

72 ❖ We need Mama Treasurer more than the money

Thérèse Kamuanya married a Mennonite man, Gustave, the son of Pastor Onésime Mpoyi¹ of the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM) Kasekeyi congregation of Kabuela. This is how Thérèse, who grew up Catholic, came to the Evangelical Mennonite Church. After living for a brief time with Gustave’s parents, Thérèse and Gustave left Kabuela for the city of Mbuji Mayi, where they had chosen to live.

Arriving in Mbuji Mayi, Thérèse and Gustave quickly became members of the CEM Bupole congregation. The welcome extended to her—and especially to her baby, Astrid—by the mothers of the congregation increased Thérèse’s Anabaptist Christian faith and led her to become, without delay, a member of the Union of Mennonite Women of the Bupole congregation. “Throughout the seven years we stayed in Mbuji Mayi, in the Bupole congregation, I was a member of the mothers’ federation and enthusiastically participated in all the meetings, on the second and the thirtieth of each month,” she reports.

After Mbuji Mayi, Thérèse and her husband decided to move to Luputa, about 180 kilometers from Mbuji Mayi. There again the couple joined a CEM congregation, Munya wa Moyi. For the seven years they spent at Luputa, Thérèse joined with the women of the congregation and worked on their behalf.

1 See “A great pastor who turned the other cheek” (chapter 58).

As she gained knowledge and experience, Thérèse was sometimes designated to preach to the women. She proved to be a good preacher of the word of God. One day, the head of the Luputa CEM asked Thérèse to preach to her peers. She took her message from Proverbs 14:1 and spoke of a model woman. Because of this homily, the women affirmed Thérèse and asked her to serve as their president. But she did not accept the nomination, because she believed she was too young. Thérèse was a traditional woman.

In 1999, Thérèse and Gustave returned to Kabuela and rejoined their former congregation. Almost immediately, Thérèse Kamuanya was appointed secretary of the women's group. This time, despite her reluctance to take leadership, she accepted the role and exercised that function from 2000 to 2005. That year, documents report that her responsibilities were torn from her by the pastor at the time, following a land dispute that had set some of the members of the parish against the family of the late Pastor Onésime Mpoyi, her father-in-law.

Though she had been improperly discharged from office, Thérèse did not abandon the faith. She continued to meet with the women and participate in their projects. Her contributions to the group effort were still visible and revealed her genuine desire to contribute to the growth of her congregation. But she vowed never again to accept a position of responsibility in the church.

Her zeal and commitment to serve the Lord stem from her adherence to the advice her father-in-law gave her when she joined the family. "He told me, 'Whatever happens to you, do not give up the faith and do not leave the CEM. Use my example. It is my recommendation to you.'"

Eventually she was asked to return to her duties as secretary of the Kasekeyi women's group, and the documents confiscated from her were returned. For the sake of serving the Lord, Thérèse reversed her decision not to take leadership and agreed to continue her ministry within her congregation. She continues to serve to this day.

But it has not been easy. From time to time, for example, she has noted discrepancies between income and what the treasurer of the association declared. Faced with this situation, and in order not to shake the faith of that sister, she has urged the other sisters to overlook the problem. "We are in much greater need of Mama Treasurer than of what she keeps for the congregation," she tells them.

The mother of two boys and five girls, Thérèse has been a major contributor to the growth of CEM Kasekeyi in terms of community development and evangelism, through her participation in numerous projects, including working toward purchasing a sound system. Currently, however, Thérèse and the other women are struggling to get women's activities reinstated in Kasekeyi. These have been on hold for some time. Her efforts have focused on the meetings of mothers, collective work, and assistance to the needy.

Thérèse believes it is through her love of work, her ongoing concern to serve God, and the minimization of obstacles that present themselves that the Lord's grace and the hand of the eternal God accompany her in her life and in everything she does.

Jean Félix Chimbalanga