

The Reluctant Overseas Missionary

To go or not to go? - that is the question. Beth & I have recently been presented with the opportunity to help investigate the possibilities of ministry in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It was interesting because I had also been tasked with working with some of my co-workers from the USA on some project development plans in regards to the many translation projects that are confronting us. Our focus was to put together a presentation that might interest various foundations to partner with us. Out of the many possibilities that were on the table, it seemed natural for my part to focus on some of the French speaking challenges. In



Canada we have a significant French speaking mission field in our backyard. Our Quebec office could certainly use the support. The past summer we had been challenged with the fact that there were more missionaries in Kenya than in the rest of the Africa's French speaking world. So I would see where a focus on La Francophonie populations would lead. It didn't take long to discover we had a number of requests coming out of the DRC, a Francophone nation. A project for the Lamb in Swahili had already been started. There were requests for Lingala and good potentials for translators being available. The potential for wonderful art work that could be adapted to the African culture had materialized. The pieces were there. On top of all that, our co-workers from Quebec had been asked to investigate the possibility of a seminar trip to the DRC. If we could interest some foundations in partnering with us, the final piece would be in place and we could move ahead, providing a much needed understanding of the gospel in the hands of the national church. It seemed my course was set. It was time to roll up my sleeves and get to work.

I arrived back in our international office in Olds to be greeted by our directors grin, "How would you like to accompany us on a trip to the DRC to investigate the potential ministry there?" I hadn't even had a chance to brief him on our meetings or the possible direction I thought would be appropriate in regards to project development. When I told him, "Interesting" was his response. I told him I would talk to Beth and pray about it. I was okay with the idea but not keen. This was all pretty new in my thinking. Beth was a little more interested so we agreed to pursue the possibility. But then we started to check out what would be involved. The Canadian Embassy had a travel advisory against visiting the country. There were some real bad fellows in the country. The previous governments had run it into the ground. We would be exposed to various diseases. We would have to get a series of vaccinations. It would be HOT. Amenities were scarce. There was even a question about toilet paper being available. We didn't know the language. It would be HOT. Finances were tight after building our new office. We had heard the police force was corrupt. It would be HOT. As we were balancing the risks against the benefits of the trip and to be honest we had become a bit sceptical about the value of some of the short

term overseas trips - we opted out. I figured I could do my part here. I didn't have to go to Africa to find ministry opportunities.

Our director was okay with that, but he would at least like us to hear Richard Fleming out, the missionary who had invited us. (by the way the same missionary who had reported on the lack of missionaries in the French speaking world). We agreed. After some failed attempts due to power shortages, we engaged Richard in some dialogue. We would be in Kinshasa, the capital, a city of 12 million people, in area 15 times the size of Toronto. The real bad guys were 100's of miles away and transportation to and from those areas was minimal. The police would stop you but it was a matter of survival and after you understood the routine it was a minor inconvenience. Richard and his wife could walk about freely and openly without fear. They were planning on having teens come for ministry. The country was experiencing a phase of rebuilding. Banking machines were becoming available, roads were being rebuilt were some of the signs. It would be HOT (Beth likes it hot), the amenities are scarce and we would have to get some vaccinations, there could be risks but the risk level was not what we had perceived. The scales were beginning to tip. What about the benefits. Richard shared that because of the lack of emphasis on ministry in the French speaking world, any interest from outsiders is a great encouragement. Just being willing to come would be a boost to the church. We also began to understand the heart of our director a bit more. His heartbeat to see many people groups and tongues have an understood gospel compelled him. He wanted the staff to have the same heartbeat. The expense was worth it. He wanted a staff that had the abilities and understanding of how to get literary tools into various countries and how to equip the people. Being part of such an endeavour was the best training ground. I could use the first hand experience to help develop understanding with various partners. The benefits were stacking up. There was potential to use some of my videographer skills, though this might be limited by some of the restrictions within the country. We could take care of some of the routine things so John and Gaetan and Ivy could focus on some of the ministry aspects. God confirmed the validity of such a trip in our hearts and the scales tipped. So with anticipation we are headed to the DRC. Lord willing we will leave the end of May and arrive home about the 10th of June. I've made a trip to the library to pick up some French language resources wondering if that Jr. High French may pay some dividends after all. We are scheduled for some shots and I will be heavily involved in planning our itinerary. Talk about learning curves. We would appreciate your prayers for safety and health, travel visas, our kids as they hold down the fort at home, our French, an expansion of ministry, that doors would be opened for an understood gospel, the church of the DRC would be equipped, lives would find God's peace and that the Islamic minority would embrace God's word and take it to their fellow Muslims.

May God grant us eyes to see as HE sees;


Gary & Beth