

# Another New Beginning

○ Zambia

Spring 2019

Morning chapel devotions began on Monday. But today, Wednesday, January 23, was the real kick-off of the new academic year at the United Church of Zambia University (UCZU) in Kitwe. This marked the opening of the university's fifth year as a state-accredited institution of higher learning in the Republic of Zambia. Our tiny chapel was packed; everyone was thrilled by anticipation of what was coming.

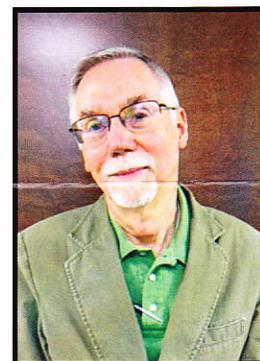
One of our senior upperclassmen led the worship service that preceded everything. Joseph is a gifted third-year student who, in addition to fulfilling all the requirements of study and ministerial practicum, manages the library in the evenings for student access after our small staff has gone home for the day. Today, he read the scripture, led the singing, and composed some beautiful inaugural prayers.

The homily was delivered by our own United Church of Zambia (UCZ) Copperbelt Presbytery Bishop Chipasha Musaba. Because of the emphasis on the future and the necessity to recognize and build the skills of everyone present, he chose to speak on Moses' appointment of Bezalel, Oholiab, and "every skilled person" to collaborate in the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:30-35). He succeeded in inspiring all present to put their best foot forward and be open to whatever is demanded of us by circumstances this coming year. Then, assisted by a half dozen second-year and third-year students, he presided over the celebration of the first Holy Communion of the new year.

We are undertaking an innovative endeavor this year. We have admitted nearly fifty new first-year theology students. That is approximately thirty percent more than we have ever admitted in the past. Last year's incoming class was large - about thirty-five - but our administrators believe there are such needs for additional ministers in the growing UCZ churches as to justify the expansion of the incoming class, and that there will still be enough resources here to provide for the increase. As we often must here in Zambia, we are acting in faith, trusting that God will bless this project.

I have met many of the new first-year students already. I escorted them on an hour-long bus trip to worship in a UCZ church in Luanshya last Sunday to familiarize them with that locale. The pastor of that church is himself a former presbytery bishop, and it was an opportunity for them to ask him questions about his experience as a student, a minister, and a bishop. In other words, to speak directly to someone with experience about what they are getting themselves into as they come to study here. I shall be teaching two classes to these students this semester - an introduction to Christian theology and basic research with English writing skills. It was a pleasure to get a head start on learning a few names and getting to know some of them personally.

For me, the greatest joy of the morning was the chance to renew my ties with the students who are now in their second and third year of study; the students whom I taught last year. To know that all have returned, that all continues to be well, that



MISSION  
CO-WORKER

**Robert  
Breckenridge**

Zambia



their families are still mostly well, and that they remain enthusiastic about their studies and goals in ministry was a special gift for me. Everyone seemed so happy to be back at school, back with their friends and teachers again.

After the service, we received the usual welcoming speeches from university officials - our registrar and our vice-chancellor - welcoming everyone, introducing a few new members of faculty and staff, urging incoming and returning students to work hard, pay their fees and, generally do their best. The new students were made to feel welcome, and the returning students laughed at all the inside jokes. It was a precious few hours together. Then, we adjourned to refreshments and, a few moments later, into classrooms for the first classes of the year.



This was the year's first formal experience that our staff and our student body have of the UCZU community. It was a studied adventure in community building. University officials attempted to include all UCZU scholastic programs that meet on our campus - the education program, the arts and sciences program, as well as the theology course of study (we rarely see the folks in the agriculture program). They introduced faculty from all programs. They introduced the workers who keep the place clean, who maintain the grounds and the buildings, who cook for our students, and the clerical staff as well. This is a small university, and newcomers get to know and appreciate each person and his or her contribution quickly.

I talked with many people afterward and observed that already the newly arrived are feeling at home and feeling ready to collaborate in this ambitious undertaking. The bishop's homily seems to have been right on target.

*Robert Breckenridge serves with the United Church of Zambia.*

