



**July 2016**

**We Praise the LORD for Dr. John and Loice Mondii!  
Pastor, African Community Fellowship Church  
Part 1**



I became friends with Pastor John Mondii on May 22, 2015. There was an instant connection between us. I was fascinated by his story of growing up in remote Northern Kenya. I continued asking him questions about what life and ministry was like for him in Africa. He shared some of the challenges he faced and some of the difficulties in ministry that he experienced.



I had the privilege of worshipping with Dr. Mondii and his congregation on May 22, 2016 as they celebrated Pastor Mondii receiving his Ph.D. in Missiology from Concordia.

My wife Sue and I worshipped with them again on June 5, 2016. We were blessed, encouraged, accepted, and loved as a brother and a sister in Christ. Their worship is alive, the Holy Spirit is present, the people are loving, and God speaks to the hearts of His people through Pastor Mondii.

I invited Dr. Mondii to share his story and his message to the Church of Jesus Christ because I believe God has entrusted him with a message the Body of Christ needs to hear.

*In the Far, Unknown Horizons of this World, the Lord Reaches Out!*

By Dr. John Mondi, Pastor, African Community Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids Michigan

I was born and raised up in the North Western region of Kenya, in a polygamous Pokot family setting. I am married to Loice my beloved wife. The Lord has blessed us with three wonderful children; Samuel, Josiah and Joyce.



The Pokot people are nomadic in lifestyle. They solely rely on livestock for existence. Predominantly, the Pokot and other nomadic ethnic groups keep cattle, sheep. Goats, camels and donkeys. My life growing up revolved around the Pokot nomadic lifestyle and culture where the most important thing for parents was to inculcate into the minds of their children the importance of being a good shepherd. My life as a herds boy began when I was five years old.

Being a shepherd is a very hard task! Livestock set out at 7:00 AM to the grazing fields and return back home 7:00 PM throughout the year. Depending on what time of the year, grazing fields in Northern Kenya can be life threatening especially for young children who are beginning their shepherding experiences. The dry and hot season, for example, is challenging to the young shepherds and their animals because for the all day they would go without water. In addition, I did not have a luxury of enjoying three meals a day. My meals were breakfast and supper. The main food was milk. However, during the dry season, when cows lack food, the meals become rare—and I would be fortunate to have a small bowl of corn porridge in the evening and early in the morning.



One of the toughest things for young children to deal with in nomadic communities before they adapt to it is the constant mobility. Moving from one place to another rests solely in the hands of the elders. Several times, my father would wake everyone up very early in the morning and instructs his wives to load the donkeys—and off we move. There were countless times when we



literally spent our nights in the open skies around a camp fire because we couldn't reach our destination in one day!



Women and children have the largest share of extremely hard work. They take care of their large families: they build the huts, livestock sheds, fetch water and firewood, care for the sick (people and animals), load and unload the donkeys or camels. They are also expected to bear and care for many children. Children, both boys and girls are shepherds most of their lives until they attain marriage age. Men claim to be the protectors of the community—thus they always sit under a tree *“planning for the next course of events for the community.”* In a nutshell, nomadic cultures are man-centered—men feel that it is their right to be served! This mindset is deeply engrained in the fabrics of nomadic culture and practice. Both *the hardworking* (women and children) and *the easy tasked* (men) think that what happens in day to day life in their community is how things ought to be.



I was very fortunate to have attended school and converted to Christianity. The Lord found me in the farthest horizon of this world. His grace reached me in a world that was enclosed within itself. Through the work of missionaries, the light of the Gospel was planted in my mother's heart. Her Christian faith became my faith. My mother's household was found by the grace of the Lord. I am truly grateful. Why? Because back then when I was growing up, Pokot people did not want to send their kids to school or church. They believed that any child who would be disengaged from the community will be counted as a lost child. However, in 1976 a missionary came to Churo, a nearby village to preach the Good News. At Churo, there was a small primary school and the missionary began a church in one of the classrooms.

The missionary began to gain converts. One of the first converts was my mother. Her life changed. She began prayers with and for us every day before we set out for grazing fields. She prayed before we had our meals day and night. She would wake up at the middle of the night and begin to intercede. But in all her prayers she reminded God of two things daily: that her children know the Lord, and that the Lord makes it possible for her children to join school. Our mother's prayers were long, repetitive and to us tiring!

To cut the long story short, my mother's four kids were able to go school, and converted to Christianity. Needless to mention, two of us, my sister and I are in full time ministry in the church of Jesus Christ as pastors. My call to ministry was confirmed when I was in high school. Two years after I graduated from High School, I joined a Bible College to train for pastoral ministry.

I began pastoral work in 1998. I served as a pastor in Africa Inland Church in the Churo area among the nomadic Pokot people of North West Kenya for six years between 1998—2004. It was during this time of ministry that I came into grips with the reality of ministry challenges among the pastoral communities. The coming of Christianity to East Pokot region landed on soils that were not tested properly. Issues related to how the Pokot nomadic culture operates, for example, were overlooked by both Western and Kenyan missionaries.



