



## 5 ❧ Frank Enns and Pierre Mazemba, partners in faith

**N**o Mennonite missionary stayed longer at one place than Frank Enns. No partnership between a missionary and a Congolese pastor endured longer than that between Frank Enns and Pierre Mazemba. The Nyanga mission station and the Nyanga church district bear the imprint of these two men.

Born into a devout Mennonite wheat farming family near Inman, Kansas, in 1895, Frank J. Enns nearly walked out on his baptism as a teenager. Although he had declared his faith in Christ and enrolled in a baptismal class, when the time came he abruptly stood and left the church! Pursued by his father and an older brother, he explained that he was not sure he was worthy of baptism. When they explained to him that baptism was not for “worthy” people but rather for people who had accepted Jesus as their Savior, he reentered the church and with the others signaled his trust in Jesus for his salvation.

Initially Frank had no idea of going further in school than his siblings, who had dropped out before the final exams of the primary cycle to give full time to farming activities. However, a perceptive teacher saw his potential, and he eventually went through high school and on to college and a year at Northern Baptist Seminary in Chicago. He married Agnes Neufeld in June 1926, and the couple left for Congo four months later under the auspices of Congo Inland Mission. Their decision had been greatly influenced by Rev. J. P. Bark-

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photo—Frank Enns and Pierre Mazemba

man, a pioneer of that new inter-Mennonite mission who visited Kansas during a furlough and let it be known that he wanted to take Frank Enns back with him.

They traveled to Nyanga by train, ocean freighter, train again, riverboat, and finally by *kipoy*, a wicker chair mounted between two long bamboo poles with crossbars and carried by four men. They arrived to find that the resident missionary couple was preparing to leave for furlough. Thus in two weeks time Frank and Agnes found themselves on a mission post which had been planted only three years earlier. A third missionary, Kornelia Unrau, a nurse, had arrived just six months earlier. Language study? They would learn the Pende language (Gipende) on the fly! But help was on the way.

Pierre Mazemba, a stocky teenager of medium height with a face deeply pockmarked by smallpox he had survived as a child, had been sent some five years earlier to Ndjoko Punda, where he and two other Nyanga boys were enrolled in station schools and given Bible training. A few years after the Ennses arrived, the young men returned to Nyanga, sought out Christian girls for marriage, and asked how they could serve the Lord in their home territory.

Enns saw strong pastoral potential in Pierre Mazemba. Over time, the two would forge an enduring bond. And so, among all of the scores of missionaries who served with the Mennonite mission, Frank Enns had the unique experience of being placed at a new station just in process of formation, being reassigned to the same place throughout his entire missionary career, and maintaining a lifelong partnership with a Congolese leader.

During their first term at Nyanga, Frank and Agnes's first child, a son, was born. They named him John, or Yone in Gipende. In the tradition of the Pende people, Frank and Agnes were thereafter known as Sh'a Yone and Gin'a Yone, the father and mother of John.

Agriculture was close to Frank's heart. Early on he had the foresight to secure additional hectares of land adjacent to the mission station. He required every class of students to plant and tend their own garden plot, which helped supply their food during the school year. Eventually a farm was established where experimental crops were planted and a variety of animal husbandry projects were designed to improve the protein content of the local cassava-based diet. Nyanga station eventually became a peaceful oasis amid the rolling scrub bush land around it. Today straight paths laid out at

right angles are lined by large mango trees that provide shade and abundant fruit. In other places are coconut palms, nut palms, and a variety of citrus trees.

But Enns's enduring passion was evangelism. As the Belgian government gradually cut roads through the bush country around him, he secured a Model A Ford from the States. Accompanied by Pastor Pierre Mazemba or other African staff, he spent days on end pushing ever farther into the area designated as the Nyanga district of the Congo Inland Mission field for which they were responsible. Sleeping on his camp cot and sharing the evening cassava mush with village Christians, he sat long hours, listened carefully, admonished them with passages of God's word, and prayed with them. No village visit was complete without at least one public meeting with hymns and a message about Jesus.

The Ennses reached retirement age in 1960. Before they departed, the Nyanga Christians arranged a day of celebration and remembrance. Fabricating two kipoyos, they installed Frank and Agnes on individual chairs and carried them on a long tour of Nyanga station, commemorating the way the couple had arrived in 1926.

When Nyanga Christians heard of Agnes's death in 1965, they sent an appeal to Frank, "Please come back. Your work among us is not finished." And so he returned to Congo alone for three more years among a people who had become the passion of his heart. He was not content to stay on the station but put together a camping kit and chop box for food and asked to be taken out to various villages and left there for ten days or two weeks. When his visit and ministry was complete in one village, he would get on his bicycle and have village boys carry his sparse luggage, while others put a long forked stick in position under his bike seat and pushed him through the sand to his next destination.

Uncle Frank, as younger missionaries affectionately called him, died in retirement in 1975 surrounded by his bird feeders, his binoculars, and an easel on which he now and again did an oil painting.

When news of his death reached Nyanga, word quickly spread that a traditional *masaga* would be held for Sh'a Yone in front of the house where he had lived for so many years. The *masaga* is a time of mourning that accompanies all village deaths. Whereas among non-Christians it is a time of wailing and mourning, African Christians

have turned it into a time of remembrance and celebration of the home-going of a fellow believer.

In front of the Enns home was a gigantic tree under which Mennonite Central Committee teachers had laid out a tennis court. On the designated evening at sundown, scores of people converged on the spot around a fire. An old chair once used by Enns was found somewhere and placed in a central location. The aging Pastor Mazemba was invited to sit in it.

The night was given to telling stories about Tata Sh'a Yone—something he'd done, taught, said in a sermon, or built; some discipline he'd dispensed; someone he'd married, baptized, or ordained to the ministry—interspersed with the singing of many Gipende hymns.

Finally came Pastor Pierre Mazemba's turn. All leaned forward to hear what form his reminiscing might take, for all knew that no one among them had spent more time with Enns than he. Normally a taciturn man not known for the display of emotion, Mazemba too reviewed some of the places he'd traveled with Enns, some experiences they'd had together, some things he'd learned from him. Finally he concluded: "Sh'a Yone lived his life seeking the lives of others."

He paused. Finally, with tears streaming down his face, he said quietly, "Sh'a Yone, I'm coming."

Jim Bertsche