

Village Church Restoration Project

The past 10 years have been years of conflict and war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Border nations have invaded the country to exploit her resources and internal power struggles have often divided the nation along ethnic lines. The primary victims of all this have been the rural population, the people who live in the nearly 70,000 villages, who have been caught in the cross-fire and been killed, pillaged and raped at the will of the various armies and militias who have fought each other across the land. It is estimated that **nearly 4,000,000 civilians have died** as a direct result of the conflict through murders, starvation and disease.

In the midst of this situation the Church of Jesus Christ has sought to maintain its' presence, witness and ministries to the people of the Congo. Much of the education and health services in the Congo were initiated by the churches and continue to be carried on by them. However, the church buildings and the mission stations related to them have not been left out of the destruction. Entire mission compounds have been destroyed as quality roofing has been taken from every building and carried outside the country.

The economy has been adversely affected as infrastructure has deteriorated and markets have been closed. Villagers have been unable to market their produce or buy even basic necessities, **such as soap and salt**. This lack of earning potential has affected the villager's ability to maintain their church buildings. Churches have deteriorated from weather, termites and a general lack of proper maintenance.

It is in response to this situation in the central part of the Congo that the United Methodist Bishop, **David K. Yemba**, has initiated a project to assist in the restoration of village church structures. Villages where the church has historically had a presence, but where the conflict in the country has compromised that presence, the Bishop and his co-workers are attempting to encourage the village Christians by assisting them in **the restoration and revitalization of their local congregations**.

Roofing, which the villagers cannot afford, and **quality lumber**, which can only be produced by a sawmill, are being provided to allow for the restoration of village churches in remote areas. The villagers are providing man power and the logs to produce the necessary lumber for

trusses, doors, windows and benches. The superior quality hardwoods, that can be sawed with a mill, will allow the structures to serve the people for many years, as contrasted to the softer forest poles that were often used as a cheap building material in the past.

The average village church building **can be restored for \$3,500 - \$4,000** including materials, transportation and operational costs of the sawmill and brick maker. When compared to the cost of a building elsewhere in the world needed to serve a similar size congregation, one cannot help but be impressed with the effective and efficient investment of these resources.

There are many villages throughout central Congo who need this kind of assistance and encouragement. This priority need of the United Methodist Church there is in keeping with Bishop Yemba's own stated priority of seeking "**the spiritual renewal of the United Methodist Church in Central Congo**".