



**Gato Munyamasoko:
A Peacebuilder in God's Kingdom**

*Gato and
Anne Marie*

by Ruth Anna Dana

An amazing testimony to God's faithfulness is unfolding as Gato Munyamasoko works toward peacebuilding and reconciliation with the Community of Baptist Churches in Eastern Congo (CEBCE). Gato's parents were refugees



CBM

who fled from Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to escape the increasing ethnic hatred and violence which led to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Gato was born in the DRC and, as a teen, came to Christ in a CEBCE church, and an elder in the CEBCE began to support Gato's education. With his experience and history with the CEBCE, God has established Gato as a credible voice within the organization.

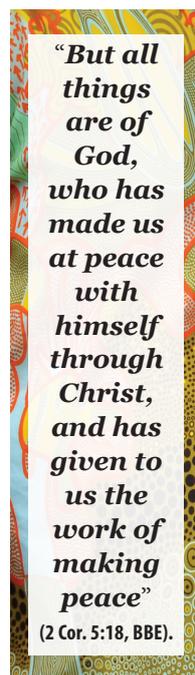
After the genocide, Gato returned to Rwanda to invest his time as head of education for the Association of Baptist Churches of Rwanda (AEBR). In 2007, he completed a master's degree in theological studies. In 2010, Canadian Baptist Ministries sent Gato to the Mennonite University in Manitoba to follow a short course in conflict resolution and restorative justice. Shortly thereafter, he started a peacebuilding program with the AEBR in Rwanda. In 2015, Gato was honoured with the Baptist World Alliance Quinquennial Human Rights Award. And, in recognition for his successful focus in teaching about trauma healing and reconciliation, Gato received a Doctorate Honoris Causa from Acadia Divinity College of Wolfville, Nova Scotia, in 2016.

Carla Nelson, a senior associate with CBM who serves as the Africa liaison and education specialist, outlines the Gisenyi Covenant Advisory Committee (GCAC) signed in 2019 between CBM and four African partners-in-mission. Since that time, the leadership of the CEBCE in Goma, DRC, approached CBM to enter into this GCAC partnership agreement. With this in mind, Terry Smith,

former CBM executive director, began exploring the possibility of an interim assignment of Gato to the CEBCE. A Memorandum of Understanding between CBM and CEBCE was signed on December 26, 2019.

The CEBCE began through the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society in 1928. In 1997, the present CEBCE was divided into two groups. Most of the cause of their division was along tribal lines and a lack of strong leadership. For 21 years this division was maintained, with two parallel groups of leadership. By God's grace, in December of 2018 reconciliation and reunification began as the leadership repented of their behaviour during the period of division and sought restoration.

When Gato and his wife Anne Marie and their own seven young people entered into the COVID lockdown of March 2020 at their home in Gisenyi, Rwanda, Gato used the time to finish writing an online version of the peace and reconciliation curriculum. Moving ahead to March 2021, Gato has facilitated the teaching of four of the program's 12 modules via Zoom. The courses that were taught centred on peacebuilding. The topics covered were subjects such as the definition of peacebuilding and biblical teaching, Jesus' example, humans in God's purpose, celebrating our differences, and conflict management. Three different groups of people are taught weekly: the CEBCE staff on Mondays, the headmasters of schools on Wednesdays, and a group of pastors on Fridays, reaching 70 to 80 people in all. A video of the inspiring testimonies of participants is available on the Canadian Baptist Ministries' Facebook page (February 10, 2021, post).



Gato and the CEBCE are aware of the 2019–2024 timeline of the Gisenyi Covenant and desire that the work develops in the next few years so that they could enter into a full partnership agreement. Pray with Gato “that the fragile reunification becomes a reality and that reconciliation among tribes strengthens. Pray for the leadership to become stronger and more accountable.” (To read Gato's complete prayer of October 6, 2020, on the CBM website, visit www.cbm.org/prayerline/page/9/).

May each individual recognize that God is actively reconciling us to himself through Christ, and that he has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Sources: www.cbmin.org/; Munyamasoko CBM ministry updates, email with Carla Nelson, www.baptistworld.org/pt/human-rights-awards/; June 2019 Tidings.