

The 2025 Congo Mission Network Conference

Presbyterians in DR Congo and the USA

Our Relationship 1891-2025

The Beginnings

- The Presbyterian Church, US, the Southern Presbyterians, desired to send missionaries to Africa.
- Two missionaries were commissioned. They were William Sheppard and Samuel Lapsley.
- William Sheppard was born in Waynesboro, Virginia, March 8, 1865. He was born free, because his mother was a freedwoman.
- William Sheppard graduated from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1888. He served at Calvary Presbyterian Church in Montgomery for a year. Then, he was pastor at Zion Church in Atlanta for 2 years. He strongly desired to go to Africa, but the PCUS did not want to send him without a white man to accompany him.

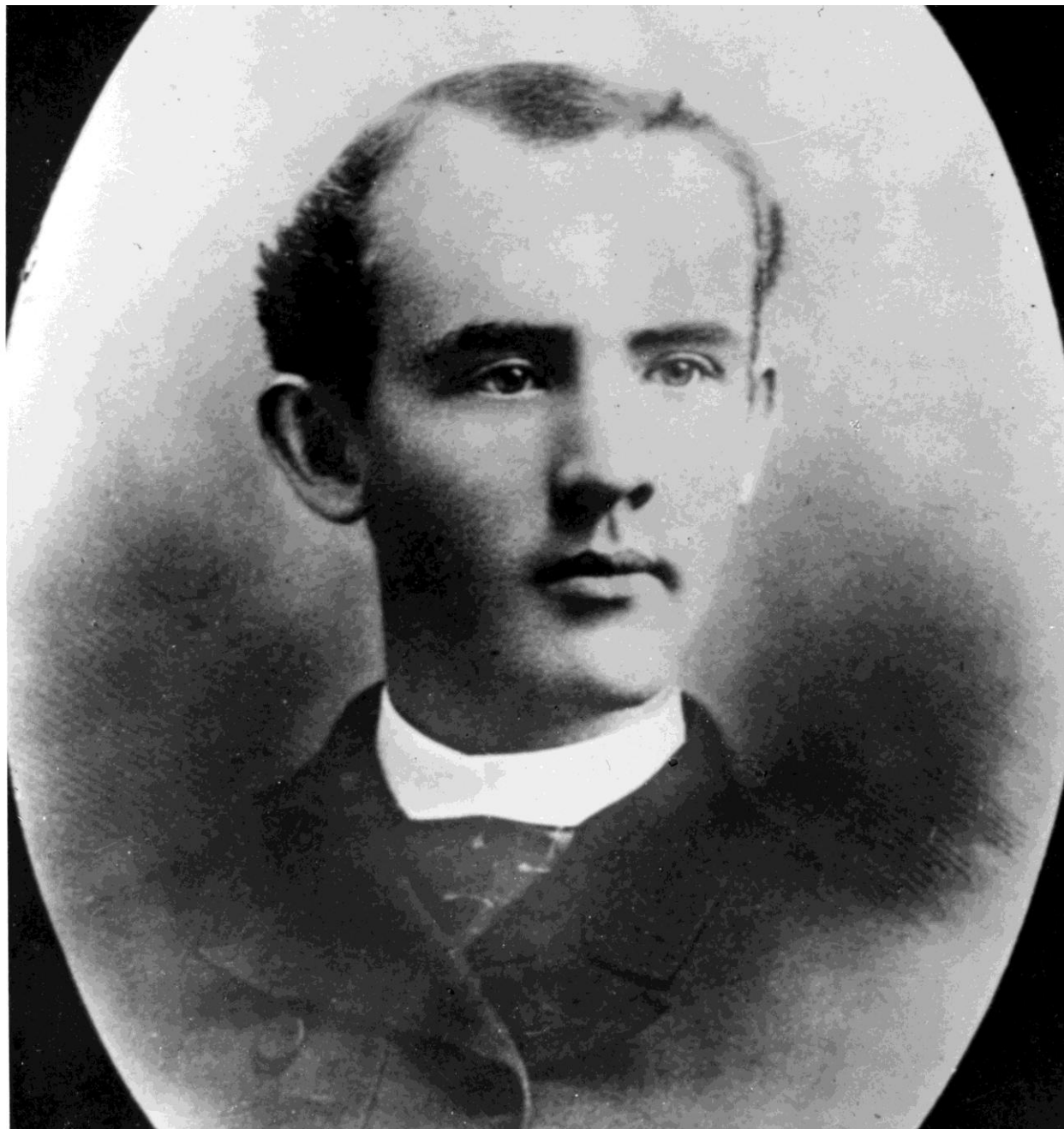
William Sheppard as a Young Man



The Beginnings

- Samuel Lapsley was from Selma, Alabama. He was the son of former slaveowners. He entered the University of Alabama at age 15. He graduated in 3 years.
- Samuel Lapsley attended Union Theological Seminary in Hampton Sidney, Virginia. Then, he went to Chicago and finished his theological degree in 1889, at McCormick Seminary.
- Samuel Lapsley also wanted to serve in Africa. He and William Sheppard met with the Foreign Missions Committee in January 1890, and were approved to go as missionaries to the Congo.

Samuel Lapsley



The Beginnings

- Sheppard and Lapsley arrived at the mouth of the Congo River in 1890.
- After months of preparation, and a bout of malaria, Sheppard and Lapsley arrived at Luebo, on the Kasai River in 1891.
- Sheppard and Lapsley set up their station at Luebo.
- Lapsley's emphasis was teaching, preaching and healing. Teaching young people was his primary focus. Most of his students were redeemed slaves.
- Lapsley worked to acquire a command of Tshiluba, the language of the BaLuba.

The Beginnings

- Sheppard also began learning the languages. He met with local chiefs and visited the villages in the area.
- Sheppard was a hunter and provided meat for the station. He also provided meat to people in the Kasai, making friends with them.
- Sheppard was a diplomat, using his problem solving skills to get on friendly terms with the local people.

William Sheppard

William Sheppard is playing the banjo for the children. He reached out to the people, building relationships with them.



