

Speak Softly...

Most every church will have at least one individual that is looked up to as a pillar. Someone that has that ability/knack/love/whatever that seems to render them indispensable. In the Gisenyi Church of the Brethren it is Mama Francine.

Whenever anything is happening, she's there. Which is pretty much every day. Her official capacity is treasurer, not only for the Gisenyi church, but for the Rwanda COB (four congregations). Throughout the construction of the new Gisenyi church building, Mama Francine has missed very few work days. It's been said that the workers do a much better job when she's there overseeing everything. As treasurer, she is responsible for paying them at the end of the day. Nothing like a financial incentive to work hard!

Because Mama Francine is always on site, she has become the unofficial "auntie" for the nursery school students. Understandably, small children often need help with the bathroom facilities (in this case an outhouse), especially the 3 year olds. Sometimes they need a hug or a few minutes on her lap. As with any group of youngsters, it's also an everyday occurrence that someone needs a little correction.

The Teddy Roosevelt quote, "Speak softly and carry a big stick," came to mind recently. The children were all outside, having just washed their hands at the homemade washing

station. Lining up 30 three-to-five year olds to come back inside for their snack can be a bit of a challenge. My tendency is to bark at them with my best school bus driver's voice (I drove for 23 years). It's not particularly effective, especially considering that the children know very little English. Mama Francine took a small branch of leaves from the poinsettia bush nearby. She waved them around, "swatting" the

children's behinds and gently speaking to them in Kinyarwanda. It was so sweet I almost cried. "Speak softly and carry a few poinsettia leaves."

For the Master, Chris Elliott with the Church of the Brethren Rwanda.

