

# SERVING THE LORD IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

## NEWS FROM PHILLIP MAGNESS



Fall 2021



### TWO FAITHFUL SINGERS

This last trip I was pleased to see Thierry MASSALA (left) and Trésor BATSIMBA (right) again at St. Augustin parish in Brazzaville. They regularly lead the singing there and attended all ten sessions I led at their church this past trip. They are truly devoted to the Lord's song and have a heart for leading God's people in singing His praises.

I've now worked with Thierry four times over the years. Earlier this year, in February, I was blown away when he came up during the service while I was singing a hymn Pastor Gustave had asked me to sing for the people, the French version of "Triune God, Be Thou Our Stay." He had learned it from me in 2011 and had the words in a notebook he keeps. I was thoroughly impressed – and sincerely moved – when he started harmonizing with me as he read the lyrics from his tattered notebook. Clearly he cherishes the Lutheran hymnody he has learned!

Trésor is a newer member of the congregation, but joins Thierry and others faithfully each week for choir practice. Your support enables me to equip many singers such as these – who then bless their congregations.



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## The Song Takes Root



### Divine Service at Paroisse Wittenberg, Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo

My first workshop this last trip to Congo was at Paroisse Wittenberg in Pointe-Noire, where I had taught this past February. Paroisse Wittenberg is one of the “beachheads” I talked about in my last newsletters: places that are well-positioned to be centers of mission. They are spaces where leaders from area congregations can readily gather and places where there is a “critical mass” of Lutherans that can build cultural influence.

Once again, Paroisse Wittenberg did not disappoint. Over 70 people came at one time or another to the classes I taught, and the Divine Service the following Sunday was particularly joyful. Attendees included six local pastors, several vicars and seminarians, and many choir members. We went through the Church Year together, reviewing and reinforcing many of the hymns already learned while picking up some additional selections from the hymnal. Also, we field-tested five hymns from the hymnal which I have set to African tunes. Four of those five were well-received. The other seemed to go well at first but did not take root like the others – which was a good learning experience for me.

The four that worked well, though, proved to be very popular, particularly the pairing of « Au festin du Saint Agneau » (“At the Lamb’s High Feast”) to a Haya tune I had found. (The Haya are a tribe from NW Tanzania.) These hymns will be in the forthcoming « Édition Africaine » of the francophone LSB, « Liturgies et Cantiques Luthériens » (LCL). We also worked on the setting of the Divine Service that will be in the new book – a special setting that takes the most “Africnable” settings of the canticles from the three Divine Services in LCL and puts them together in a single setting ideal for franco-African mission.

The local pastors are particularly jazzed about the unified liturgy we’ll have in the new edition of the French hymnal. Pictured above in white is Rev. Fred MASSALA, who arrived at the workshop with a new portable hard drive he had purchased so that he would have a fresh, dedicated medium for recordings of the liturgical music. He’ll be making copies and sharing recordings of the various canticles and key hymns with brothers and sisters he’ll be teaching. It is in this way that the songs “take root.”

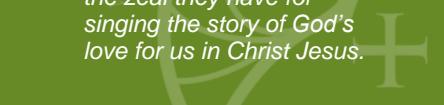


### PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Our brothers and sisters at Paroisse Wittenberg in Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo, as they continue to work on repairing and expanding their church building.*
- The seminaries in Togo, Congo, and Guinea, as they work to make up for time lost during the pandemic.*
- Safe travel during my upcoming deployment to Burundi.*
- Good cooperation and successful work toward completing the African edition of Liturgies et Cantiques Luthériens (LCL), especially for the engraver, Rev. David Saar, and for Rev. David Somers as he secures copyrights.*

### GIVE THANKS FOR:

- CPH granting permission for the African Edition of the French hymnal to use the LSB artwork. We greatly appreciate their support and cooperation in mission.*
- The many pastors, vicars, seminarians, evangelists, deaconesses, elders, and choir members who came to the Congo workshops, and the zeal they have for singing the story of God's love for us in Christ Jesus.*



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](http://lcms.org/service). Click on "Service Opportunities."

## Workshop at St. Augustin – Brazzaville

After teaching in Pointe-Noire, the commercial center for the Republic of Congo, I returned to the administrative capital, Brazzaville, to teach there. The host congregation, St. Augustin, was the mother church of our mission partner there, the Église Évangélique Luthérien au Congo (EELC). While there are more congregations now in other areas of the country, St. Augustin remains a vital center for this church body, and a good place for folks from sister congregations to gather together.

Because we had many newer students here, the work was more fundamental. Again, we went through the Church Year, but this time had more hymns to introduce which had only needed polishing in Pointe-Noire. Still, there were some who knew hymns from my previous trips to Congo or who had learned them in Togo, and so we had good opportunities to work on the art of teaching songs as I helped those who already knew various hymns take the lead in teaching the others.

We also worked with pastors, vicars, and song leaders on finding good keys in which to sing with the people. In general, one cannot rely on a keyboard to give a pitch in Africa. Pitch pipes are helpful when the leader can read the notes on the staff, but the most helpful skill – one that all can readily learn – is simply to review the *topography* of the hymn.



The “topography” of the melody is the height and depth of the tune’s range and its corresponding shape. Does the melody start high and go down, like “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”? Or does it start low and go up, like “Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise”? In the former case, pastors and song leaders who are basses need to practice starting those songs higher than they expect. In the latter case, tenors need to learn to start low. One can easily learn enough music literacy for the notation to be a big help, even as the ability to “sight-sing” melodies requires much practice.

I also worked with pastors and vicars on their overall presiding over the liturgy, considering when and how announcements can be helpful and when they get in the way. The service the following Sunday revealed much good fruit from all these efforts, as the liturgy ran smoothly and the song of salvation was sung with great joy!



### A WARM WELCOME

Leaving on a Wednesday afternoon, I expected to be in Pointe-Noire that Friday. Alas, due to a flight delay, I had to spend two days in Addis Ababa waiting for the next Ethiopian Air flight to Congo. Result: I did not arrive until Sunday afternoon.

A surprisingly large welcome party greeted me! About 20, children and adults, came to welcome me! After many joyful salutations, we sang (*en français*) “Listen! God Is Calling,” – attracting many smiles from passers-by. Before heading off into town, I snagged the selfie with part of the group. Each culture shows hospitality in its own way, yet there is much we can learn from one another.

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