The Beginnings

- Lapsley's health was deteriorating.
- He went to the port of Matadi and died a few weeks later, on March 26, 1892. He had been in Congo for less than 2 years.
- He was buried in the Baptist missionary cemetery at Matadi.

Samuel Lapsley

This photograph of Samuel Lapsley was taken three weeks before his death in 1892.



The Mission Slowly Grows

- Now William Sheppard was the only Presbyterian missionary in the Congo. He continued reaching out to the people in Kasai.
- Sheppard worked to make a connection with the BaKuba, a large, wealthy tribe. The Lukenga (Chief) of the BaKuba did not want contact with foreigners. Sheppard worked to learn the language and slowly learned the trails leading close to the BaKuba capital, Mushenge.
- Finally, Sheppard made contact with the Lukenga and entered Mushenge. This began the relationship with the BaKuba.
- Sheppard set up another station near the BaKuba border. This was Ibanj (Ibanche).

Sheppard and Maximalinge

Maximalinge was the son of Lukenga, King of the BaKuba.



The Mission Slowly Grows

Sheppard also reached out to other tribes. Here are photographs of Sheppard with BaKete warriors and a group of BaKete people.



Bateke people.



The Church at Luebo, 1895



Church enlarged + completed at Luebo 1895-

Lucy Gantt Sheppard

Lucy Gantt was from Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She graduated from Talladega College in 1886. She met William Sheppard while he was a student at Stillman College, and became engaged to him before he left for Congo.

While on a furlough to the US in 1894, William and Lucy married. She then went to Congo with her new husband.

While in Congo, Lucy and William had 2 babies. Both died young.

Then, the Sheppards had two more children, Wilhemina and William Lapsley. They survived. William Lapsley's African name was Maximalinge, in honor of the BaKuba prince.



The Sheppards and Their Mission

The Sheppards continued their work in Congo.

The mission stations at Luebo and Ibanj grew in size. Many BaLuba moved to the stations, where they were safer from slavers and government brutality.

This is a picture of the Sheppard House at Ibanj, with William Sheppard standing and Lucy Sheppard sitting with a baby and 7 Congolese children.



