

A Day of Rejoicing

○ Zambia

Spring 2019

The service was four and a half hours long but few people felt the need to leave early.

The United Church of Zambia University, a mission partner of Global Ministries, held its annual Licensing Service for third-year ministerial students on December 9th. The day was a celebration of achievement and a commissioning of new probationary licentiate ministers of word and sacrament for this growing Zambian church. The service was held in the Mindolo Congregation of the United Church of Zambia. It is one of the largest, if not the largest, UCZ congregation in Kitwe. Sunday worship usually draws 4-5,000 people, and on this day, there were many church officials and guests.

Eighteen of our students at the UCZ University, where I serve as a mission co-worker with Global Ministries, were to receive their probationary licenses in the UCZ. Although I have been here only eight months, I have gotten to know some of these young men and women, and it was very emotional to witness their licensing. My husband, one of the lecturers at the university, and I were seated on the platform three rows back from the church officials. Present were bishops, university officers, the executive secretary of the UCZ, Rev. Dr. Peggy Mulambya Kabonde, and many others. Invited visitors came from other UCZ agencies, other Christian social organizations, other universities and from places I cannot imagine. Of course, their families - parents, grandparents, husbands and wives and children - were also present.

For the first hour or so, it was a pretty typical UCZ worship service - lots of excited singing, some dancing, animated prayers invoking God's blessing. There were several choirs competing with each other for the affection of the congregation. One would sing a few songs, then another would try to outdo the earlier one. Bemba is the dominant language spoken/sung here, but there were also lovely songs in English and in, I'm sure, other languages of the congregation and the licentiates.

Then the university chaplain took over the direction of the service. Introductions were made of the various officials. Offerings gathered - two this time - one for the church, another for the young licentiates. More prayers were offered. There were lots of congratulatory speeches.

Next, the licentiates were ordered to stand and they made promises to obey church governance policies and to follow the Christian teachings they had studied in the last three years as they enter upon their ministries. The big one was: "Do you promise, in the strength of Christ, to be a faithful preacher of the Word of God, and a faithful servant of His people; and to carry out all the parts of the Christian ministry entrusted to you?" Of course, all promised to do so.

Elders and minister all went down to shake hands and congratulate them. Formalities broke down and we gave out many hugs. Presents, including new study Bibles and clerical collars, were handed out. The young licentiates were crying. We from the platform were crying. Their families were climbing all around, looking for advantageous places to photograph their loved ones. Television cameras captured



MISSION
CO-WORKER

**Maria (Charo)
Breckenridge**

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many moments (my husband and I were seen on the news that night!) Finally, scripture was read and the UCZ bishop of Lusaka preached and charged the new ministers to remember their duties and nurture their spiritual lives in this challenging calling. We sang a hymn and, accompanied by at least one of the choirs, we filed (many danced) out, dignitaries first, then the new licentiates and, lastly, the congregation in general. It was a magnificent send off for these newly anointed church leaders.

It was a privilege to be present at this licensing ceremony. I felt very blessed. I probably will not ever see these newly licensed ministers again. I will miss them but I am happy to share with you the hope and joy that was on every face that morning. I want you to know this church is growing in Zambia and God is blessing the people here. Thank you for your prayers and support.

Maria (Charo) Breckenridge serves with the United Church of Zambia (UCZ).

