



# THE ANGOLA MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

*(Formerly Gilchrist Memorial Angola Student Trust Fund)*

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Few Angolan Christians have demonstrated by the example of their lives the strength of character of our sister-in Christ, Maria C. Chikueka. She exhorted her people by word and deed to seek training in many diverse fields. She held a strong belief in the role of the Church in meeting physical as well as spiritual needs of her people.

Maria was one of the first Angolan women in the province of Bié to pass the entrance exam to secondary school. She had to borrow clothes from other students in order to be admitted to the classroom for her examination.

In 1952, Maria was a delegate to a World Convention of Christian Youth in Toronto. She was accompanied by Margaret Dawson of the United Church of Canada. When they arrived at Union Station, they found the porters were on strike. Quite undeterred, Maria walked out carrying her heavy suitcase on her head. During her stay in Canada, Maria was showered with gifts of love and respect.

Her training in Science and Theology con-



REV. MARIA CHELA CHIKUEKA

1925 - 1999

vinced her that liberation from illiteracy, hunger and disease, does not happen through only a few highly trained individuals. But it can happen when whole villages, men, women and children resolve to work together in harmony for the entire community.

So Maria put this theory into practice when she became a valuable animator for self-help projects in the Angolan villages.

## **Maria's Leadership in village Improvement**

Maria was convinced that she must give leadership in easing the burdens on the backs of the women who had to work long hours in the fields often with a baby tied to her back. She was also concerned about sanitation, not forgetting about the importance of literacy and Christian education.

On Saturdays, groups of some 15 students and teachers from the five central institutions spent the day working with villagers in improving the sanitation of their homes, the school and the church. Villagers always insisted that the first building to receive a tiled floor must be the Church -- God's House.

Sufficient floor tiles had been pressed in advance with a hand machine and “burned” in a village kiln. One Saturday morning the students went to the pastoral centre of Ulondo with wheelbarrows and shovels and trowels and sacks of cement. Earth had to be brought in first to make the floor level. Maria was the first to push the wheelbarrow. Singing one of their work songs, the students took their places and laid the tiles in neat rows, cementing the spaces between the tiles. Joy and satisfaction were evident at the end of the day which closed with a worship service led by Maria and the pastor.

### **The long trek to the south**

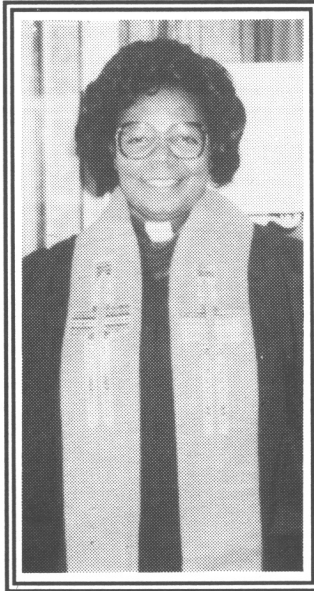
The outbreak of civil war in 1961 forced Protestant churches to close most of their schools. Protestants were blamed for inciting Angolans to violence. Maria, working at the Chissamba Hospital, was under suspicion because of her visit to Canada in 1952. Her missionary colleagues, Nurse Edith Radley and Dr. Betty Bridgman were taken to prison in Luanda, and after four months were deported to Canada. Maria continued to supervise the Hospital for five months until the medicine supply ran out. She was advised to flee during the night, and took with her only one dress, one cake of soap, her Bible and hymn book, and Edith’s radio. Barefoot for most of the 800 kilometres, she lived off the land, eating nuts, termites, caterpillars and mushrooms. Feet became blistered and swollen during the month’s trek. Many died from disease and starvation. Maria was reminded of the long march of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.

### **Two years of Struggle for Survival**

Fields had to be cleared, grass houses built,

precious corn and bean seed planted, while the only available tools were hoes and axes. Then the children must be taught, outdoors under shade trees, wood logs for seats. One morning

Maria found a little girl crying. “Why are you crying?” Maria asked her. “I don’t have a book, and I don’t have a pencil,” was the reply. So, Maria found three labels from soup cans and sewed them together to make a notebook. Then she removed the wood from a long pencil with a knife, and cut the lead inside into small pieces. Inserting one piece into a small twig, she created a pencil for the little girl who skipped happily off to school.



*Maria on the day of  
her ordination*

After teaching, healing, feeding and ministering to a variety of human needs in the southern Angola “bush”, Maria was brought to the United States where she earned a Science degree and worked in a lab at Rockefeller University. Later she came to Canada and studied Theology. She was ordained by the United Church of Canada at the request of the Angolan Church.

Her final years were spent writing her life story which is entitled “Angolan Torchbearers”. In mid-January 1999, her Lord called her home. She died in her Toronto apartment. A meaningful memorial service was hosted by Bloor Street United Church in Toronto, where she had worked for a time and held church membership.

### **What we had hoped for Maria**

Many of her friends and colleagues sense something incomplete in Maria’s life and witness. Would that the political situation in Angola had permitted her to return to her country and to her people. Would that she had been allowed to bring to the Angolan Christian com-

munity her strong faith in her Lord, sharing with her people from her rich background of experience. Many had hoped that she might have helped to train Christian leaders to take the Gospel to remote villages as well as to towns and cities. Would that God had permitted her to demonstrate the wholeness of the Gospel as she herself had experienced it, above all in the long trek "to the Bush" in southern Angola. But this was not to be! The Lord called her home!

