

KRATZER CONGO MISSION

Champions for Congo News – August 1, 2022



Kratzer team arriving in the DRC

INTRODUCING THE MISSION

In June Dr. Tim Kratzer, his son Ken and two granddaughters, Lupita and Savannah, traveled to the Democratic Republic of Congo. What they experienced as they witnessed the work of the Free Methodist Church in the Congo was transforming. They toured Deaconess Nundu Hospital, visited the Nundu School of Nursing, learned about the various healthcare ministries of the Church, experienced International Child Care Ministries (ICCM) of the DRC and met with Bishop Lubunga.

The Kratzer Family's Congo connections go back to 1981 when Dr. Kratzer arrived at Nundu to assist in the development of what came to be known as Deaconess Nundu Hospital. While in the DRC, then known as Zaire, he was assisted by his wife Connie and accompanied by four sons, Ken, David, John and Nathan. The hospital was named the hospital of reference for the surrounding health zone, and a system of health centers was developed. During this time, Dr. Kratzer had a vision for quality healthcare, training of healthcare professionals and community development. Political instability and ultimately war interrupted the family's ministry in the DRC in 1991.

In 2012, Tim and Connie Kratzer returned to Nundu to see that the hospital had survived war. In fact, the community in some amazing way was thriving. Hospital staff and the church gave a warm welcome. What followed were visits in 2014 and 2016. With these visits the Kratzer family found its interest in the DRC growing and relationships being built with another generation of leaders who were now taking charge.

Despite ongoing civil unrest and concerns regarding COVID, the Kratzer family has been reflecting on its

spiritual legacy and returning to the Congo. The Central Africa Healthcare Organization has authorized this mission trip with its primary goal described as being relationship building and asset assessment. The Kratzers are a part of a group known as Champions for Congo, former missionaries and others interested in the medical work of the Free Methodist Church of Democratic Republic of Congo, working in partnership with CAHO.

The resilience of the Congolese people is remarkable, supported by their shared Christian faith and sense of community. The Kratzer Team, having experienced in person what it means to live and thrive in the Congo, now share their transforming journey and experiences. The needs of the Congo are great, but healthcare ministries of the Free Methodist Church in the DRC are making a difference.

HEALTHCARE THAT TRANSFORMS – DRC June Visit

We set out on our mission to Nundu with the expectation of learning more about the work of the Church in the DRC, leaving June 11 and returning July 4. Our journey began the evening of June 10 at 10:45 pm when we loaded our rented pickup with 8 pieces of luggage plus carry-on bags. We arrived at Phoenix Sky Harbor around 2 am and checked in after 4 am.

Connections were made in Newark and then Brussels, arriving in Bujumbura, Burundi at 8:15 pm of June 12, bringing to an end a long day of travel. Getting to bed at midnight was a welcome relief, ending what was the longest day of our mission.



Our journey continued as we crossed over into the Democratic Republic of Congo on Tuesday, June 14, where we were met by representatives in Uvira from the Medical Coordination Office of the Free Methodist Church. We also met with Rev Luk, director of ICCM in the Congo, and Dr. Marx, Medical Director of DNH.

We met young men interested in entrepreneurship. One remarkable young man was Thierry who is

developing a secondary school academy near Nundu. During our overnight stay in Uvira, we experienced life in the DRC as we walked the road by the hotel and then along the lakeshore.



Lake Tanganyika

The next day it was on to Nundu where, after 5 hours on a bumpy bone jarring road, we experienced the enthusiastic and heartfelt greeting from the hospital staff and school of nursing students.



Welcome to Nundu

We also were greeted by the church leadership, receiving a Nile Perch as a gift. We have so many memorable experiences to share, it is hard to know where to begin. Here are the highlights.

We participated in the annual meeting of the Medical Coordination of the Free Methodist Church. I was amazed by the enthusiasm and commitment of those representing their various medical works. What I find most remarkable is the extent of the healthcare ministries established by the Free Methodist Church – the church oversees 53 healthcare ministries, including four hospitals, with 21 doctors serving the church. The total number of healthcare professionals and workers is 453. The area served is immense with a population I would estimate to be around 500,000. These centers provided with essential medical supplies and

pharmaceuticals, perform minor surgeries, maintain immunizations, respond to epidemics as well as provide care for endemic diseases such as tuberculosis and AIDS.



