

Where I have **comfort**, they have **faith**.

Where I have **opportunities**, they have **determination**.

Where I am **loved**, they *have love*.

Kipendano— those who love: this is what United Methodist Women (UMW) are called in the Congo. I can't think of a better term to describe the UMW or a better goal to strive for. Throughout the past couple of months, I've witnessed two very different and very distant communities of Kipendano (UMW) display acts of love.

Raising nearly \$10,000 to support a group of women half-way around the world that you've never met — that is love. When the Indiana UMW's *Money for Mortar* project was created in partnership with the women of Mulongo to support their effort to build a Women's Center, I don't believe anyone anticipated the huge success it would be. Within the short span of sixth months after the *Money for Mortar* project was announced to be the hands-on project for Indiana UMW 2014 MissionU, women from around the state worked to raise money to support the work of their UMW sisters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The enormity of the gift that was offered and the love that accompanied it fits the UMW's Congolese name of Kipendano.

The women of Mulongo, not having money at their disposal, have exhibited their love differently. Here in the States, we often refer to things taking a lot of "time" and "energy", but I myself have never seen such a sacrifice *of* time and energy as I witnessed in the women of Mulongo. For two months, these women dug, molded, scraped, stacked, covered, and fired 20,000 bricks, each woman working her share two days a week. Two days a week? That doesn't sound too

bad...until you realize that the normal day for a woman starts at 3am and doesn't end until maybe 11pm. So if it takes a woman that long to fulfill her daily duties, what happened on those two days a week she had to leave her home to make bricks? What it means is that she had to do the housework the day *before* those designated working days. It means, two days a week, she was performing what normally takes 40 hours to accomplish... in one day. And if this sacrifice didn't already seem immense, these women aren't even creating this building or program for themselves.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been immersed in war for ten years, leaving many young girls parentless and, because of prevalent, war-time rape, as mothers. Because of these circumstances, a whole generation of girls is facing the problem of raising their new families unequipped with basic literacy, money-making, or household skills. The UMW of Mulongo are starting the Women's Center so that the young women and girls of the community will have the opportunities that they, themselves, did not have: the opportunity to learn to read (which helps women into leadership positions), the opportunity to learn how to create wares to sell and produce an income, and the opportunity to learn how to take care of a family. It's for this vision of educated women that the UMW of Mulongo lovingly sacrificed and continue to sacrifice their time and energy, living up to the name "Kipendano".

Now that a connection has been formed between Congo and Indiana through a mutual interest in women's education, keeping that connection is vital for the project to succeed, but not because the UMW of Congo will be relying on Indiana UMW's financial support: that would likely change the dynamic between the two groups of women from a healthy partnership into a detrimental dependency cycle. The connection is vital because relationships are inspiring. Relationships remind you that you're not alone. Relationships show you that

people actually *do* care.

The importance of relationships is shown through a traditional Congolese saying: mukwenu ukimuna kakudishapo na ba bwa— if you come to visit me regularly, dogs will not eat me. Now I'll admit, I almost laughed when I first heard someone recite this. I mean, how often have I faced the problem of dogs eating me because no-one came to visit? It seems a bit extreme, doesn't it? But in a country where war is still very prevalent and where no-one else in the world seems to care that they are suffering horrors every day, being scared that no-one will be there for them in their time of trial is a very real fear.

By supporting the women of Mulongo's project and by sending three of their own to visit Mulongo, the Kipendano of Indiana have reached out their hand in love, saying, "You are not alone. We haven't forgotten about you. We will *not* let the dogs eat you." These are powerful statements to make. These are powerful *promises* to make. Staying in contact with these women by following the progress of their Women's Center is one way of fulfilling this promise, and perhaps when the construction of the building is complete, the Indiana UMW can send another team out to visit Mulongo to see what the women have accomplished, affirm them, talk to them, and listen to them. But of course the most powerful thing we can do to stay connected with the Kipendano of Congo is to keep them in our thoughts and prayers.

Where they have **faith**, I will **comfort**.

Where they're **determined**, I'll support **opportunities**.

Where they **love**, I will **love**.