The Sheppards and Their Mission

This is the first real church at Ibanj.

It was named the Lapsley Memorial Church.



Confronting Atrocities

The Congo Free State was the personal possession of King Leopold of Belgium.

Leopold worked to maximize the production of ivory and rubber, thus generating huge profits for himself.

The Congolese were forced to produce the ivory and rubber. If they did not achieve the quota for production they would be killed or mutilated by chopping off a hand. Villages were destroyed.

William Sheppard witnessed these atrocities. He used his Kodak camera to record these crimes. This picture was probably not taken by Sheppard, but it shows what was happening.



Confronting Atrocities

Sheppard another Presbyterian missionary, William Morrison, reported on these mutilations, killings and devastation in the Presbyterian newsletter, the Kasai Herald.

sidiously. There are signs of unusual languor with a tendency to sleep at unwonted times and places. Often there is slight nervous and mental affection, until finally the unfortunate victim passes into a sort of stupor, at last ending in coma and death. The duration of the disease is from several weeks in some cases to several months in others.

Our greatest problem is to prevent the spread of the infection. One case is a source of danger to all within a considerable distance, for scientific research shows that the infecting agent (trypanosome) is conveyed by the tsetse fly, very much as malaria is now known to be carried by certain kinds of mosquitoes. It is very difficult to persuade the natives of the importance of segregating those infected. The Congo State Government in the vicinity of some of their larger posts, have established a few *lazarets*, or places for segregating those in the vicinity who have become infected. But this is very

local and by no means even touches great districts where no effort is being made to prevent the spread of the disease. Here at Luebo there has for some time been, under the care of the local State officer, an unofficial *lazaret*, which has been a veritable pest-house, existing under the most unfavorable surroundings, with the inmates having inadequate shelter and food. But we have, as a mission, owing to the large population here, and the goodly number of foreigners in the region, asked for an official *lazaret* to be placed here. And this request we hope will be granted. At present the nearest official place for these unfortunates is at Lusambo, a distance of probably two hundred and fifty miles.

It is to be devoutly hoped, for the sake of the natives and the cause of civilization and Christianity in Africa, that some really efficient remedy for this terrible malady may soon be discovered.

From the Bakuba Country.

By W. H. SHEPPARD.

THESE great stalwart men and women, who have from time immemorial been free, cultivating large farms of Indian corn, peas, tobacco, potatoes, trapping elephants for their ivory and leopards for their skins, who have always had their own king and a government not to be despised, officers of the law established in every town of the kingdom, these magnificent people, perhaps about 400,000 in number, have entered a new chapter in the history of their tribe. Only a few years ago, travellers through this country found them living in large homes, having from one to four rooms in each house, loving and living happily with their wives and children, one of the most

prosperous and intelligent of all the African tribes, though living in one of the most remote spots on the planet. One seeing the happy, busy, prosperous lives which they lived could not help feeling that surely the lines had fallen unto this people in pleasant places.

But within these last three years how changed they are! Their farms are growing up in weeds and jungle, their king is practically a slave, their houses now are mostly only half-built single rooms, and are much neglected. The streets of their towns are not clean and well swept as they once were. Even their children cry for bread.

Why this change? You have it in a few

words. There are armed sentries of chartered trading companies who force the men and women to spend most of their days and nights in the forests making rubber, and the price they receive is so meagre that they cannot live upon it. In the majority of the villages these people have not time to listen to the Gospel story, or give an answer concerning their souls' salvation. Looking upon the changed scene now, one can only join with them in their groans as they must say: "Our burdens are greater than we can bear."

Just near the mission station, however, it is still reasonably prosperous. The parents send their children to school and to church. Many of them are in training to become teachers and preachers to their own people. The in-

dustrial part of the work is doing beautifully. Church services are held daily in all the near villages, Sabbath Schools are taught by competent evangelists. The Lord is showering blessings upon them and they appreciate it and prove it by their works.

