



45 ❖ Papa and Mama of the Kikwit II church district

Louis Fimbo was born in 1918 and arrived at the Mukedi mission around 1926. He was baptized in 1936 in Mukedi and became a teacher. He alternated teaching and work as a salesman for several years and married Valestine Gavunji in 1944. They would have ten children.

Louis Fimbo became wealthy. He had two coffee farms and a cattle farm. In 1952 he became a merchant and bought a truck, which he made available to missionaries for their transportation. He was able to support the education of his nephews and nieces as well as his own children and pay a monthly salary to seven teacher-evangelists. One of his children became legal representative of the Mennonite Church of Congo (CMCo). Another is director of a primary school. Three are abroad. All are members of the church. It was great blessing from the Eternal that caused Papa Fimbo to make great progress and to be a good example. Unfortunately, Papa Louis Fimbo died in 1987.

His wife, Mama Valestine Gavunji, was also one of those rare individuals who have understood that one can only walk in the way of the Lord by fearing God and by serving him with all of one's heart and soul and by obeying his commandments.

She was born in 1924 at Luvuji, a large village in the territory of Gungu, to a family whose members often held traditional power. Her father, Mihala, was the older brother of the chief of the Luvuji

photo—Louis Fimbo

members of their clan. He is remembered as a tall man who lived with his wife, Luyinda, in perfect harmony, although they were not Christians.

Like many girls of her age, Valestine left her parents at the age of six or seven to join other members of her family at Mukedi, where she could enroll in primary school. She studied for a short period of time. Baptized in 1942, she married Louis Fimbo two years later.

As a mother of ten children, Mama Gavunji proved to be a good educator who supervised not only her own children but also many other young women who had married young. She had good memories of her life as a student and maintained a preference for communal activities. She loved to relate to groups and organizations that brought women together for activities either at church or in the neighborhood where she lived.

Because of their social position and the financial means of her husband, their house was always full of family members from the husband's or wife's side. One needs compassion to manage that sort of clan, which can be parasitical and even engage in lawsuits. Her husband, though generous in his acts, tended to be miserly, but Mama Gavunji was generous by nature. She served as a bridge between her husband and relatives who were always waiting for a handout.

After the death of her husband, even though she was a widow with limited means, Mama Valestine Gavunji was able to keep peace between the two families. She never lost her gift for bringing people together, offering shelter even to the children of those she knew only as brothers or sisters in the church.

Despite her advanced age, Mama Gavunji gave herself body and soul to singing praises to the Lord in the great choir of the CMCo, which was the pride and joy of Kikwit. She remained a member until the end. She died in 2006 in the joy of having served her God and her church, which paid her well-deserved homage.

One of their sons reports that his parents gave him lessons of love, parental responsibility, and service to the well-being of the people of God who had given him a mandate to lead.

Jackson Beleji