

TEACHING TEACHERS

One of the most important aspects of my work is equipping those who teach and influence others with skills that help them share our music with others in good ways. This entails more than just “getting the notes right.” It means singing with understanding, taking the music to heart, learning efficient teaching techniques, and growing in their listening skills. That latter part helps them also grow in their ability to care for souls in other ways as well. Listening is critical in both music and the care of souls.

In the picture above, I’m working with Rev. Joseph MBOUNGOU on chanting the Benediction that is used at Matins and Vespers in the francophone hymnal, *Liturgies et Cantiques Luthérienne* (LCL). He had learned this at the seminary in Togo, but had changed it. So I showed him the differences – not so as to be “liturgically correct,” but for the sake of hearing how the hymnal version reflected the text and better cued the congregation’s Amen. He readily understood and then taught the revision to others.



To be added to or removed from this mailing list, send an email message to Phillip.Magness@lcms.org with the word ADD or REMOVE in the subject line.

missioncentral.us/magness
facebook.com/groups/MagnessAfrica

Cantor in Congo



Rev. Albert KOUTIA (bottom left), President of the EELC, and the “Third Wave.”

This past month, after meetings and consultations in Brazzaville, I headed to the coastal city of Pointe-Noire, Congo. There I had the joy of leading a two-week seminar with pastors, elders and seminarians, and children, who came in three *vagues* or “waves.” First, I worked with mostly pastors and elders, who stayed for all three waves. Then came the seminarians and some of the wives. After lunch, the children came as they were released from school. Each wave helped the next, as instruction focused on equipping leaders to teach and to lead others in singing sacred music.

The seminar took place at Paroisse Wittenberg, a parish blessed with a good location near a large marketplace. The pastor there, Rev. Joseph MBOUNGOU, has a beautiful voice and a passion for the Lord’s song. He also has that special “parish priest” quality about him that has made him a father-figure for many in the neighborhood. His strong, yet gentle way attracts children, and he has discipled several young men to be Christian youth leaders. I had met Joseph when I taught in Brazzaville in 2011, but this was my first visit to his church. It was indeed a joy.

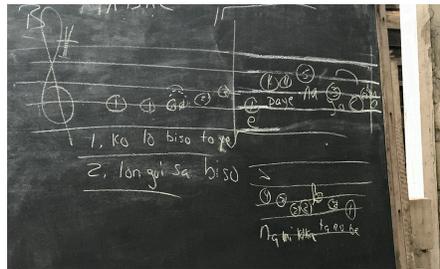
Learning hymns by heart was a significant emphasis. This is a salutary practice I encourage for Christians everywhere, but one especially important in Africa. Most congregations have few, if any, hymnals; the tradition is strongly oral. So the Western practice of devotional poetry as a means of growing in faith is alien to them. Not that they don’t have their own forms of poetry, but it doesn’t align with the highly literate practice of learning by singing stanzas of poetic text. Instead, like most oral cultures, the tradition is rooted in telling – and singing – the story. Thus, key stanzas of hymns outlining the life and work of Christ and our sharing in his death and life as Christians were internalized so that they could be sung by heart.

In this way, the hymnal is a prompt and a resource, rather than a crutch without which the people cannot sing. Would that more Americans be able to sing our chorales just as readily as we sing “Happy Birthday” or “Take Me Out to the Ball Game”! Certainly these friends can and do use hymnals, when available, to sing all the stanzas. But how powerful is their witness when they sing by heart!

Making Connections

“How does the mind work?” one of my college pedagogy teachers would ask, to which he would joyously give the answer: “By association!” Throughout my life as a teacher, this insight has continuously been proven true. Effective teaching discerns the interests, knowledge, and experiences of the students and then makes connections that help the students understand and remember what is being taught.

In the photo below, such an association is shown. I had been doing some work with numbers that reflect the different degrees of the scale, particularly to help people understand the small variations that occur in some of the hymns. But I had begun to suspect that many were not understanding how the numbers really indicated the shape of melodies. So I asked Pastor Joseph to sing one of the Lingala songs so that I could put the numbers into that melody.



A golden moment followed when the class returned. It was literally a group epiphany as eyes lit up and the students delighted in singing a song they already knew yet in a way that deepened their understanding.



“Roi de la musique”!

We make connections with the songs and with one another. While many of these friends would want to learn more Lutheran hymns whether or not they felt I cared for them, there is much truth in the adage that people care more about what you know when they know how much you care. This is especially true in music, where students need to trust their teachers – particularly where singing is involved. Singing is intensely personal, as it uses the instrument God placed in each of our bodies: the human voice.

So I was deeply touched when the leader of the youth warmly crowned me “King of Music” at our closing ceremony, complete with the traditional crown of the Loango tribe. Many wanted their photos taken with me wearing this. Elders later affirmed for me that this was not “child’s play” but a serious honor – and rarely given to a “mondelé” (white man). SDG



On the front page, one sees a picture of me working with Rev. Joseph MBOUNGOU on the Benediction for Matins and Vespers in the LCL. Here is a picture of him showing what he learned with third-year seminarian, André DILOUBENZI, who often serves as liturgist at his parish, Paroisse Wittenberg. They have Matins and Vespers each weekday there, a real blessing for the neighborhood.

Pastor Joseph was overjoyed with the seminar, writing, “We are very happy because the whole parish keeps singing these hymns. My brother Phillip has sown a lot, and now we will reap much in the ministry we share together in Christ.”



PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Our brothers and sisters in francophone Africa as their countries strive to recover from the devastating fallout of the global shutdown this past year. Economic consequences have been particularly hard on developing nations.
- The missionaries returning to the field, including my teammates in francophone Africa, Rev. Gary and Stephanie Schulte, who are now back in Brazzaville, and Rev. Jacob Gaugert, who is returning soon. They are eagerly getting back to work; may the Lord make their way smooth.

GIVE THANKS FOR:

- The many friends in Congo who helped make this last trip safe and successful.
- The steady growth of Paroisse Wittenberg, as more continue to come and hear the pure Gospel and rejoice in the new life we have in Christ through the forgiveness of sins.



There are many opportunities to serve as short-term or GEO missionaries. Check out the current list and download an application at lcms.org/service. Click on “Service Opportunities.”

To support the LCMS through the work of Phillip Magness you may send a tax-deductible gift to:

Mission Central
40718 Highway E16
Mapleton, IA 51034

Make checks payable to “**Mission Central**.” Mark checks “Support of Phillip Magness.” Gifts can also be given securely online through the LCMS website, on my online giving page at lcms.org/Magness. Thank you very much for your support! SOLI DEO GLORIA.