In 1890 our church sent a lighted torch into Central Africa, entrusting it into the hands of the immortal Samuel N. Lapsley. That light has not been extinguished and shall never be. It has sent forth its rays of light and life into hundreds of homes, and the great highway from Central Africa to Glory has been lighted up by it, and thousands have been led to walk therein. May a blessing rest upon all who have in any way aided in sending the light into this dark land.

Working with the Hands.

By A. L. EDMISTON.

EXPERIENCE is now teaching us that in order to christianize and to bring true civilization to the natives of Central Africa industry must play a very important part. Although our mission is solely religious, we have come to the conclusion that a little instruction along industrial lines will do no harm.

Every year there comes to us a large number of boys expressing a desire to become Christians, and to learn to read and write. Our hearts go out after them for we feel sure that the success of our work depends largely on our getting hold of the young people, but to take so many with nothing special for them to do would incur a very large expense to the mission. Therefore, in view of these facts, we have begun some regular industrial features for the boys who work a part of the day and spend the rest of the time attending all our daily religious

services and the day school. Some of these boys are employed in the printing office and are now able, with assistance, to do much of the work of the printing department. Others are learning to make fields and gardens, while still others are learning the carpenter's trade, etc. This last phase is proving most interesting, profitable and attractive, and is benefiting the people in many ways.

It is a great pleasure to visit many of the native homes near us and find nicely fenced in places with fruit trees, and nice large houses with windows, doors, beds, tables, chairs, etc., made by the pupils of our industrial schools, the value of whose work covers the most of their expenses.

We earnestly pray that God may bless this with all the other phases of our work, for we hope to draw from these industrial schools many of our best evangelists,

Confronting Atrocities

These reports of atrocities caused Sheppard and Morrison to be sued by the Company Kasai in 1909.

Morrison was dropped from the suit on a technicality. Sheppard went to his trial in Leopoldville (Kinshasa). See the photograph. Many Congolese witnesses accompanied him.

The US State Department and the British government intervened.

Sheppard was acquitted in 1909.

Meanwhile, the Belgian government took over control of the Free State and began reforms.



The Sheppards Go Home

- In 1910, William and Lucy returned to the United States.
- By this time, there were other Presbyterian missionaries in Congo.
- The Sheppards moved to Staunton, Virginia and finally settled in Louisville, Kentucky. William Sheppard took charge of the effort to develop the Presbyterian mission for blacks in Louisville. He also was the pastor of Grace Church.
- Lucy Sheppard became the choir director as well as a Sunday School teacher. From 1918 to 1935, she was also a public social worker in Louisville.
- William Sheppard died in 1927. Lucy Gantt Sheppard passed in 1955.

Maria Fearing

- Maria Fearing was born into slavery near Gainesville, Alabama, in 1838. She was a slave for 28 years. As a slave, she learned about Jesus Christ and was devoted to Him.
- After getting her freedom in 1865, Maria Fearing went to school in Talladega, Alabama, to learn to read. She completed the ninth grade.
- Maria Fearing became a teacher, and, with her earnings, bought a house in Anniston, Alabama. Then, she returned to Talladega College and served as assistant matron of the boarding department.

Maria Fearing

- In 1894, Maria Fearing heard William Sheppard speak about the Congo, while he was on his furlough. She was inspired and wanted to go.
- However, the Presbyterian Mission Board refused to send her as a missionary, because she was 56 years of age.
- Maria Fearing then sold her house and used the money to go to the Congo. After a year, the Presbyterian Church gave her an official position and salary. She stayed in the Congo until 1915.
- While in the Congo, Maria Fearing was instrumental in starting and operating Pantops.

Maria Fearing



Maria Fearing,

Maria Fearing

At Luebo, Maria Fearing learned the language well enough to teach a class and translate lyrics. She also taught girls the Christian faith as she instructed them on sanitation, sewing, cooking, child care and reading, writing and arithmetic,

Maria Fearing then built Pantops, a resident girls' home.

Pantops provided a home and school for girls who had been orphaned or who had been redeemed from slavery.

This picture from 1902 shows Fearing and some of the Pantops children.



Maria Fearing

The girls at Pantops called Maria Fearing, "Mamu wa Mputu," Mother from far away.

