

buzz

Mission

More Questions from Mission Sunday

By Lynda and Rod Hollinger-Janzen

More than a month ago, on Sunday, February 6, we talked about God's work in Benin, Burkina Faso and Congo and our participation in it through the Waterford congregation and Mennonite Mission Network. You had great questions during the Sunday school hour and more came in later. We wanted to reply to them immediately but ended up making a 10-day trip to Canada and have been playing catch-up since. Hopefully, it truly is better to be late than never? For what they are worth, here are our responses to the questions that came in after our presentation.

1. Did Ed and Irene influence other more traditional missionaries in their own era as they changed their approach to mission?

Yes, they did. An important aspect of their ministry that we did not touch on because of time on Feb. 6, was working at reconciliation between Western mission-planted churches and African Initiated Churches (AICs). Ed and Irene engaged in extensive conversations over time, both in informal settings like visits to missionary colleagues, and in larger contexts such as interchurch councils, advocating about the importance of taking AICs seriously as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Weavers did not shy away from these hard conversations,

but gently and straightforwardly, challenged prevailing assumptions that AICs were heretical, "pagan", "inferior", etc. Of course, Ed and Irene were written off and even ridiculed by many missionaries, especially at first.

Through their writings, dialogues with mission administrators, speaking at church conferences and at mission promotion events, they also engaged specifically with Mennonite mission practitioners in the same ways.

2. Did you ever find yourself in the uncomfortable position of being a minority in a negative way?

Mostly people were very welcoming of us, even though our foreign-ness was visible a long way off. The color of our skin, the way we walked, the way we talked ... all immediately identified us as "other." We continue to be humbled by the way we have been warmly received across the African continent. We are also embarrassed at how some people in North America treat people from other cultures. We learned so much about hospitality and generosity from the Beninese people that we are still trying to grow into the high bar they set to this day.

Everywhere we went in Benin, children would shout, "Yovo, yovo!" (White person, White person!) when they saw us approaching. This felt horribly uncomfortable at first, but we gradually got used to it. There were a handful of times in the 16 years that we lived on the African continent, that adults whom we didn't
Continued on page 2

Cont. from page 1

know would growl with disdain, “Yovo!” (Benin) or “Toubabou!”

(Burkina Faso) or “Mundele!” (Congo) when they met us on the streets. Then, they would spit in the dirt to show their disgust with our presence.

Once, when Rod was applying for a visa to France in the French embassy in Benin, there were long lines of Africans waiting to speak to visa officers. One of the officers, spotting him at the back of the line, called him forward. Rod hesitated, knowing that he was benefitting from White privilege. However, he was also afraid of angering the French official and having his visa application rejected. Rod accepted the opportunity to get his paperwork done rapidly. After all these years, he is still ashamed of what he did that day.

3. Did you have to think through the issue of polygamy as you journeyed with people toward greater faithfulness in Jesus?

Polygamy is still practiced in many places in Benin, Burkina Faso and Congo. One of the most common colonial models is that when a man with several wives becomes a Christian, he sends all his wives back to their birth families and marries a new Christian wife, usually a much younger woman. One of the multiple problems with this approach is that the women who are sent away are humiliated and unprotected, treated as “discarded members of society.” They often have difficulty finding enough food to feed their children and to pay for their school fees.

The New Testament accepted/did not condemn polygamy for ordinary believers, but did ask Christian leaders to move out of that toward modeling monogamy for their congregations (I Timothy 3:2,12). So, we think that the trajectory of the New Testament teaching moves towards monogamy. What the focus on monogamy for leaders tells us is that early Christians

recognized the complexities involved in changing fundamental family structures. This is not something that happens overnight, but something that a culture needs to grapple with over the longer term. We are not sure that any culture has really found the secret in terms of managing long term, constantly evolving, complex marital relationships. Some people call our culture’s model of divorce and remarriage “serial polygamy.”