### **Setting up the Scholarship Fund**

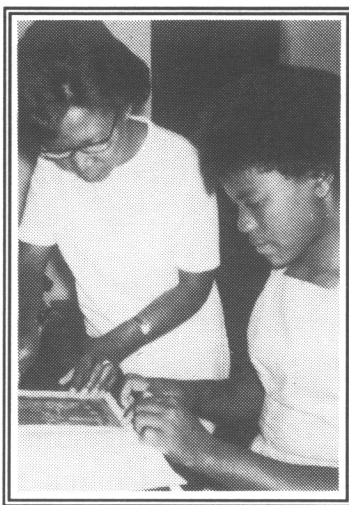
But Maria left with us a legacy and a challenge. Friends of the Gilchrist family together with the five sons sensed the need for an Angolan to serve on the committee responsible for creating the Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund in 1970. All agreed that Angolan opinions and values must be entrenched in the constitution of the Fund. During the early years of the Fund, the name of Maria Chela Chikueka is registered in the minutes of all meetings, called by the United Church of Canada, for the purpose of setting up a Scholarship Fund.

Perhaps the most important legacy that she bequeathed to her people was that of education. Likewise you who have faithfully contributed to the Fund for almost 30 years, have also found in the Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund a gift to the Angolan people, an investment of your love and concern for Justice. You have helped to train more than 150 Angolans at post-secondary level. Angolan parents saw in Maria a realization of their dreams for their own children.

### **Four Primary School's for Angola**

A delegation of four Angolan pastors arrived

in United States and later in Canada to present to their North American brothers and sisters-in-Christ a request for funds to build and equip 4 primary schools. It was led by Rev. José Chipenda, but under the constitution, funding was restricted to such maintenance costs as training of leaders at all levels. Funds had not been used to build schools and dispensaries and they had not been designated to pay teachers' salaries. Let it be inscribed in the history of AMSF that discussion of the motion to finance 4 primary schools occupied not more than 20 minutes.



*Maria teaching an Angolan girl at Means School*

Maria gave her full support to the discussion of financing the schools and the acceptance of the motion was unanimous. And because you, our donors continue your faithful support to AMSF, there are to be no cuts in support for leadership training.

*Maria leaves with us for our comfort and admonition, these words. "Jesus Christ came to reconcile people to God, and people to people. Jesus Christ came to make us One in Him, even as God and He are One. The Church has the man-*

*date of exemplifying the kingdom of peace, justice and freedom among nations" "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course. I have kept the faith."*

*2 Tim 4:7*

### **A Ministry among Victims of Landmines - a Challenge for Year 2000**

In the Fall 1996 brochure, AMSF told about the scourge of anti-personnel landmines in Angola, one landmine planted in the soil for each inhabitant. It is estimated that it may take

more than 10 years to remove all the landmines from fields and paths.

AMSF reminds you that the Church with inadequate funding, did pioneer in many different ministries during more than 100 years. One might cite the campaign to combat illiteracy, the treatment of leprosy and tuberculosis, the demonstration of how villagers can provide clean drinking water. Clean water and sanitary latrines can reduce infant mortality by 50% in one year.

One might ask "Does the assault against landmines, demining present a greater challenge than waging a battle against malnutrition, disease, illiteracy?" Demining is too dangerous and too expensive for churches to consider, but the church already has many years of experience in its ministry of primary health care, in emphasizing prevention of disease as well as curative medicine.

Year 2000 is literally on our doorstep. AMSF proposes that the Church must respond to any scourge that afflicts a people whether in body, mind or soul. Critics may attempt to convince us that a ministry of healing for victim of landmines does not belong in the outreach of the Church. They may affirm that these are responsibilities of government and/or secular agencies.

AMSF awaits an invitation to take part in a witness of healing some of the 70,000 victims of landmines in Angola by establishing mini-rehabilitation centres. This involves training and retraining some of the Angolans already trained as nurses, pastors, farmers and leaders in appropriate technology. This is precisely the ministry already performed through the Church in education, health and all of its diverse ministries.

### **Obituaries**

AMSF regretfully announces the death of

two of its members and servants, both of whom gave generously of time and talent to the initial organization and development of the Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund. We cite, in particular two of our colleagues, namely Miss Alice Moreira and Rev. Murray MacInnes.

Alice served with love and dedication, in the ministry to lepers (victims of Hansen's Disease), both at Dondi Hospital and at the Central Leprosarium at Cavango. Nothing much is left of the buildings at Cavango, the hospital, the school, the church, excepting heaps of bricks and mud but Alice and her team of dedicated co-workers left a legacy of grateful Angolans who received at Cavango healing of bodies, minds and souls. From the ashes and the rubble, there must be new buildings, new personnel and a new hope for those who have never heard the good news that there is a cure for leprosy.

Murray must be remembered by the people of Angola as the first Chairman of the Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund (AMSF). When the Church began a search in United States and Canada for a Chairperson, it was Murray, with his deep concern for education and leadership training of Angolans, women, men and young people, who responded to this challenge and served as Chair for 8 years. During some years in Angola, Murray and his wife Innes, served as hostel parents in Huambo, Angola, where they witnessed among Angolan youth the strong motivation to seek training in 53 different fields of study. Murray served as a pioneer in service to his Lord. Today AMSF looks back with a sense of gratitude for the 150 Angolans who have already found post secondary training. He will be remembered by his Angolan as well as North American colleagues for his collaboration in founding the Scholarship Fund.