She continued her work at Pantops until she returned to the United States in 1917, at the age of eighty.

Maria Fearing then lived in Selma, Alabama and Sumter County. She passed in 1937.

This is another photograph from Pantops.



Our Relationship Now

- For the past 135 years American Presbyterians and Congolese Presbyterians have worked together to serve Our Lord Jesus and to advance the Gospel.
- In 2006, the Presbyterian Community of Congo (CPC) had 2.5 million members.
- In 2005, the Presbyterian Church, USA had 1,094,733 members.

The Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley and the CPC

In 2005, members of the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley travelled to DR Congo.

They made an agreement with the Presbyteries of Tshibashi and Nganza to share in the Good News with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The relationship is mutual, among the three presbyteries.

The partnership is founded on working together, assisting and strengthening one another in prayer, evangelism, education, and development.

We hope to exchange visits, to know each other better.

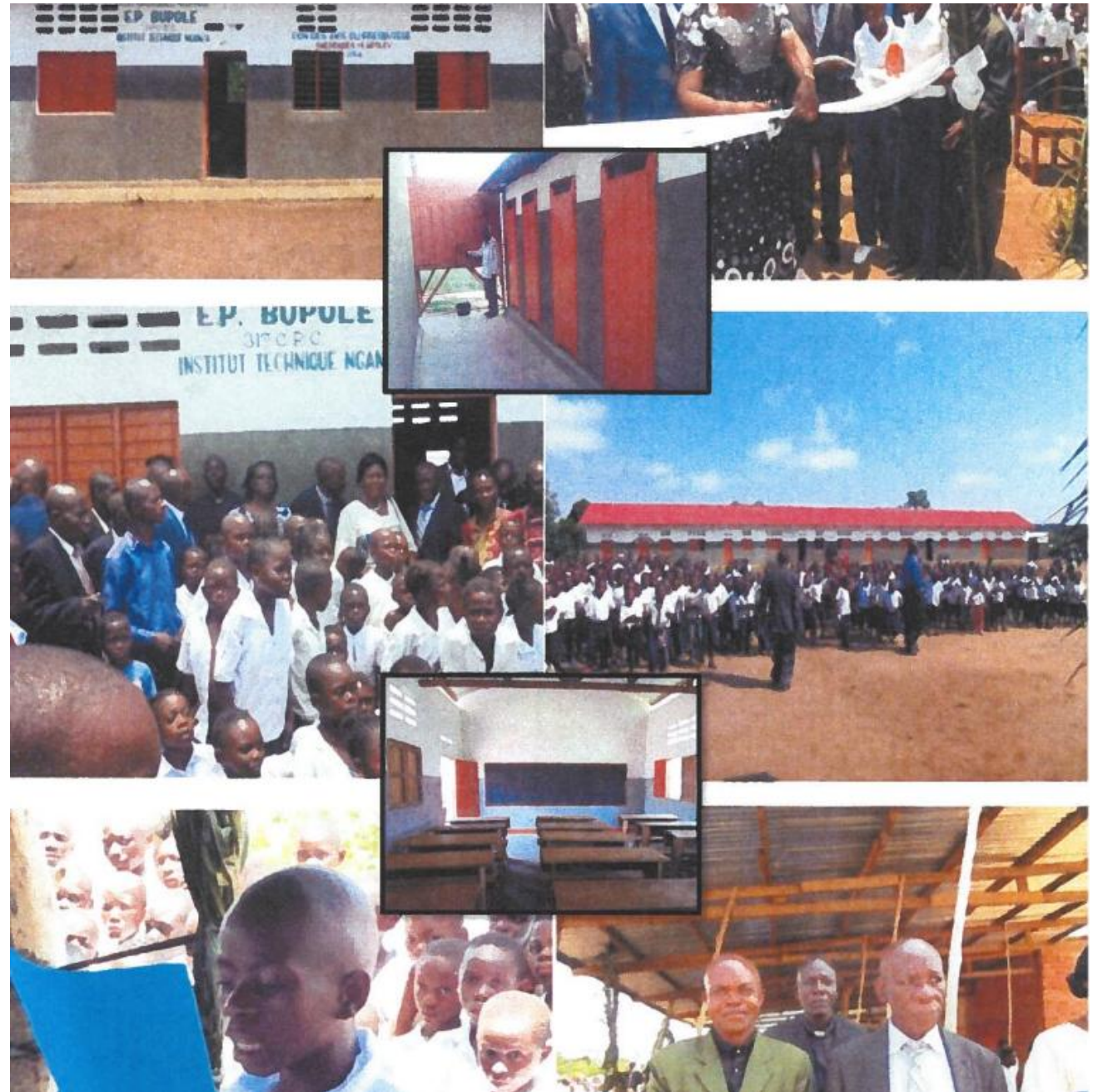


Our Relationship

For the past 20 years, the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley, in partnership with the Congo Mission Network, has sent help to DR Congo, focusing on the Kasai.

The Presbytery has helped with student tuition, school construction and aid to the IMCK hospital.

These pictures are of the new school built and dedicated in Bupole.



Build Quality Schools

Empower Congo's Children

Our Relationship

The Congo Mission Network and the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley have been involved in promoting education by building schools, providing books, motorcycles and teacher training.

The Presbyterian Community of Congo (CPC) runs 632 schools in the Kasai region.

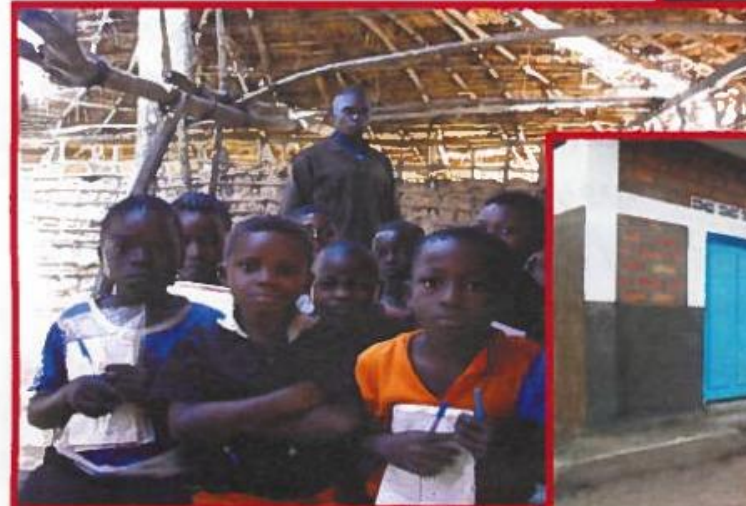
The Presbyterian Community of Kinshasa (CPK) runs 400 schools in the Kinshasa area.



