this role fully in the lives of young girls and boys in Kamayala. She was born in Nambulu around 1920, and her parents, who had certainly not gone to school, sent their daughter to the little school in Kamayala. People understood that you sent children to school not only so they would learn to read and write but also so they would be transformed and transform the world in which they lived.

Ruth became the wife of Daniel Khumbi,¹ who was employed at the Kamayala dispensary. But he passed away in 1956, and Ruth became a widow. She had seven children.

After the death of her husband, Mama Ruth was employed by a missionary, Bertha Miller, to care for orphans. Ruth Makanga gave herself body and soul to these orphans as well as to her own children. Raising children is a task that belongs to parents or relatives. But to raise children whose parents one doesn't know can pose great challenges. Ruth Makanga demonstrated the full potential for love that a woman can carry within herself. She succeeded in raising her own children as well as those brought to her from the various villages touched by evangelization.

She also helped other women who wanted to bear children. Through prayer and by using medicinal plants that God placed in nature, Mama Ruth treated women who had fertility problems.

Many of those who benefited from her motherly warmth became leaders in the church or elsewhere and remained thankful. They report that while doing this work well, she considered that satisfaction and happiness are an illusion when they are sought for themselves. True satisfaction comes from a job well done.

Grounding her faith in Jesus Christ, Mama Ruth knew how to speak to men and to women, to build them up, to exhort them, and to console them. Blessed by the Eternal, this woman who knew how to share the joy and the suffering of children without parents spent more than eighty years on this earth. God called her to himself on June 1, 2000.

Vincent Ndandula

1 See "Daniel Khumbi, Christian nurse" (chapter 11).