



59 ❖ The desire to belong to one body

After he had been away at school, Pascal Blaise Misakayabo returned in 1972 to Mbuji Mayi, his town of origin, to serve his church, the Evangelical Mennonite Church (CEM). Mbuji Mayi is the seat of the CEM. But things were not going well. A huge leadership conflict had broken out, opposing Pastor Zacharie Nkumbi to pastors Mathieu Kazadi, André Ntumba, and a number of others. Pascal was obliged by the circumstances to define himself relative to this disaster. He found himself on the side of Kazadi and Ntumba, and the two leaders were instrumental in obtaining a scholarship for the young man, then in his early twenties, so he could go to university.

And so Pascal left Mbuji Mayi again, studied at the Protestant University in Kisangani, and obtained a degree in theology. He came back to Mbuji Mayi in 1979 and was ordained as a pastor and given a congregation. He was assigned to Sangilayi Bipemba, the congregation that had trained and shaped him.

Pascal was soon drawn into various leadership roles in the CEM, and he served under both leadership factions. He also served as headmaster in the schools of the CEM. In this capacity, Pascal trained many people in the area of religion, particularly young people, who for the most part are faithful servants in the church today. In his own words, he became “someone to whom people came when they ran into problems.”

photo—Pascal Misakayabo

During his time as a pastor he had frequent interactions with church leaders, while conflict among them continued to simmer. He attended all the steering committee meetings, even before he was appointed to the committee. He also dealt with the conflict as it played out in his own congregation, where tensions rose against another congregation in the city.

In 1993 Pastor Pascal Blaise Misakayabo made a decisive move. He assembled a number of fellow pastors whose sympathies, like his, were on one side. Together they accepted the leadership of the opposing faction. This finally brought the rival CEM groups together. In 1995, he was elected president and legal representative in the assembly led by the former opponent, and thus he moved into the top leadership position of the CEM.

In this capacity, he has to his credit several successful projects for the good of the CEM. But the most important is, he says, “having reconciled the members of the CEM—that is, having given the members of the CEM the desire to belong to a single body, the CEM.” It’s this unity that he left to the CEM at the close of his double term as head of the CEM (1995–2005).

In addition to his courageous acts of reconciliation, Pascal fought a great deal to ground the church on a properly religious foundation, in opposing the existence of a category of council members who were given permanent positions on the council. These council members, who were no longer elected by, or accountable to, their respective congregations, often reflected badly on the other faithful, acting far from the will of God and serving their own interests. He expresses his satisfaction on this subject, saying: “I am pleased to see those who succeeded me at the head of the CEM making this philosophy their own and wanting to give all the members of the CEM the same rights”—that is, to be represented by people of their choosing.

In his attempts to explain the meaning of this disorder that constantly threatened the cohesion of the CEM, Pascal notes: “The discrimination born of the creation of permanent council members is a consequence of the conditions in which the CEM was created: the crisis that preceded and followed the political independence of our nation. After being sent away from Ndjoko Punda, the members of the CIM (Congo Inland Mission) making up this wave were admitted and given responsibilities in the young church, with no account taken of their past. The first president of the CEM had no choice in doing this,

because he was absolutely committed to his goal of setting up a new church. But it is the cause of the imbroglio in the CEM.”

Pascal Blaise Misakayabo remains, with his wife and six children, attached to the CEM, where he serves God today as head of the CEM missionary district of Kinshasa. He constantly says: “The CEM is really and truly my religious assembly; nothing will be able to force me to leave it.”

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