

MRS. MARIE LOUISE YAKEMBA

Report #C05

ABSTRACT

Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba, divorced from her polygamous husband, is the mother of seven adult children who live abroad. She has received extensive education, including theological education, and has a job with the government as a senior Treasury official. She has lived and traveled abroad, serves in leadership with a variety of women's ministries at the national level (Union des Soeurs, Aglow International, and Samaritan's Purse)—and plays a key role in leading and organizing conference activities for women.

BACKGROUND

Childhood Home

Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba was born in a Christian family. Her father worked with the missionaries in the very beginning at Kemba, and it was thanks to him that the first pastor Rev. Toudou of the Baptist Church was installed at Kemba, Ouango. It is worth noting that her father came from a polygamous family, and he himself ended up marrying two wives. The missionaries did not baptize men who had many wives. Only the wives were baptized. However, her father helped the church in many ways and was very much involved. Mrs. Marie Louise was very lucky to have her grandmother who was a committed Christian and who raised her. She showed Marie Louise the Christian service, and she began serving the Lord as Sunday school teacher when she was still in school in Bambari.

After graduating with her Baccalaureate from the High School of Bambari, she came to Bangui to study at the University where she resumed her spiritual activities. She attended the Union Fraternelle des Eglises Baptistes (UFEB) and worked with the Women's movement. She was also the leader of the "Beta Ouali" group. It was in 1990 that her Pastor the late Adris recommended her to the Ecole de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui (ETEB) from 1990 to 1994.

Countries of Residence

Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba spent one year in France where she did her professional training from 1986 to 1987 as *Inspecteur des impôts*. In addition to France, she traveled in many countries.

Current Family

Marie Louise Yakemba was married to a polygamous husband and had children with him. But after she resumed her spiritual activities, she divorced. She committed her life to serving God. She is, therefore, a single mother, and all her children are now grown.

Mrs. Yakemba had seven children: five girls and two boys. Concerning their involvement in her ministry Mrs. Yakemba asserts: I would like first to talk about my contribution to the lives of these children because if I had not raised them in the ways of God, they would not also contribute to my ministry. As I told you, my grandmother was a fervent Christian, and she taught me to know the Lord. When I began to have my own children, I taught them the word of God. All my children are baptized and are all committed to serving God, and they are supporting me." In fact, her oldest son is in the USA and financially supports and encourages her in her ministry.

Educational Background

Marie Louise Yakemba did her primary and secondary education in Bambari. After her Baccalaureate, she came to Bangui and entered the university and applied to the Management Department in 1979. It is worth noting that her grandmother who raised her was a very wise person. When Marie Louise was in eighth grade with three children, and she wanted to leave school and write the midwife entrance exam, her grandmother refused, saying: “You must pursue your education because I am there to care for the children.” Also, after her Baccalaureate, Marie Louise wanted to enter the School of Administration, but again her grandmother refused, telling her to go to the university. She, therefore, applied to the University, but two years later, her grandmother passed away. She was so traumatized that she could not continue at the university. She, therefore, applied to the *Ecole Normale d’Administration* (ENA) for her post-graduate education.

Concerning her Theological/Christian education, Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba asserts that she was baptized at 10. She sang in the choir and was a Sunday school teacher. On the advice and encouragement of Dr. Mbunga Mpindi Paul, she applied to ETEB and then to FATEB. She acknowledges that the different pieces of training she receives help her know what to do and are resources to teach other women. Marie Louise Yakemba has had the opportunity to take part in many seminars outside the country. For instance, every two years she attends conferences in the USA. She also attends conferences on the regional level and also in South America. Her training in France was financed by the school there.

Personal Testimony and Calling

Marie Louise Yakemba says: “The testimony of my life is that I was a lost woman if I can express myself in this way. To be a second wife in life is not what God recommends. God made me understand what he wants to do for me. He opens my eyes to see who he is and bless the Lord because the decision I made to divorce a man gave me the strength to commit myself to the Lord. He gave the strength so that I won’t regret anything. He bestows me with gifts; God gave me the strength to take a decision.” Marie Louise felt in the beginning very guilty, but there were always people on her way to encourage her to trust in God. This is what gives her the strength today to help other women. In CAR, the rate of Christian’s women living together with men in polygamous homes is very high, and this slows down the work of God. This situation gives to Marie Louise Yakemba the courage to speak about her life to other women telling them that it is not too late, that what is the most important is to take the decision to follow Jesus Christ rather than to remain in their situation that does not have a way out. Her testimony influences other women to follow her example and change. They testify in these terms: “when we look at you, you reflect what you practice. We are praying God to help us follow in your step.”

For Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba without God’s calling, you cannot do anything. If she is what she is today, it is because of God’s calling. It is because of her commitment that she can do all that she is doing today, and this is her secret because she is involved in many things. In her denomination, she is the leader of the women’s group. When she was in UFEB, she was the first national leader person of the *Union des Soeurs* (Sisters’ Union). She is also the national leader of Aglow International, a Christian NGO with headquarters in the USA. It is a Christian organization for women. This NGO does gather not only women but also men and young people. Marie Louise is the coordinator of activities. She is also a coordinator of the Samaritan’s Purse and since July 2013, she became the National Coordinator. In all this when God calls, he provides. Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba doesn’t have any child residing here in Bangui; they are all abroad, and she has all the freedom to serve the Lord.

Influences

Marie Louise was influenced by Dr. Paul Mbunga Mpindi, her grandmother and late Julienne Kette who was a very brave woman. Marie Louise points out that when Julienne Kette was still alive, she used to work in collaboration with her. By that time, Marie Louise was the national leader of the *Union des Soeurs* and Julienne was the head of *Maison Dorcas*. Anytime there were conferences, Julienne Kette will call Marie Louise to help her organized them. Marie Louise will learn from Julienne Kette and this collaboration helps her today in her ministry.

CURRENT MINISTRY OR VOCATION

Work/Ministry

For what concerns her profession, Marie Louise is senior Treasury official and her function is that of Inspector of Taxes. In fact, the senior Treasury official controls taxes at the level of institutions, customs duties and other ministerial departments. However, for what concerns her religious activities, she is the coordinator of *AGLOW International* which focuses on evangelism.

As for her denomination *Union des Eglises Baptiste* (UEB) Marie Louise coordinates activities for the *Bata-Ouali and Union des Soeurs* (Faithful Women and Sisters' Union/Fellowship). She also participates in training young girls so that they can take over later. Furthermore, Marie Louise also coordinates activities for the *Samaritan Purse*. At the national level, the group collects gifts from partners abroad and distributes them to children in churches. These children are trained as evangelists to evangelize their friends.

Mission/Vision

Marie Louise's vision is to help those around her know Christ because she realizes that many people call themselves Christians but their lives do not reflect God's word. Therefore, she wants to help people change their attitude, know Christ and live according to the word of God. She wants people to grow in their faith, and she prays for God's intervention in their lives.

Organization

Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba works with AGLOW International and the Samaritan Purse. She is the national chairwoman of AGLOW International since 2002. She is the interface between the international office and the national branch. All activity reports from different groups at the national level must be submitted to her, and she will do the summary of all of them before sending them to the International Office. Anytime there are conferences that are held somewhere, she will register the names of the participants. She will provide them with letters of invitation, and every participant will organize herself to attend the conference. Samaritan's Purse, just like AGLOW International, is an American organization. She coordinates activities abroad and at the regional level. Training is regularly planned for the members on how to make the work move forward on the national level.

Impact/Success/Evaluation

AGLOW International is an interdenominational organization and works with any women's fellowship from any church whether Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal... However, it wasn't easy in the beginning because of confessional barriers. She faced all kinds of difficulties with pastors of her denomination. They fought against her, accusing her of creating a sectarian organization to mislead women away from their churches. But she stood firm. She recognizes

that working with men and women coming from different backgrounds is not easy, but God gave her the strength to train women and make of them able women today. For instance, a man came one day to her saying: “Madam, I want to thank you for what you did for my wife. My wife is now acknowledged and who puts herself at work.”

According to Marie Louise Yakemba, AGLOW has a training center for young girls where they are trained in sewing, knitting and also in many other things. They are also taught the word of God. Many of the young girls became women on whom Marie Louise can count. For instance when Marie Louise was in the USA for a conference, a group of women went to Ndjamen, Chad and they valuably represented CAR. In August 2013, another group went to Libreville, Gabon without Marie Louise and came back with good testimonies. It is something to be grateful to the Lord. For instance, at the beginning of every year, the leaders meet to evaluate past activities to see what went well and what did not. They base their evaluation on reports.

