



Profiles

of Mennonite Faith

Nzelenga Philippe – Pioneer Congolese Pastor

Nzelenga Philippe was one of the first ordained pastors of the Mennonite Brethren Church of the Congo. He was born in the village of Matshitshi in the sector of Mungindu, Gungu Territory, Kwi lu District, Bandundu Province, as a member of the Pende tribe. His father's name was Nzelenga Mulewu and his mother's was Ndungo.

We do not know his exact date of birth, only that in 1925 he began primary school in his native village, Matshitshi. He then transferred to the Kafumba mission station where he continued his primary school studies. In 1928, while in the fourth grade, he was encouraged by missionary Aaron Janzen to open and teach in a primary school in Totshi village, Kilamba sector, of Gungu Territory. From 1928 to 1931, Nzelenga Philippe taught in Totshi. A few years later Janzen encouraged him to leave Totshi to start a primary school at the village of Mbuto, some 15 kilometers from Kafumba.

Here he started a primary school and a church. After a few years, in 1939, he was ordained as pastor along with Ndjimbo Timothée. They became the very

first pastors of the Congolese Mennonite Brethren Church.

Nzelenga married Fumwenzi Asena, a young woman from the village of Kikwandji. They had six children.

Pastor Nzelenga Philippe marked his ministry, indeed his whole life, with prayer and dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was one of a few pastors who did not receive training at the Kafumba Bible School. He never had the traditional Biblical studies as did most CEFMC (Congo Mennonite Brethren Community of Churches) pastors. In spite of this, he was a remarkable preacher and leader with a profound sense of ethics and discipline. He always lived and obeyed the command of Christ, "To go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16: 15).

In his congregation he stressed Mennonite Brethren moral and theological principles and the spiritual virtues of the Bible. He continually reminded his listeners of the words of Psalms 111:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding."

For him, true fear of the



Nzelenga Philippe

Lord was to submit all of one's life to God. He taught that Christians are obligated to act in a manner that is pleasing to God. During many of his sermons he invited believers to claim and draw on the wisdom of God, to acquire the knowledge and the fear of God so that they might be given the gift of discernment between good and evil and bring guidance to the details of everyday life. For Pastor Nzelenga Philippe, to be wise was to live in total and constant obedience to the will of God.

During his ministry he communicated Christian and Mennonite values to thousands of faithful Mennonite Brethren in his parish, including his own children. As a result, all of his surviving children are faithful and active members in CEFMC parishes in Kikwit and Kinshasa.

Pastor Nzelenga Philippe is one of the few pastors who never left the parish where he was ordained. He lived his entire life at his post in Mbuto from 1936 until 1991, the year of his death.

In the field of evangelism and church planting Pastor Nzelenga made some of his greatest contributions. He created worship centres in many villages and worked as the pastoral supervisor overseeing the CEFMC parishes of Mbuto, Gibo, Mwinda, Kikandji and Ngongo. Under his direction these parishes grew and developed significant growth in infrastructure and membership.

Pastor Nzelenga remained faithful to the education he received from his missionary "parents." Well respected by the missionaries, Pastor Nzelenga was frequently invited

to assemblies and conferences to share his wisdom and long pastoral experience with young pastors and Christians from other denominations.

He was a defender of Mennonite Brethren doctrine. Even when the difficult times came, during the rebellion of 1964-1968, he never betrayed his faith, his Church and his Lord Jesus Christ. During the rebellion he was arrested by rebels who wanted to assassinate him and force him to renounce his faith. During this time, one of his sons and a grandson were killed by rebels.

To sustain his family, he did not wait for the church to pay him wages. Like St. Paul he worked hard in the fields and pastures of Mbuto with his own hands to provide for the needs of his family. All who knew him noted the abundance of food in his house. An untiring worker, Nzelenga divided the surplus of his fields with members of the parish.

Nzelenga's life constitutes an eloquent testimony for our Church. For more than 60 years Christians of the church of Mbuto, and those of the surrounding villages, profited from his spiritual and moral teaching. Thousands have been converted and baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, thanks to his pastoral ministry. He continues to serve as a model to young pastors who choose to devote themselves to the service of the Church.

Cut down by disease, Nzelenga died in 1991 in Mbuto where he was buried. The entire church community came to pay their respects to this servant of God.



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Author: Kikweta Jean, Congo

Translated by: G.E. Miller

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E-mail: kreddig@mbconf.ca • www.mbhistory.org