

RWANDAN REPORT
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The Commissioning of a Liturgy

Several months ago Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini of Rwanda, participated at the ground-breaking ceremony for the new building for our church, Christ Church Mobile. At that time he participated in a very meaningful liturgy that we had written for the occasion. Afterwards he asked if we would write a special liturgy in which the people could participate in the cleansing of genocide sites in Rwanda. Because of the interruptions of hurricanes and holidays and ministry obligations it was not until late April, 2006, that I began in earnest to work on writing the liturgy.

Writing liturgies is something I love to do and have written them for many special occasions over the last several years. But this particular assignment was very different. As I prayed I knew that in such a liturgical ceremony God would be commissioning Christians to wage battle in the spiritual realm against the powers of darkness and death. These prayers had to be far more than just spiritual words with a melodious flow, even far more than a specific intention. These prayers had to be inspired and empowered by the Spirit of God Himself!

For three days I sat at my computer praying and reading scripture but nothing came. I was aware of a couple of scriptures that had to be included but that was all. I was about to decide that this was a formidable task for which I was not equipped. And then, on the fourth day God took over! I could literally see myself among the people of Rwanda as we prayed the prayers and then the words literally flowed out from my hands as they flew across the keys. It actually required very little editing after it was completed.

A team of thirteen, mostly from Christ Church Mobile, was preparing to go to Rwanda in just a few days. *[Those from Mobile included Conlee and Signa, Bert and Pris Milling, Charles and Sue Phillips, April Mullins and Rita Green. We were also joined by Daniel, Marcia and Nate Holland from Pensacola, FL, Sharon Lance from Fort Collins, CO, and Terri Mitchell from Milwaukee, WI].* We felt it was important to gather in the midst of our busy preparations to pray through the liturgy before we sent it to Archbishop Kolini. Eight of us gathered in the small conference room of our rented office space and, each with a copy of the liturgy, read through it, praying the prayers. All I can describe is that the Spirit of God filled that tiny room. We knew that He was anointing the written words with His power and that something awesome would be accomplished through the prayers of the people in Rwanda.

Amazi (Water)

Flying to Kigali is a long, tiring trip. It was our third trip to Africa and it never gets any shorter! But along the way God kept telling me that each of us would be like a tiny drop of water. Even one drop of water brings life to a parched ground. Many drops put together produce a cleansing stream. If any of us attempts to be a gusher we will become weak. But if we will share one drop at a time the ground will become fertile. Although I didn't understand this completely it was comforting because it was from God.

Umunsi mwiza (Good Day!)

Our arrival began with the warm hospitality of our dear Rwandan friends. We were greeted by Rev. Sam Mugisha, Rev. Nathan Amooti, and Freda Kolini and her father and grandson. Those of you who have visited Rwanda know how gracious and loving they are to visitors. A few of our group had not been before and so in the next few days we went to some familiar places: the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, the new Theological School, hosted by Dick Seed, Ruhengeri to see the newly completed Cathedral, Sunrise School, and the site of the future Healing Center. Our weekend was filled with Conlee preaching at the Cathedral in Kigali, others of our group preaching in various churches, and a visit to Fawe Girls' Secondary School where Terri Mitchell shared her story with the girls. We worshiped and danced with them, and then got to pray with the leaders. At dinner that night Archbishop Kolini outlined how he envisioned using the liturgy for cleansing.

Ruhanga

On Monday we all went with Abp. Kolini to Ruhanga, a genocide site where about 23,000 victims are buried. Five thousand had been buried there just two days before. The remnants of flowers and votives from that ceremony remained. Another 10,000 are expected to be buried there soon. The numbers are incomprehensible because you appear to be in the middle of a remote, rural area. We gathered in the old church where many had been slain. As we stood in a circle to pray several local people joined us, including the pastor's wife. Conlee led the prayers in English which were then translated into Kinyarwanda, phrase by phrase. A large part of the liturgy involves the importance of confession and forgiveness, and water is prayed over and sprinkled around the site, invoking the Presence of God and releasing His Spirit with the blessings He brings. Hope and Life are released where despair and death have reigned. The sprinkling of water symbolizes the spiritual cleansing God pours out on us when we come to Him in obedience.

