

# 👉 News (at last!) from Jeff and Ellen Hoover 👈

Lubumbashi, 6 November 2010

Dear Friends,

Please accept our apologies for the long silence, though we've been in touch with some of you by email, letter, or even in person in the case of those who have visited Congo this year. We will spare you the excuses for our silence and instead try to fill you in on some major happenings here in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo. So stay tuned for School, Uni-News, and Celebrations.

## **A new frontier for The English-speaking School of Lubumbashi (TESOL)**

One of our ongoing activities requires your special attention at this time, so we'll start with that one:

### Ancient history and current events

The English-speaking School of Lubumbashi (TESOL). Since the school's opening in 1987, Jeff and I have both been involved in various capacities with this United Methodist international school. Starting with seven children in Grades 1-3 in September 1987, the school now has a hundred students and offers classroom teaching for pre-kindergarten (age 4) through Grade 9 and a correspondence option for Grades 10-12. The composition of the student body has always been diverse in terms of nationality, religion, home languages, and parents' occupations, but the particular mix varies with the economy and politics. What the children have in common is that they or their families want them to have their education in English, whereas most schools in Congo are in French (or sometimes the local language for primary school). We currently have eighteen nationalities represented, including Congo—in fact, a larger percentage of Congolese students than in the past. Some of these families have been working or studying in English-speaking countries and have now returned to work in Congo. The transition for their children is much less traumatic if they can continue their education without a drastic change in language and educational methodology. Other Congolese families make the sacrifices necessary for their children to attend our school so that they will be prepared for high school or college education in English.



### Bad news ☹

Since its first year of operation (1987-88), the school has been located on land granted by the Congolese government to the French embassy for a school. A French school already occupied part of the property, but the plot was very large and we were allowed to build in one corner. Four years later the French school suddenly stopped operations after a civil emergency, and later the non-profit that operated it was legally closed. By agreement with the embassy, we used some of the classrooms in exchange for guarding the property. In September 2009 a new French School opened, using the same name. At first the embassy said that our school and the new French school would have similar agreements with the French embassy, but in the course of the school year, this policy changed (we were informed of this rather late in the last term). We were asked to vacate seven rooms in French School buildings at the end of the school year. We accomplished the downsizing, by the creation of new storage space with a container and break-out space with tents and an attractive thatched "garden-house." Meanwhile, well before the end of last school year, we intensified our search for a large plot of land where we could build new buildings, as we had not been able to find any large facility where we could move all or part of the school by modifying facilities to our needs. A large undeveloped plot would mean looking well outside the city center, but since our students live at home, the new site could not be too far from town or on rough tracks for the students' daily commute.

### Good news ☺

We have now found a site with many advantages, but since the arrangement is not quite official (not officially official...), we can't tell you much more about it!! We can say that it's a big piece of land (about

50 acres), with no houses or other construction on it. It's flat with no streams or marshes limiting its use. It's on a major artery, which is currently dirt but maintained by a company, and the government has reserved right of way for four lanes in the future. We are very excited about all that we will be able to do with this land.

Our concern now is to prepare a master plan for the new site (we have two earlier master plans, but for sites with quite different shapes from the current one), then construct classrooms by August in order to be ready for next school year. A tall order, but we have no choice if we want the school to continue.

### What we need 🗨️

What we need right now is funds for building. We have a supportive core of parents who are willing to contact local companies for their financial assistance. These companies are aware that the school is an important community asset. It helps them recruit specialized employees and attracts potential customers. Also, our oldest alumni are now 30, and while many are in service careers that are not necessarily lucrative, we have enthusiastic boosters who will contribute what they can. (They keep a busy Facebook page buzzing.) TESOL is a United Methodist school with an Advance project number (10337A), and we would like to show that support can come from the international United Methodist community. The school has been generally self-supporting from tuition payments. We are now asking each one of you: as individuals, churches, and groups to make a concerted effort to help us raise these funds so that we can build classrooms, lavatories, and an office by August 2011. We are counting on you!

