



# MISSION CONNECTIONS

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**Christi and Jeff Boyd**

*Mission co-workers serving in the Democratic Republic of Congo*

Dear friends,

In the shadow of spotlights shone upon unhealthy donor-driven programs for vulnerable children, an amazing transformation has been unfolding in Congo where the Presbyterian Church (CPC) has made a principled decision to shift away from institutionalized care in a handful of children's centers to a comprehensive congregation-based ministry denomination-wide.

Launched in all four synods in East Kasai, the 192 Presbyterian congregations have become vibrant beacons in their community as State-approved temporary foster families accommodate abandoned or otherwise unaccompanied children and child protection committees raise awareness about Child Rights and watch out for and advocate against any violations. Two years into the shift, after finishing trainings for foster families and child protection committees in all CPC synods in East Kasai, a survey of records from the past 12 years shows remarkable positive results:

In the ten years (2010-2019) preceding the vision implementation, 103 children were placed by the State's Social Affairs Division in Presbyterian centers in East Kasai. While four of them ran away, 62 (60.2%) of these children were still in the centers before being reunited with family for the Church to launch the vision implementation process in 2020. The 99 retrieved and eventually reunited children were institutionalized an average of 3.7 years. Two years into the new vision implementation (2021-2022), 48 children have been newly placed, of whom 32 (66.7%) have already been reunited with relatives and for another 7 (14.5%) relatives have been traced back and their reunion is underway. For these 39 children, the average stay in CPC foster families was 8.4 months.

By coming alongside the CPC in the transformation of this ministry, Presbyterian World Mission has inspired, equipped, and connected Presbyterians across the US to enable the CPC to realize this sweeping change. With their basic education ensured, the children get a second chance in life to become contributors to society at large, thereby breaking the cycle of systemic poverty for themselves, their families and community at-large, and thwarting additional social impact often associated with unsheltered youth.

Mbuyi (10) is one of the abandoned or otherwise unaccompanied children that in 2022 have been accommodated, cared for, and reunited with relatives thanks to the hospitality of CPC foster

families, the community involvement of the congregational child rights protection volunteers and their visibility and recognition by local authorities.

Mbuyi used to live in Nzaba, a Mbuji Mayi neighborhood situated close to a diamond mine. Mbuyi started working in the mine, fetching water every day for the women food vendors. Asked how he ended up in the mine and for how long he has been there, Mbuyi told us his story as follows:

The infographic features a blue background with a white torn-paper effect at the bottom. In the top left corner is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) logo and the text "Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Presbyterian Mission". In the top right corner is a yellow and green star logo with "ECC" and "CPC" labels. A central photograph shows a young boy in a blue shirt and grey pants standing next to an older man in a yellow shirt sitting on a blue plastic chair. To the right of the photo, text reads: "Went to local chief", "Brought by chief to CPC Church", "Relatives found", and "Reunited and in school". Below the photo, a series of text labels are arranged in a path: "Abandoned by father", "Single mother with two siblings", "Disappearance mother", "Child-headed household", "Work in mine", "Evicted from home", "Quit school", and "Removed from mine".

*Our mother would leave us alone at home. Every time she left, she told us that she went out looking for money to buy us food. She came back every morning. But one day she left and did not return in the morning. We were by ourselves for many days, not knowing where she had gone.*

*As we had nothing to eat, I started going to the diamond mine to do odd jobs. I fetched water at the river for the food vendors and when I had brought them three or five jerricans of water [20-25 liters each], the women gave me fufu to eat and some money. I would leave again to sleep at home.*

*Last April, the landlord of the house that my mother was renting noticed that our mother had disappeared, and no one knew where she had gone. We were six months behind with rent. He kicked us out of his house. My older brother went to live with our uncle in the village of Bakua Mulumba, but I refused to go with him. I started to sleep in the mine and even quit school for a lack of means.*

*One morning, the president of the mine told us that he would be arrested if children were found working in the mine. But we didn't listen to him and kept going there. When the police came and chased us away, I went to the local chief and the local chief brought me to Papa Paul Makelele. That was in May 2022.*

*When I was at Papa Paul's, they gave me to eat, and I slept at their place. Papa Paul asked me for the names of my father and of my mother. I told him their names and said that my father was in Lubumbashi with another wife and that our mother had left us at home and that her whereabouts are not known. Papa Paul asked me: what family do you have in Mbuji Mayi? I told him no one. Then he asked me: where is your family's village? I said in Bakua Mulumba. That is the village of my mother's family. He asked me for the names of at least two or three family members, so I mentioned the name of my uncle where my brother had gone, and I told him that he goes to the Branham church of Baka Mulumba.*

Pastor Benoît explained to me that Mbuyi spent a couple of weeks with the family of Paul Makelele. After he found the family members, he reunited the child with his maternal uncle. Mbuyi is attending school and is currently in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Pastor Benoît regularly talks with Mbuyi's uncle, who assures him of his love for the children of his sister. He treats them like his own children. They are still looking for Mbuyi's younger sister, to this day.

Papa Paul Makelele is the President of the child rights protection committee of the CPC Bobumua Buetu congregation in the Presbytery of Nzaba, Mbuji Mayi. He also is the Pastor of the Bobumua Buetu congregation.

Empowered to welcome, cloth, feed, shelter and educate vulnerable children as ignored and overlooked members of Christ's family (Matthew 25:40, MSG, NRS), successfully pleading with local authorities on behalf of those who had a run-in with the law, raising awareness to change harmful attitudes and practices towards at-risk children in general, and to end their systematic stigmatization and marginalization as child witches more in particular, Presbyterian congregations in Congo have been invigorated to live out all that Matthew 25 stands for. Emboldened by the initial outcomes, the denomination is seeking to expand the vision across the 13 CPC synods in Greater Kasai and invites its siblings in the US to help make that happen.

In short, by restructuring its ministries with vulnerable children from a center-based to a congregation-based approach in East Kasai, the CPC has, in collaboration with the State's Social Affairs Division not only succeeded in achieving its primary goals to:

- Allow children placed under its care to thrive better in family settings rather than in care centers,
- Also accommodate boys, who were excluded from girls-only care centers,
- Become self-reliant in meeting the children's primary needs (shelter and care) through the support of foster families by local congregations,
- And free up operational funds for the search for children's relatives and their eventual reunion,

but the Church has also been able to:

- Accommodate a far greater average number of children per year,

- Reunite a considerably larger proportion of these children with their relatives,
- Significantly shorten the time of family separation.

It is an exceptional privilege for me to accompany the Church in its courageous endeavor and witness the transformation. My gratitude goes to all who have come alongside with [contributions to mission personnel support](#) (E132192 in honor of Jeff and Christi Boyd) complemented with [gifts to the ministry itself](#) (E051625 Vulnerable Children in Congo)!



**Pastor Benoît Mingedi and his colleague of the Catholic National Office for Children in East Kasai, Pascal Mubikayi, review with Christi Boyd a video to be used during the fourth and last training in East Kasai (photo: Jeff Boyd).**

For more in-depth information, please click on the following links:

A video presentation by Rev. Benoit: <https://youtu.be/EgIU2zDgTek> (2021)

Two of my earlier Mission Connections letters on this ministry:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/letter/presbyterian-ministry-for-vulnerable-children-in-east-kasai-congo/> (2020)

and

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/letter/caring-vulnerable-children-congo/> (2016)

Blessings!

Christi (for Jeff as well)