One of the models we felt was the most in keeping with Jesus’ way of love was practiced by Papa Dossou of the *Eglise évangélique universelle* (Universal Evangelical Church). Papa had multiple wives before he gave his life to Jesus. He took his first (oldest) wife to be his Christian wife. All the others live in his courtyard, as an extended family, where he continues to provide food for everyone to eat and he sends all their children to school. So, all the women and children are part of a cohesive family life. After Papa Dossou’s conversion, he maintained platonic relationships with all his wives, except the oldest one.

We would also like to share these comments from Len Harms, who was part of a fellowship trip to Benin in 2016:

I want to thank you for your work and contribution to the [Mission Sunday] service. I appreciate the openness in answering questions, especially the one about Vodun. One of my reflections from the trip is how I responded to our visit to the Sacred Forest [where the Vodun religion is practiced.] I remember feeling that I was in a sacred space that I did not understand, but I also felt no fear. From some of my reading since, I believe that there is depth and mystery in how the [Vodun] religion works in people’s lives. I was reminded that people often fear what they don’t understand and misconstrue or make up the details.

See **Questions** on page 4

Community Life

Waterford Mennonite Church 			
Team Totals			
More Australia	Vici	Doveania	Dinosaur
117	207	161	267
Winning Team			
Dinosaur			
			



The Waterford youth O-lentic games are off to a running start. This weeks shenanigans: a life-sized game called Wits and Wagers. Gio Molina, Grant Kauffmann, Elijah Voth, and Lucas Bateman wear the wager props to jump into the game to win points.

Questions (Cont. from p. 3)

Traveling challenges my faith in that I see the ways that faith and belief in all their various forms help people navigate the difficulties of life. How can I assess their importance or validity when there is so much inward knowledge that I cannot see or appreciate? I think mission work is about building relationships, establishing trust, listening to the needs of people, and responding in helpful ways. There are so many ways that we could benefit from some serious mission work among us by people who have a different world view if we can humble ourselves to see them as equals with wisdom to share.

If worship is to be provocative, [the Mission Sunday service] certainly accomplished that for me.

Editor's Note: If you missed Rod and Lynda's excellent presentation that prompted these additional questions and comments, you can watch the video [here](#).

Membership Transfer Out

Tim and Sharon Burkholder have requested the transfer of their church membership from Waterford to First Mennonite Church in Edmonton, Alberta. Members here since 1993, they were active in the life of WMC—Tim serving as MLC chair several times, Sharon involved with Senior Adult Ministry Team. Tim also worked for a number of Mennonite Church agencies and organizations. They moved back to Canada in 2019. Ministry Leadership Council has acted to approve this request.

Correction

Two people were mislabeled in the 2008 photo of the Berean class in the March 6 Buzz: Clarence Yoder should have been Galen Yoder; Merle Yoder should have been Mel Cross.

Waterford

Mennonite Church

65975 State Road 15

Goshen, IN 46526

phone: 574 533-5642

fax: 574 533-0879

office@waterfordchurch.org

www.waterfordchurch.org

Staff Team

Administrative Ministry

· Karen Hostetler

Secretary

· Elvina Schmidt

Bookkeeper

· Janet Shoemaker

Coordinator of Administrative Ministries

· Colin Berkey

Tech Support

· Mariko Claassen

Interim Director of Children's Ministries

Facilities Ministry

· Jan Oostland

Facilities Manager

· Courtney Shetler

Custodian

· Irma Perez

Custodian

Pastoral Ministry

· Katie Misz

Pastor of Family Life

· Deron Brill Bergstresser

Pastor of Senior Ministries

· Cindy Voth

Pastor of Community Life

· Frances Ringenberg

Interim Pastor

The *Waterford Buzz* is normally published weekly for members of Waterford Mennonite Church. Items for inclusion should be sent to the editor by 5 p.m. Monday preceding publication.

Janet Shoemaker,
Interim editor
buzz@waterfordchurch.org