



# CONGO INITIATIVE



## November 2013

### Giving with Abandon

This week, we celebrate our American Thanksgiving-- analogous to harvest festivals in other cultures. One of my most powerful memories of my childhood years growing up in Congo was attending church each harvest season, and watching as families come forward to the altar with the produce of their farms. The front of those rural village churches would fill with maize, cabbages, peanuts, squash, cassava, millet, eggs, chickens, an occasional goat or sheep... And the giving was joyful with singing and clapping - not silent like so many church offerings today!

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Have you ever experienced African music? You know the way it gets under your skin, into your blood? How it infuses your limbs with the desire to move, to celebrate, to worship? And not just any African music, but Congolese music! Now that's something truly special. The harmonic blend of sonorous melodies with creative rhythms can often leave one breathless, in awe of the life that is released in those moments. The life that is being enjoyed fully in the present. Now, imagine a university graduation where the traditional "Pomp and Circumstance" is replaced with this! The ceremony becomes a celebration, and the music takes on a life of its own.



Having the honor of being present last month for the third graduation of the Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo (UCBC), I witnessed something I had not been aware of before. And it gave me a much deeper appreciation for what a graduation can be.

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### Faces of Thanksgiving

Alain, Yvonne, and their two young children joined the UCBC community last year. Alain is an economics teacher at UCBC, with expertise in health and development. He also serves as the Economics Faculty Coordinator (Department Chair). Yvonne is a counselor to displaced women and trauma survivors. Her work demands that she is often gone for a week or two at a time to Rutshuru, a day's drive south of Beni. Like many in our community, Yvonne and Alain are frequently dogged by the realities of life in this part of the world--sickness and what Americans would consider "poor



medical treatment" and/or incorrect diagnoses; thieves breaking into one's home; an inadequate police force that often fails to respond; broken municipal utilities so that one has to haul water for all household needs; lack of motorized transportation so that one relies on the kindness of others or the local moto taxis; and the undercurrent of regional insecurity, a weak government, and a climate of corruption.

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### A Medallion for UCBC

Perhaps you have noticed UCBC's logo in some of our photos or letterheads. The logo, in its symbols and colors, is representative of UCBC's identity, vision, and values. Several years ago, an artist in our community, Annie McKenzie, who grew up in Congo and is deeply committed to CI and UCBC, began to work on a presidential medallion that would incorporate the essence of the logo, and that would be worn on special occasions. (See photos below and right.) Annie designed, created a wax model, cast in bronze, polished, and gifted the completed medallion to UCBC in time for this third graduation. Thank you, Annie!

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