Training/Leadership Development

AGLOW has a department that is charged with training. Lately, when she came back from France, Madame Marie Louise Yakemba met a French lady who wants to help pay the teachers. Marie Louise is doing all she can for girls who drop out from school because of lack of support to be trained.

Professional Relationships

Regarding the professional level, Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba refuses to boast because she respects hierarchy and she does her work correctly. She is in good terms with her colleagues she says: “As for me I am not of a provocative nature. I am not a proud person. There is simplicity in me, and this creates a good working environment. In all this, where ever I go people respect me even when I was at the head tax office. If you go to the head tax office and ask: ‘What can you say about Mrs. Yakemba?’ people will respond ‘she is a rigorous woman. If there is a rule to apply she will just apply it.’ That is the reason people respect me.”

For what concerns her religious activities, Mrs. Yakemba will not do things differently. She says that her simplicity, humility make things easy between her and the other women even men in the church. She emphasizes by saying: “God give me this grace, I do not have problems with people.”

Partnership/Link

Apart from AGLOW International, Samaritan Purse, and her denomination Marie Louise Yakemba is very much sought after by women from other denominations to speak at conferences and seminars. Sometimes when she is tired, she refuses invitations.

SWOT: Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Beginning with her weaknesses; Marie Louise asserts: “What I can say is that even though I am a rigorous person, sometimes I just leave things undone. This is my weakness.” Another of her weakness is a lack of financial means. When she wants to do something, she is confronted by financial limitation. For what concerns her strength, she thinks that her simplicity, humility and her rigor constitute her strong point.

For what concerns difficulties, Marie Louise recognizes that difficulties never lack in life. The greatest difficulty she ever faced was that of raising her children alone. It was not easy, but

she is grateful to God who helped her to bring her children to the level where they are today. To be a single mother is not easy for a woman, but she has to go through it.

For opportunities, Marie Louise thinks that what prevent her for the moment are her professional activities; these are her only concern.

She still has to work for five years. After that, she will have the opportunity to go everywhere. For instance, when she went to the USA, she could not stay there for one month. She had to come back because of her work. This situation represents a pressure that she does not like at all. To justify her desire for freedom to be able to go everywhere, Mrs. Yakemba says concerning the opportunity to meet other people: "It is because I spent two weeks in France that God open the way for me to meet that lady." Therefore, opportunities for Marie Louise will come when she will be free from her professional duties, and she will have time to do more than what she is doing now.

Reading and Writing

In addition to her personal reading, she likes reading the Bible. She is more interested in books written by the Chairwoman of AGLOW International. She writes a lot of papers that are very useful to women. She also likes books written by African authors like Ousmane Sembene. For what concerns her own production she says: "Frankly, I have had the intention to write. I have ideas, but I have not yet started writing. I would like to write about myself; about what I was before becoming what I am today." For her writing is very important.

Electronic Media

She is very interested in the Internet. In the beginning, she used Facebook but did not appreciate that everybody wrote to her through Facebook, and she stopped using it. However, she re-connected to Facebook for some months now.

Finances & Other Resources

Marie Louise was initially financially supported by AGLOW International, but later she was asked to be self-sustained. Anytime there are programs, she raises funds. When things are well-explained people voluntarily give their financial support. The members and her children also contribute. The members of AGLOW/CAR make handiworks that they sell. Finally, AGLOW has a plot of land for the construction of their center.

Political Arena

For Mrs. Yakemba politics is not a bad thing. She, for instance, was part of the national advisers during the last regime. She was in the Transitory Parliament from 2003-2005. Unfortunately, most of the time Christians do politics for their personal interests, and it is something she tries to understand. Christians are in fact supposed to make their faith known. The role of a Christian is to denounce what is going wrong. She says that she tried to tell the former President when the opportunity was given to her that a Christian does politics to help the nation. But, sometimes, the Christian sees things going wrong but he does not say anything, he protects himself; therefore at this level politics does not have its sense.

