

## The gift of a new name

A year ago I received a new name, Mama Kiese. I received this gift from a group of Congolese women pastors and students as we sat around a table outside the room where the committee of African Anabaptist Women Theologians (AAWT) discussed which countries would receive the next round of scholarships. Since most of the scholarship dollars came through our MW USA office (see “Grapevine,” p. 16), I elected to not be part of the AAWT discernment process.

During this “free time,” the Congolese women not on the AAWT committee and I, tried to converse. Since I know no French and the woman who knew English best, Lola Bumba, was at the beginning level, this conversation provided an interesting opportunity in friendship building. I took out my notebook and drew the table where we were sitting. Together Lola and I wrote down names and family information—siblings, number of children, where each woman lived. I told the group my husband’s name and that we had three children. We had nearly exhausted our conversational ability when Lola turned to me and said the group had given me a new name. Mama Kiese, meaning Joy.

Joy? The name made me happy, but struck me as discordant in the context of my tiredness and feeble attempts at communication. I felt more like C.S. Lewis’ Narnian marshwiggle, Puddleglum, whose efforts at dancing were dismal and awkward.

In the year that followed I have often thought of this name and wondered what joy really is. Does our joy received from Christ transcend self-perception and the activities we are engaged in?

This holiday season as I sing, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come,” I will remember a circle of women in

Kinshasa who gave me the gift of a new name, and a deeper understanding of what joy is—the presence and reality of Christ within. 📖



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**Congolese pastors and students visit with Rhoda Keener. Lola Bumba is pictured next to Rhoda.**

**Photo by Suzanne Lind.**

