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Event focuses on many aspects of Congo

Submitted by Bobbie Dodson

Congo Mission Team chair at Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, Herb Long, says "It seems most of us did not learn much about Africa in school, an important area on the world stage." Local residents will have an excellent opportunity to learn about one of its countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, at Celebrate the Congo from noon to 2:30 p.m. on Nov. 4 in Fellowship Hall at LOPC. The Lafayette event will feature Congolese food, music, dance, cultural talk and a fashion show.

"It will be a joyous occasion," says Long. "However, there will also be an opportunity to learn about conditions in Congo today. The humanitarian conditions in the DRC remain in crisis, but the Congolese people have a vibrant, multi-faceted culture that we want to share with the community."

Mboyo Therese Okitukunda, the featured speaker, was born and raised in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She came to the United States after completing two years at the University of Kinshasa. She earned her teaching credential at Foothill and Modesto community colleges and became an associate teacher at Early Head Start. Her passion for education and learning led her to pursue a degree in nursing in 2014. She is a wife and mother of six children. Topics of discussion include historical background, tribes and languages, and contributions to world civilization.

A fashion show will be presented by Esther Nkunku, an American-born designer who saw her roots from the DRC. After completing her studies in Congo, Esther returned to America to pursue further studies in fashion design at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. In 2006 she launched her clothing designing business, producing mainly traditional African ladies styles. She also combines the traditional African heritage with western style to make it more contemporary. She is skilled in experimental fabric-manipulation, such as pleating, appliqué, layering and gathering.

Featured dancer Byb Chanel Bibene is a dance educator, researcher choreographer and performer, working in theater and contemporary dance and has performed around the world. He received an MFA in dance creative practice from Saint Mary's College. He founded the Mbongui Square Festival that gathers artists from the Bay Area and across the world. In addition, he is the author of numerous poems and short works. "At the end," says Long, "all three presenters will be available for a question and answer period. There will also be a short explanation of the work the church supports in Congo." Lunch is \$7 and can be paid at the door or by calling Jim Fulford at (925) 254-5419.

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