Abp. Kolini, in his purple cassock, took the blessed water and liberally threw it around the inside and the outside of the church, around the grounds, and into the home of the pastor across the road. Although the pastor was not there, his wife received a great blessing and freedom from the lingering effects of death which hovered over their home, the place where the previous pastor and his wife had been killed. She and I couldn't communicate through language, but we held hands later for almost an hour, joined by the love of our Lord. Her dramatic reaction to the prayers demonstrated that God was transforming death into Life! I wept as I realized that the liturgy God had poured into me in my office at home was being birthed at the genocide site at Ruhanga.

We walked through the adjacent Children's Village, where older children are raising the younger ones, all survivors of the genocide, yet not all are related. We prayed for a 3 day old baby girl and her young parents, for a little girl with polio, and the teenage "sister" who is raising her. We prayed for numerous children, young and old and realized that

God was doing something far beyond what we could imagine. He was continually transforming death into Life before our eyes!

That night as Conlee and I prayed together in our room he saw (in his spirit) a picture of the old church at Ruhanga where we had prayed. In this picture he saw the roof opened over the area where so many are buried, and Jesus was looking down with compassion. Jesus was surrounded by thousands of shining faces, glowing in His Presence. And, in the Spirit, I heard their voices proclaim: "We are not bones!"

The Leaders' Seminar

Conlee and I led a four day seminar for lay pastors and other leaders in the diocese of Kigali at St. Etienne's Cathedral. What an incredible time we had with these exciting men and women! We spent each day together exploring such topics as: Intimacy with God, Confession and Forgiveness, Cleansing the Heart, Being Rooted and Established in Love, Holy Spirit, Holiness, and Renouncing Idol Gods. Their participation, great questions, response to prayer, enthusiasm and love was outstanding! We could see lives transformed before our eyes.

On the final day of the seminar we gathered on the Cathedral steps. Abp. Kolini wanted to introduce the cleansing liturgy to these leaders by having them experience it here where the former dean of the Cathedral was killed. The participants lined up along the bottom step of the Cathedral, their Bibles on the step in front of them. They were solemn and expectant. The Archbishop stood at the top of the steps in his purple cassock. It was noon and the equatorial sun beat down on us but no one minded. God was doing something no one wanted to miss. Each leader's face was reflecting a heart ready to receive everything God wanted to give.

We went through the liturgy, praying the prayers, confessing, forgiving, renouncing death, embracing life and asking God to send His cleansing streams from the steps of the Cathedral out into the land. Again, the archbishop sprinkled both outside and inside the Cathedral, praying blessings even up into the bell tower where the dean had attempted to hide from those who took his life. We then gathered in the pews to listen to the Archbishop's words: "Rwanda needs symbols. Denying the sprinkling of water in this Church [*out of concern over the misuse of water by animist religions and superstitions*] is the same as denying the waters of baptism. There has been a curse on this land. The soil is supposed to receive water not blood. God has brought Rwanda and America together to accomplish this."

Remera

The Archbishop took us to the Secondary School at St. Pierre Eglise at Remera. Begun in 1999, it now has about 600 students and is growing. The goal continues to be academic excellence with Christian ethics, influence and morality. We spoke briefly to the enthusiastic students in their assembly and then prayed over their classrooms.

Women's Fellowship

The week before, on a Friday night, the women on our team were invited by Jackie Mugisha, Rev. Sam's wife, to attend the Women's Fellowship from the English speaking congregation at the Cathedral. Jackie is the organizer for this group and we were pleased to hear an evangelist, Antoine Rutayisire, speak on "Becoming Mature in Christ." At the end of the evening he invited the ladies to ask questions. One of the questions came from a lovely woman sitting next to me. Her concern was this: "I believe I am maturing in Christ but I have friends who tell me that unless I attend one of the Pentecostal churches I won't ever grow in the Lord because the Holy Spirit is not present to the same degree in the Cathedral." Antoine focused his answer to her on "speaking in tongues" but I believed in my heart that she was asking far more than that. I prayed silently and wrote in my notebook: "I am supposed to teach this women's group on Holy Spirit."