During my ministry experience among the nomadic Pokot people I noted the following realities about the existing church: First, most Pokot nomads did not want to convert to Christianity because they felt that the initial introduction of Christianity to the community was both forceful and insensitive to their culture and cultural practices. When women converted to Christianity in the mid-seventies for example, their traditional hair make-ups were cut by the missionaries. The only time a Pokot woman cuts her hair is when her husband dies. Thus, the act of cutting women's hair was a serious obstacle to Christianity! Pokot men concluded that Christianity had come to wish that they were dead. Christianity condemned polygamy without learning more details in a community where almost every marriage was polygamous!

Second, most of the established churches among the nomadic Pokot communities were comprised of mostly women, children and men who had no respect in the community. Most Pokot men and elders, especially those that still embrace full nomadic lifestyle, do not go to church. They still treat Christianity with great suspicion.

Third, the framework of our evangelistic engagement was purposely focused to saving souls from going to hell. As much as there is some truth to some extent in this regard, the nomads were not pleased with how this message came to them. The message focused on an individual, and thus when you got saved or converted to Christianity, you literally had to disengage from the unsaved members of your family, community and ethnic group.

Fourth, I noted that in the early conversion to Christianity, the missionaries had less time in learning ways through which the Gospel could have gone through into the nomadic cultures. In other words, much time was needed for getting to know more about the culture. When evangelists and missionaries came to witness in Pokot Nomadic villages, for example, they reached out to women and children; they did not engage the Pokot men, elders and warriors. Thus, the Pokot leadership—residing solely in council of elders and warriors, nicknamed Christianity as a religion that seeks for women, children, and the lowly in the society.





The underlying summary of my experience is that it was clear that *there was something missing in doing mission work in a nomadic setting*. As trained Pokot clergy, we tried to apply all the evangelism methods that we were taught in the Bible College, but nothing was working. Later, I noted that *most of the methods that were used to reach the Pokot nomads did not resonate well with their lifestyle and worldview*. However, the small growing church in East Pokot continued to make gains. But up to 2012, eighty-five percent of the East Pokot population was still actively nomadic and unchurched. This is a demographic that we attempted to reach but there was no viable response during my time as a pastor.

This dilemma of not knowing what to do with nomadic mission among the Pokot people prompted my quest for further theological training. In 2004, the Lord opened a way and I joined Calvin Seminary for my Masters of Arts in Missiology, 2007 Western Theological Seminary for Th.M. and later in 2008, I enrolled in PhD program at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne Indiana where I majored on Missiology—my research was entitled *The Challenges of Missions to Nomadic Peoples: A Case Study on the Pokot People of North West Kenya!*



Looking back to early missionary arrival to East Pokot nomadic context, and reflecting on my own experience as a pastor and as an insider, I can confidently say, it does not matter where God's work is taking place. *The Christian message whether it is preached by Pastors or Missionaries, both local and international, it must be channeled through the positive avenues of the receiving culture. If Christian witnesses do things without proper understanding of their context like the case of East Pokot region, for example, it will be going contrary to the incarnation motif demonstrated by Jesus Christ Himself. In other words, our local context where ministry is happening must shape our approach to mission! Because when mission practitioners acknowledge, value, and respect other people's way of life, they are saying: everything that*



*formed the foundation of your families and societies are also important to us. Proclamation of the good news must cloth itself in the incarnation story of Jesus Christ who chose to come to live with and among us. He chose to come and live in a culture in Palestine, and through those cultural dynamics He made Himself known. As his mouthpieces, we must embody the same approach to our outreach ministries going forward until He returns!*

After twelve years of studying and living in United States, I found myself asking the same questions. In 2009, I was approached by an emerging African Congregation to assist as a volunteer pastor because their pastor was relocating to Africa for a World Mission job. To cut the long story short, I am currently full time pastoring at African Community Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids Michigan. I wrestle with the same outreach questions like I did while serving a nomadic church in Kenya. Why? Because African immigrants in United States come here with their cultural background packages. Thus, an African culture within the broader USA culture is created. Missiologically, these arising mini-cultures must be served well by the church of Jesus Christ in America. The same incarnational theology must apply here. I see myself as the servant of God leading my congregation in a manner that within the representative culture, the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be allowed to percolate and transform God's people from within their way of life experiences. Secondly, I am always praying that our congregation exists to not only become the recipients of God's grace, but also that we exist to become the channel of Good News of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to our neighborhood.



I am convinced beyond reasonable doubt that the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church today *“engage in Mission work locally and internationally.”* The *call to reach out to the nations within and without should be both urgent and active!* Jesus came to live among his people so that he could reach them within their own contexts. The people saw him, he was one of them in the market places, he used their language, ate their food, used examples of things within their environment. This is the missiological trajectory that the church of Christ must follow—making incarnational approach to mission alive. The church of Christ must recognize that life entails breathing in and out. The message of Jesus Christ is about the real life. Therefore, as the church exists, it must engage in discipleship within the four corners of the church, but also it must engage in evangelism outside the church building (Matthew 28:18-20).



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