



47 ❖ The impact of a quiet man

Herman Buller was a man who listened much more than he spoke, but his unswerving commitment to his faith and to service in the name of Christ was clear to all who knew him. This Mennonite farm boy from Oklahoma would make a unique contribution to the Congolese Mennonite church at a sensitive time.

Herman began college in Oklahoma and Newton, Kansas, but was called up by the draft during World War II. He registered as a conscientious objector and served with Civilian Public Service units in Nebraska and Colorado. After his term of service he volunteered with Mennonite Central Committee, traveling on boats taking livestock to impoverished war refugees in Europe who were struggling to restart their shattered lives. Herman made nine Atlantic round trips with horses. He later served with MCC teams distributing clothing and food in Hamburg, Germany. There he met Ruth Lehman, also an MCC volunteer in that city.

Herman then enrolled in Goshen College and earned a degree in accounting in 1951. Upon graduating he married Ruth and they took a position on the administrative staff of the Mennonite Hospital of Bloomington, Illinois. Gifted with a clear bass voice, he sang with a quartet, the Evangelaires, who were much in demand at the time in central Illinois.

In the early 1960s he took a position as administrator of a hospital in Hinton, Oklahoma. It was here that Herman came to the atten-

tion of AIMM, which was looking for an administrator/accountant to oversee the mission medical program. The Bullers went to Congo in 1966, where Herman began working closely with African staff and church officers.

The decade of the 1970s was a particularly difficult period in the Congolese mission community. Amid the post-independence political furor, missions in that large country were working their own way through new understandings and new relations with their respective emerging churches.

As national churches elected their own officers, acquired their own legal charters from the government, and began to make decisions on their own, issues of finance, equipment, and property quickly emerged as an extremely sensitive agenda. It was in this context that Herman made an enormous contribution to both the mission and the church.

Having by this time won the confidence and trust of a number of African leaders, Herman, a missionary, was elected by African delegates in an annual assembly to serve as the assistant treasurer of their church. He was given an office next to the church treasurer and surrounded on all sides by African staff. His dual role of overseeing mission funds and monitoring the transfer of mission contributions to the church's own budget brought many opportunities for misunderstanding, mistrust, and miscommunication. But while the relations of some mission groups with their churches were souring because of controversy over funds, AIMM never encountered such a problem. Herman's gentle, quiet, respectful stance of servanthood, coupled with his thoroughness and command of bookkeeping, quickly won the trust of the African church administration. He continued to serve in this role until he and Ruth retired from the field in 1988.

Known for his erect 6'2" posture and his firm, long stride, Herman suffered in his later years from osteoporosis, a condition that eventually curved his back to a 90-degree angle. When he moved about slowly with the aid of a walker, his field of vision was limited to the floor at his feet. Living with increasing pain only partially curbed by medication, he insisted that in spite of everything, "the Lord is good."

Herman died peacefully in his bed in the night on June 14, 2005. This quiet man left an enduring impact on all who knew him both in Congo and in the States.