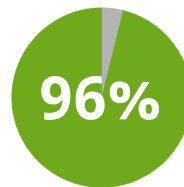


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Graduation at UNIBAC



GLEN & RITA CHAPMAN



SUPPORT PLEDGED



The institution that was founded seventy years ago by Rita's grandparents at Kikongo to provide leadership for the rural churches and has experienced another major milestone.

It has been three years since we moved the school up to University level. Now, after three years we have celebrated our first graduation. Forty eight men and women in agriculture science, teacher training and theology wore caps and gowns for the big ceremony.

The government accreditation for UNIBAC (Baptist University of Congo) was signed just a week before. The news was kept secret until the delegation from Kinshasa arrived to make the announcement. Dr. Nkwim, the University president and my lifelong friend stepped off the plane and announced to the welcoming student body that the much hoped for document had been signed and that UNIBAC was officially recognized by the government. The joy could not be contained. The whooping, hollering and festivities lasted for three days.

Some churches in the US had sent us their choir robes. We had enough robes so that each faculty had their own identifying color. The staff and professors had our own color as well. The robes and caps made it a "real" graduation just like in the big city. As the graduates donned their colors, the fife and drum band got everyone moving to the rhythm. The students were further affirmed by the presence of dignitaries from Kinshasa; the Baptist general secretary, and delegates of the national ministry of education. There were local authorities as well as colorful tribal chiefs.

We were expecting a delegation from Bandundu city, the capitol of the province, but since the ferry is out, we were not sure if they could make the last stretch of road between Kikongo and the river. It was time to begin the procession to the church so we all set out marching to the rhythm of the band. As we marched in double file, a warning cry went out "Motorcycles - make way!" The two files made room as the dozen or so motorcycles came speeding through. The dignitaries had arrived complete with their armed military escort.

We couldn't begin the ceremony without the important delegation, so the students just continued parading around the station in all their honor and glory. Eventually, the big shots bathed and dressed and could be seated so that the ceremony could begin.

The event was a perfect storm of celebration. Important people to witness the graduates in their academic attire complete with the understanding that their diploma's are legit.

It was a good reason to slaughter two cows and three goats so that all the visitors could depart Kikongo having witnessed a wonderful historical experience.

The students were honored, validated, and dignified. I'm sure graduation was the biggest day of their lives. Nothing like this has happened at Kikongo before. People used descriptions like "far and beyond" or "way too much" to describe the celebration.

The desire of all the youth now is to become UNIBAC students!

As for Rita and me, it is an honor to be part of the history of Kikongo, standing on the shoulders of all those who have labored here for so many years. We are encouraged that all of our efforts offer hope to rural Africa.

Sincerely,

Glen and Rita