Medical Coordination Meeting

We had an opportunity to visit several of these health centers and hospitals, as we traveled, again over demanding roads, from Nundu to Mshimbakye. In times past major surgeries would only be performed at Nundu. Now C-sections and other select surgeries are performed at reference health centers or one of these small hospitals. It was remarkable to see that, Mshimbakye which had for years been a health center, providing essential services, including a maternity, was now “equipped” as a small hospital. I say “equipped” but many or most of these small hospitals lack proper surgery tables and lights. Even so, these facilities have been well maintained and many new buildings have been constructed thanks to collaboration with various non-government organizations.



Mshimbakye Maternity Ward

Our travel south toward Mshimbakye exceeded our expectations with an eyewitness view of all that is happening. Lusenda has a Health Center with a well-equipped maternity, but the leadership of the center is asking for hospital services as the road to Nundu is

difficult, as if we needed a reminder of the need for improvement of infrastructure throughout the region.



Lusenda Health Center

Half-way between Nundu and Mshimbakye is the Lweba Health Center, where Dr. Alembe Tresoir is assigned. He does surgery without a surgery table and light. Lweba has a well-quipped, recently built maternity, provided by International Medical Corp (USAID).



Lweba Delivery Room



Dr. Tresoir, Medical Director of the Lweba Healthcenter, standing in front of the surgery suite

Another highlight was **meeting with the staff and students of the Nundu School of Nursing**. Over the years, many of the healthcare workers have trained at Nundu and now are serving in health centers and hospitals. The emphasis is public health nursing with 61 students enrolled and 31 midwifery students enrolled. We were introduced to the curriculum reform which involves a change in teaching methods, moving from rote memory to an interactive approach. These reforms were first introduced at Formulac, a school of nursing in the Bukavu area, as a pilot project in 2018 and then integrated into the curriculum of each school.

As Nundu was our primary place of lodging, we had ample time to tour the hospital. **The vision for Deaconess Nundu Hospital**, as the hospital of reference for the Nundu Health Zone, is that it will be a **center known for Integrity, Excellence, Respect, Healthcare with Dignity and Compassion**. We experienced these values as we toured the hospital and had opportunities to get to know the medical staff.



Pediatric Rounds



The Medical Team at Nundu

Finally, we had time to **visit with Randy and Alice Matthewson** and their grandsons Sam and Simeon. It was amazing to learn what they had accomplished over

the almost three months that they had been at Nundu which included preparing for solar expansion and restoration of the air strip.



Sam, Randy Matthewson, Simeon

Saturday June 18, the Matthewsons were loaded and ready for travel to Buja. Maintenance staff and community wished them well as they departed. What the Matthewsons have accomplished over their years of volunteer service has been truly remarkable - a hospital rebuilt and restored after years of conflict.

We have more highlights to share soon, including the ICCM agricultural project, our visit to the Linda Stryker Academy, the solar expansion project, our trip to Bukavu and opportunities for involvement in the future of the Free Methodist Church in the Congo.

The poverty of South Kivu, where Nundu is located, could be overwhelming, but our people have a quiet resolve to champion change. The Free Methodist Church of the DRC are inviting all who will to join them in their journey, assisting in whatever way possible. Contributions to help with this important work may be given through at www.congohealth.org or by mail to **GuideStream Charitable Gift Fund**, 8050 Spring Arbor Road, P.O. Box 580, Spring Arbor, MI 49283. We are affiliated with the Central Africa Healthcare Organization.

THE MISSION OF CAHO: To support, promote, and facilitate Christian healthcare through partnership with hospitals and clinics affiliated with the global Free Methodist Church, primarily those in Central Africa and Haiti.



We, Savannah, Ken, Tim and Lupita, thank you for your prayers. Our mission trip was transforming and only possible as the Lord prepared the way for us.

Timothy Kratzer, MD