

Doors open for women theologians

Africans promote opportunities for ministry

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For MC USA and MWC

KINSHASA, Congo — A vision for providing theological training to African women brought together an international committee Nov. 13-15 for its first meeting in three years.

The group celebrated the progress achieved through its partnership with Mennonite Women USA, a partnership brought together by the connecting role of Mennonite World Conference.

The committee continued the slow work of creating an organization that will support women as they seek to respond to God's call.

At their last gathering in November 2004, in Nairobi, Kenya, the African Anabaptist Women Theologians, or AAWT, committee set a goal that by 2009 at least 20 additional Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women across Africa will be trained for church leadership.

Mennonite Women USA created a Sister-Link partnership with the committee to help achieve this goal by providing scholarship funds and supporting the group.

In addition to seven women from Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, this year's participants included a guest from Ethiopia. Her presence represented a shift in the Ethiopian church, which has de-



Rhoda Keener/MWC

The African Anabaptist Women Theologians group gathers by the Congo River. Front row, from left: Esther Kalambo, Zambia; Sibusisiwe Ndlovu, Zimbabwe; Rebecca Osiro, Kenya; and Kelemua Tefera, Ethiopia. Back row: Sidonie Swana, Congo; Nelly Mlotshwa, Zimbabwe; Hellen Bradburn, Tanzania; and Kadi Hayalume, Congo.

cidied to participate in the AAWT process and to encourage greater use of women's gifts since the Bulawayo MWC assembly in 2003.

Also in attendance were 11 Congolese women theologians, pastors and theology students, in addition to Tim Lind of MWC, Suzanne Lind of Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Women USA executive director Rhoda Keener.

Two women have graduated from theological programs, and two are in their final years. A fifth selected woman was unable to study as hoped.

In Kinshasa, the AAWT leaders decided the next scholarships would be awarded to women in Angola, Congo and Tanzania in churches that presently have few or no theologically educated women leaders.

While few women in the

African churches have formal theological training, thousands exemplify practical theology, the group noted.

"It's about putting our faith in Jesus into our everyday life," said Rebecca Osiro of Kenya. "Women who are involved in ministry are doing theology. These women can be a doorway for other women to do theology."

The Congo Mennonite Brethren Church, or CEFMC, has led the way among African Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in opening opportunities for women in ministry.

Four CEFMC women theologians have been ordained, and more are scheduled for ordination next year. Although some other African denominations in the MWC family have accepted the principle, few have actually ordained women.