Zapo Zapo School built 2013



Blackboards needed



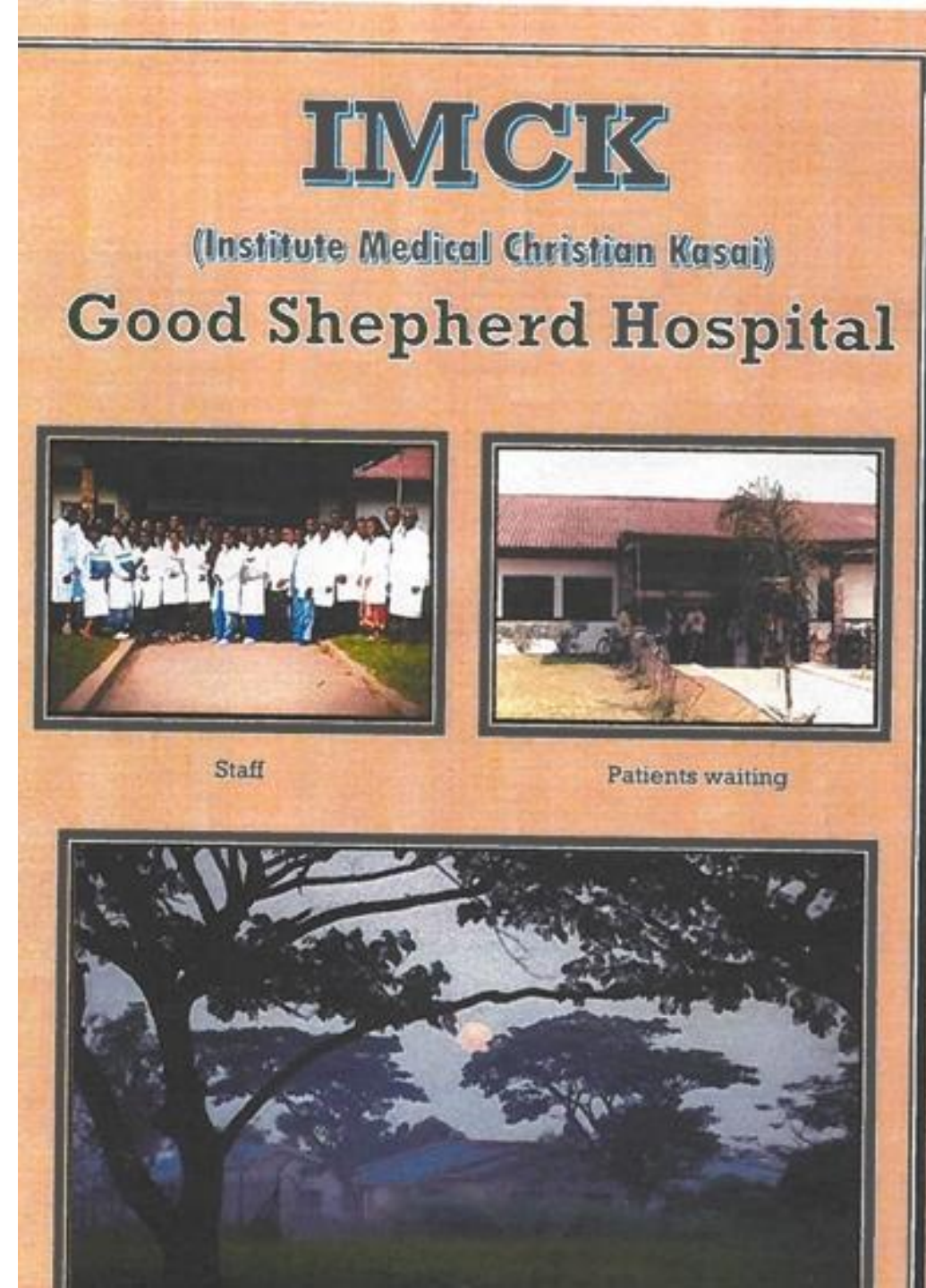
Most schools are thatch and mud



Moata Mualabala School built 2014

Our Relationship

- Presbyterians in the USA and DR Congo have worked to heal people of disease and injuries.
- Presbyterians have supported hospitals and clinics in DR Congo.
- One of these is the IMCK hospital at Tshikaji , in the Kasai.
- IMCK is the Institute Medical Christian Kasai.
- Members of the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley have been involved with IMCK for decades.



Our Relationship

- The Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley and the CPC and CPK have had a mutual relationship. This Presbytery has sent help to DR Congo for years. However, the mutual aid has not gone in one direction.
- I remember when, in 2011, sixty tornadoes devastated Alabama, killing 250 people. Our sisters and brothers in DR Congo sent word to us that they were praying for us. They showed God's love to us.

Resources

- Columbia Theological Seminary-John Bulow Campbell Library
- Presbyterian Historical Society-Pearl Digital Collection
- *The Sheppards and Lapsley, Pioneer Presbyterians in the Congo*, by William E. Phipps, The Presbyterian Church (USA), 1991.
- *Protestant Missions in Congo 1878-1969*, by John R. Crawford, Ph.D.
- *Led In Triumph*, by Ethel Taylor Wharton, Board of World Missions, Presbyterian Church, US, 1952.
- *The Lapsley Saga*, by Winifred K. and Lachlan C. Vass III, Providence House Publishers, Franklin, TN, 1997.
- Encyclopedia of Alabama, encyclopediaofalabama.org.