Some of you may find the idea of raising money for a building to be rather bland and boring. If that's the case, you can help us by raising scholarship funds. Nothing boring about that! Among the best students at our school are some whose families are not able to pay our full tuition. During the last couple years, almost all TESOL's income from the Advance has been used for scholarships, but it has not been adequate to provide all the scholarship subsidies that we needed. We have had to use reserves to keep these students in school. The difficult economic times also knocked a few non-scholarship families into the scholarship category when their companies closed, ended contracts, or started paying salaries erratically. Your help in this department would therefore be equally valuable. Tuition is \$1300 per term (there are three terms) and we need this much for each student to meet the costs of running the school. Generally, tuition subsidies range from \$200 to \$800 per term, with a few being higher. Some of the students receiving subsidies are children whose families are employed in full-time church work. Others are working full-time in other professions but are earning at the low end of the pay scale or are limited by handicaps. If you can contribute a part of the scholarship for one child, we'll combine your gift with others to enable that child to continue receiving their education at our school.

### So what else is new?

The University of Lubumbashi (UNILU) is the large government university where Jeff has taught since 1979 as our first missionary assignments in Congo. He still teaches a full course load and continues to enjoy watching his students increase their skills and knowledge. Since 2007 he has served as head of the university library system, which includes the central library and 13 department libraries. The university has had a multi-faceted partnership with French-medium universities in Belgium focusing on developing 67 new professors to replace faculty members nearing retirement, and one facet has been library development. The reading rooms of the central library have been transformed: formerly gray, dark, and with no open access to books, they are now pleasant, light, and lined with bookshelves. What a difference! Painting on the interior and exterior during this past month added its welcoming touch. Department libraries are also starting the make-over at the rate of one or so a year. Not that there aren't some major problems. The librarians are supposed to be entering books into an online catalog, but as a result of infrastructure problems, the central and most branch libraries have had no access to the university network since February.

Katanga Methodist University at Mulungwishi continues to grow, bursting its seams. The Year Without Electricity (2008) is past, the Year Waiting For Computers likewise (the containers arrived in October, 12 months after the first batch of computers were delivered in Virginia). We are both still teaching in the College of Theology, which is preparing to open its M.A. and doctoral program. The academic year began on schedule at the beginning of October, although we have not been able to free ourselves from Lubumbashi to begin our own courses before mid-November. Ellen teaches a course on Islam in Africa to the graduate students, and Jeff teaches courses on early church history, Methodist history, and African church history.

## Celebrations

2010 has been a **REALLY BIG DEAL** as an anniversary year.

- 50 years of independence for Congo
- 100 years since the founding of Lubumbashi
- 100 years of Methodism in this part of Congo
- 125 years since Methodists first began work in Congo as a whole

All these celebrations were occasions for festivities and special activities. The city dressed up nicely with road repairs, paint jobs, parades, attractive signs made of lights, and the opening of a fine small park at the city center. Many people bought the specially-printed 50-year cloth to make shirts and dresses for the occasion.



Our church's annual conference was held at Mulungwishi and preceded by a wonderful outdoor worship service celebrating 100 years of Methodism in this part of Congo. For this and the public celebration beforehand for a couple days in Lubumbashi, the presence of visitors from Europe and the United States reminded us all of the international character of the United Methodist Church. A group of scholars in our province (and some who are currently serving elsewhere) wrote chapters for a book celebrating the century of Methodist work in Katanga province. Jeff wrote the first chapter and helped edit the whole volume. It was a last minute finish, but copies were available for the anniversary celebrations in July, even if Jeff and others are still trying to catch up on their sleep!

In conjunction with Congo's fifty years of independence, the library at the University of Lubumbashi, received a large donation of scientific and academic publications from Belgium. These were studies sponsored by four major government research institutions centering on the Belgian Congo during the colonial period, two of which more or less went out of existence after Congo's independence and two evolved with somewhat wider focuses. Some documents thus date back to Leopold II's Congo Independent State (before the Belgians) while others are as recent as 2010. The intent was to give Congolese access to all this scientific knowledge about their country which had accumulated in Belgium by turning over complete (as possible!) collections to be housed in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi. Since the university's first tiny beginnings were only five years before independence, it may never have had many of these studies (too old or too recent), and others have been scattered during the university's checkered history. These will prove invaluable for research in many departments. In recognition of this gift, the university hosted a large delegation of representatives of the Belgian donor institutions, government officials from Kinshasa and Katanga, including the Minister of Higher Education, and many other guests. One full day of events (10-6) was held at the newly-brightened central library. A dozen scholars from Belgium and Congo demonstrated the value of the collection to current research, including several very innovative lines of study. The library staff worked hard to prepare the space, and all sighed a huge oooof when it was over!

### Advance Numbers:

(The) English-speaking School of Lubumbashi  
Katanga Methodist University

10337A  
14433A

Ellen 