

Unexpected Family

God builds a family in unexpected ways. That thought filled my mind eleven years ago as I first looked down at my son in my arms. I was standing in an orphanage just outside Kinshasa (the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, or the DRC). My son was nine months old, but it was the first time I'd held him. Through earthly loss and God's unsearchable providence – with no small amount of paperwork and prayers along the way – he became my son, and I became his father. And the strangest thing was how it didn't feel strange at all. Unexpected, sure. But without a doubt, we were family.

This April, that thought came echoing back. I was back in the DRC. This time I was standing in a small classroom in Lubumbashi. I had spent the last week visiting local Lutheran churches and teaching catechetical classes on the Apostles' Creed to a group of Congolese pastors, evangelists, and choir leaders together with missionary Keegan Dowling. As I began to say farewells (through an interpreter), we called each other brother and sister. We didn't speak the same language and we knew so little about each other, but God's Word had brought us together. Without a doubt, we were family.



The One Africa Team Adjunct Program

I was in the DRC as an adjunct member of the One Africa Team (OAT). Much of the OAT's work is following up with African churches that are seeking guidance as they grow in the Word and develop strong Lutheran churches – and many churches are reaching out to us. To help serve the great need, OAT has begun recruiting “adjunct” members of their team: US-based WELS pastors who can travel to Africa for a short period and partner with an OAT member to work with local church bodies.



one of the workshop sessions taught by Rev. Seifert

Missionary Dowling and I worked with church workers from the MELC (la Mission Évangélique Luthérienne au Congo, or “The Evangelical Lutheran Mission to The Congo”). Some of the challenges they faced were familiar: the large local church drawing away members, and the temptations to avoid conflict by comprising on doctrine. Some of them were foreign to me, such as a lack of Bible translations available in the local language, the challenge of worshiping in the rainy season without a building, or local pastors bringing in pagan practices. But the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word was strong, and it was beautiful to witness. The men and women were faithful students of the Word and eager servants of the church.



Marking the locations of MELC congregations in the DRC

World Missions Come Home

I serve a congregation on the north side of Atlanta. Our local WELS churches have been talking about ways we might serve the large immigrant population in Atlanta and connect them with the gospel. During my time in Lubumbashi, several of the workshop participants shared that they had relatives who had recently immigrated to the States – and all of them had gone to Atlanta! They were eager to share their contact information with me, with the hope that I could connect them with one of our local churches. It was a wonderful reminder that the gap between “Home Missions” and “World Missions” isn’t so wide. It’s a privilege to bring the gospel to people overseas, but we dare not miss that God has brought so many people from overseas to our cities and neighborhoods.

I often get emails and WhatsApp messages from our friends in The DRC – even the occasional phone call, though we don't speak the same language! We share photos, updates, and prayers. While I didn't expect to be communicating with people half a world away, that's what family does!



Rev. Joel Seifert lives in the Atlanta area and serves the members of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Marietta, GA

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news, and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>