

January, 2008

Dear Ministry Partners,

This is the third part of a series Jim began last fall, so we will write it to you just as he wrote it from his heart.

A fourth project is Evangelism. At the heart of Laban Ministries in Bandundu, Congo, are 3 Bible Institutes. The Holy Spirit has allowed us to graduate about 500 students who studied at one of the Bible Institutes for 3 years. At the heart of each school is evangelism. Evangelism not only taught but “caught” through on-the-job training: first in person-to-person evangelism, then village evangelism, and city evangelism.

We use the Evangelism Explosion Program of the late Dr. James Kennedy as the program of choice in our schools. “I strongly felt called to be a missionary in the Congo,” he told me 4 years ago at his church, “but I didn’t go personally. However, now I have gone many times through the going of all the Explosion material.” In his book Evangelism Explosion, I am referred to as an “assistant pastor at the Warrendale Community Church who helps train candidates in the Explosion Ministry.”\

We also use the Sower’s Method when talking to groups of people. Preaching reaches the hundreds and thousands. Three movies are also shown: *The Jesus Film*, *The Passion*, and *Ricardo*, a corrupt policeman who throws his wife into a torrential river rapid to drown her and cuts his own throat. A man saves his wife, and others rescue him. In the hospital he is saved. He gives his life to serve Jesus Christ and is martyred. The story is true, and our people love this film.

The project in 2008 is to evangelize the city of Kikwit with nearly 2 million people and many refugees from east Congo. About 100 of Laban graduates will go yard to yard sharing Christ. We want to cover every section of the city with personal evangelism, Gospel films, and sectional Bible studies. Do you remember Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings talking about the dangerous Ebola disease in 1995? This is the city. Laban and Marcella Smith, my parents, are both buried in Kikwit. It is a city known for demonism, witchcraft, and darkness. We are planning on 3 years of reaching Kikwit, helping churches already existing to teach and follow up the new believers. Each year will also have a crusade for the masses in the soccer stadium, with well-known Christian musicians coming from Kinshasa, the capital, such as Patrice, who is actually from our area. His music has hit the top of the charts in Paris, France. He sings the Gospel in the Lingala language and writes songs that hit right to the soul. He is a servant of Christ with no reservations.

Pray with us that in 2009 the group *Stand* will be there to present the Gospel through strength demonstrations, as they do all over America. In the city of Kikwit thousands will come. All this is a part of a three-year effort by the Holy Spirit to reach Kikwit with Jesus Christ.

In 2010, our son, Todd, will be coming with Selah and the family, about 13 in all. Todd will be returning to his home in Africa at Nkara-Ewa on the shore of Lake Ewa. Selah will sing at the church at Nkara, which can hold between 4,000 and 5,000 people. The church was designed by Todd’s grandfather, Laban Smith, and finished by his grandmother, Marcella and Uncle Mit Yost. Chorales by the scores will come to add their voices. I am expecting a music group of 1,000 voices. The best chorales will be recorded, and America will probably hear them as Jason (Selah’s producer), and Shawn (Selah’s road manager), record the best and put it together in Nashville when they return. Selah will cap the 3-year evangelism and Bible-centered teaching with two concerts in the stadium of Kikwit. We are expecting over 100,000 in attendance. Todd insists on evangelism, preaching for salvation, and Bible teaching along with the concert.

Other national groups of Congolese will also lift the Name above all names; Jesus will be mightily lifted up. We need an army of prayer warriors—some with black, blond, and white, gray, red, and brown hair praying. Going from east to west, you must pass

through Kikwit. Spirits of darkness live in the Kwilu Valley, as former President Mobutu’s mother found out and died 2 weeks later. Mobutu hated Kikwit for that reason. She thought her evil spirits were stronger than those in a certain Kikwit cemetery. Something unseen hit her, causing her death. How remarkable the President’s mother would single out that town’s cemetery in all of Congo.

Selah will sing and preach for the One in us Who is Greater than the one who is in the world. Pray for their families. Cover them in the Power of the Blood of the Lamb long before they arrive in Congo in 2010. And cry with us for thousands of souls during the next 2 years. Todd will see his grandparents’ graves. Dad died in 1953 and Mom in 1978. How thrilled they are to see their grandson back in Congo since the last visit 11 years ago.

Jack will be going back in 2008. He is Minister of Music at the Gilead Baptist Church in Taylor, Michigan. I believe he will lead a 1,000-voice choir made up of many chorales from all over our regional area. What a thrill that will be. Molly, his wife, will be home with Isabella and Jackson Laban, the brand new addition.

My heart rejoices in the memory of missionaries who served in Bandundu and helped build churches in that town. Their efforts paid great dividends in souls, and the light of the Gospel that has burned for nearly 100 years. Our efforts blessed by the Holy Spirit will magnify the Name of Jesus and add to those who have served before. The spiritual legacy they left in Congo believers caught fire, especially during the wars of the 1960's. The pastors they trained who carried the black Book were the strongest encouragers and leaders of the war years, and that caused people to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Being born again was genuine, powerful, and life changing.

Thank you to the Yosts, Streets, Hallers, Clarks, Forsberg, Graves, Grings, Dr. & Mrs. Osterholm, Dolbys, Shannons, Ratslaughs, Alma Doering, Bertha and Martha Miller, Bucks, Vera Ronberger, Peters, Petersons, Brower, Eichers, Shaponeers, Palmoreys, Mennonite missionaries, and Andersons. All tried so hard and are worthy of praise. Where are their children? The most notable with striking power are the Grings, third generation missionaries. Bob, their father, is in his 90's and still riding a bicycle, handing out tracts and gently but powerfully sharing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. Their mission in the bush was completely pillaged more than once. All vehicles were torn apart, even after 50 years of building that mission. Discouraged but serving.

Our daughter, Shawn, has written a book called Congo Vignettes, published by Word. It is due to be released to Laban in April, then to the public in July. It will tell the story of what God did with 3 generations of Smiths. It goes deep into the soul. You will be thrilled to be a part of what happened as you read it, starting with Dr. Laban and Marcella Smith leaving America in 1938 for the Congo. Leaving was a wonder story. God put a passion in Laban's heart for the people of Congo to know the Gospel of his Lord Jesus, the Christ. I say wow! And praise Your Name, the Trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The book to me was unexpected. It is a refreshing breeze of God's grace, calling, love, and total surrender to Jesus Christ by my father and mother, Shawn's Grandpa Laban and Grandma Marcella. We who follow them try to walk as they walked with God. With Dad I must say as he did time after time, "Yandi ta kwisa. He is coming again!"

Expectantly,

Jim Smith

P. S. Thrilling news to share:

Funds needed to purchase the cement mixer are supplied!

2008 Benefit Dinner will be held on October 23. **SAVE THE DATE.** We will celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. and Mrs. Laban Smith's going to Congo and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jim and Nancy's ministry there. Pray that we will be able to bring our Congo team to America: Gary Kapinga, Mboma Nicolas, Pastor Mbuku, and Pastor Kapem.

Next planned trip to Congo: April, Lord willing and funds in hand.