Future

Concerning the vision of Marie Louise, this is what she asserts "I have the vision to do great things and my prayer is to realize great things. I don't want to limit myself only to what I am doing now. I really want to reach out to the whole country." She continues by saying that the lady she met in France is ready to do many things. She prays for peace to be restored in CAR

because according to her interaction with that woman who is a medical doctor, she is ready to help Central African Christians. Marie Louise's concern is not to limit herself only to the spiritual level but go beyond and bring her assistance where there is a need.

However, the only factor that will be a challenge to the realization of her vision is the fact that her children who are all living abroad want her to leave the country to go and stay with them whether in the USA because she has her son living there or in France where her daughters live. She told them that her own father is still alive, and she is also engaged in many activities for God in the country. If God blesses her with good health and preserves her life, she will see her vision fulfilled. She wants to see women who can speak in the name of God and men to help this country to come out strong.

Report Information Preparation

Names: Max José Koyadibert and Kalemba Mwambazambi

Interviewee: Mrs. Marie Louise Yakemba

Date of Interview: Wednesday, 03 December 2013

POST-CONFLICT INTERVIEW REPORT

8/25/14, Interviewed by Yolande Sandoua

At this time, Mrs. Yakemba was not physically affected by the conflict since her location was not one where it took place, but she knew people who were affected. A woman in her ministry lost her son during the conflict, and Mrs. Yakemba and the other women in the group encouraged the woman in her faith during that time of uncertainty.

Mrs. Yakemba was emotionally very affected by the violence she saw on T.V. and heard about. She wondered what she and other women could do to help with the situation. She prayed about it and later felt compelled to gather Catholic and Muslim and Protestant women to broadcast a message on the radio telling the Selekas and Anti-Balakas to stop fighting. People across the country became interested in their work to bring back peace.

Moving forward, Mrs. Yakemba will retire from her career as a civil servant in a few years, and hopes to dedicate herself more to the work of the Lord at that time. She believes the church has failed, because Christians are some of those who have robbed and killed during the conflict, and she hopes to help turn this around. She says: “there is a need to make people understand what Love really means. Why God loved us and why we should also love others. Even though we went through difficult times, God is asking us to forgive. As long this vision is not in CAR, I think we will not get out of this situation.” Mrs. Yakemba believes that training and conferences about peace may help with reorienting the church and the country in the right direction.

2/22/15, Interviewed by Yolande Sandoua

Mrs. Yakemba works with organizations that operate throughout the country. Some regions were inaccessible during the conflict, and this limited the organizations’ ability to deliver materials and the staff’s ability to travel.

Mrs. Yakemba has not had any opportunity to influence anti-balaka groups directly but has worked with and ministered to Muslim women and children at the Mosque and elsewhere. Specifically, she and other women in the Women’s Association for Peace distributed sanitary kits to women and children at the Great Mosque of Bangui that they could use when they returned to their homes.

Mrs. Yakemba also organized a conference on reconciliation at FATEB. Four children who had been injured in the destruction of a church were amongst those who spoke at the conference. They told about their experiences and also called on the audience to forgive others as they had forgiven those who had injured them so badly. Mrs. Yakemba worked with the families of those children to help them heal and not continue the cycle of violence with vengeance after what had happened to their children.

One of Mrs. Yakemba’s nephews was mutilated and killed by the anti-balaka. It was a difficult and traumatizing time for the family. She says that the word of God is what helped them to let it go. After much counseling her sister let it go, and after much prayer and counseling, the deceased boy’s younger brother was persuaded not to join the Selekas to pursue vengeance.

Regarding finances, although Mrs. Yakemba’s salary as a civil servant was not paid for three months during the conflict, Samaritan’s Purse did send funds to help with the situation.

Mrs. Yakemba was invited by a Catholic NGO to participate in a workshop for reconciliation in Vienna. It encouraged her there to receive documents about the situation in CAR and to know that people were concerned and wanted to help.

Looking forward, Mrs. Yakemba plans to stay in CAR even though her children have asked her to leave. She says that after retirement if God gives her the strength, she will continue in the ministry.

Mrs. Yakemba's favorite scripture is Philippians 4:13—"For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need." She says: "It is a passage that gives me strength to hold on. Whatever happens, I know that God will see me through. He will give me the strength to make it."