Oh, my! What was I thinking? I mentioned this to the other 7 women in our group and they concurred. So I offered to Jackie the possibility of doing this the next Friday night. There were so many conflicts - another speaker scheduled, a possibility we would even have other plans with the Archbishop - and at one point I just gave up. But God was in control and it worked out for us to meet with them.

In the meantime we met a professional man who was a lay leader at Zion Temple, one of the large Pentecostal churches in Kigali. We asked him if we might attend their worship meeting on Sunday night. He was an incredible host and arranged front row seats and a personal translator for each of us. It was an amazing two hours of lively worship, singing, dancing, and praising God in the midst of a thunderous rainstorm amplified on the metal roof. But the worship was louder than the rain! These were great people who obviously love God with all their hearts.

Umwuka Wera (Holy Spirit)

At the women's fellowship the following Friday I gave a very brief teaching on Holy Spirit along with some of my testimony. I told them about a time in my life when I was a young Christian and believed that I, like some of the women present, would not be able to find the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the Episcopal Church and developed a fascination with other churches that seemed more exciting. They were good churches but I explained how I was limiting God's work in my life by being critical of the Episcopal church and neglecting to pray for my church and its leaders to combine the beauty and holiness of Eucharist and liturgy with the power of Holy Spirit.

I compared this to the example of keeping my life free from sin in all areas, including criticism and negativity, and then expecting God to work through me and use me to bring spiritual renewal as He wills, wherever it is needed.

I explained to them the powerful significance of the cleansing liturgy that day with the leaders from the diocese on the Cathedral steps and how through confession and forgiveness, curses are lifted. As I was teaching on the lifting of curses by obeying God, a large butterfly or insect or small bird - no one was exactly quite sure what this thing was - began to soar around over our heads. At first we tried to ignore it but then we were

ducking, afraid it was going to fly into someone. I read them the following scripture: "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest." (Prov. 26:2).

What a vivid example for us of how unforgiveness, criticism, negativity, etc. can allow a curse to light upon us! A curse brings death and darkness, but when the curse is removed, God's blessing of life and light envelopes us. We had a time of confessing our sins, the critical attitudes towards the leadership, the negative outlook we had gotten used to, etc. We embraced God's forgiveness and His blessings. As we did this we knew that according to God's word the curse was lifted. And then.....that insect/bird (whatever it was) died! Everyone was astounded.

We then prayed together a litany prayer asking for more of Holy Spirit, and all I can say is: He came! What a remarkable experience it was! The disciples could not have been any more excited at Pentecost than these women were that night at the Cathedral. We Americans circled around our Rwandan sisters and prayed for them. Then they circled around us and prayed for us. There was power in those prayers! We became bound together as one in the Spirit of God.

Only about 15 minutes after we Americans left that night, Archbishop Kolini went into where the women were meeting. They were trying to explain to him what had happened but they didn't have words, they were still so excited. He told them he was coming to commission them to be his prayer team when he goes out to genocide sites to pray the cleansing prayers. They were astounded because God had just equipped them for ministry!

The next Sunday the women led the morning service at the Cathedral and they are very excited about how God is going to use them in this outpouring of cleansing and love throughout the diocese.

Bugasera - Maranyundo Church

The Archbishop took us to another genocide site on Saturday to pray the cleansing prayers and liturgy. This time the church was full. All the priests from around this parish were present as was Freda Kolini, the archbishop's wife. The choir was there, singing. Although our van had broken down and we Americans were an hour late, they were worshipping and waiting.

There was a sadness and darkness in this place. We prayed through the liturgy with the people, the archbishop sprinkled the church, the grounds, the burial place and came back into the church. All the priests were on their knees around the altar asking us to pray for them. What an anointed time of prayer we had! There was much love shared. But the lasting impression we retained was of a very serious, depressed atmosphere. The next day two of our team went back to this church with the Archbishop where he preached at the Sunday service. They said it was hard to imagine they were in the same place. The people were so joyful! Several people came forward for salvation. It seemed light and full of blessing. This was another tangible example of the curse being lifted. Alleluia!

Imana Ishimwe! (Praise God!)

There were so many, many more experiences we had during our sixteen days in Rwanda. Each one is precious and will last a lifetime. But the message I hope this report leaves with you is this: God is a God of Blessing and Life. As we obey Him through confession and forgiveness He lifts the curse of death and raises us up into His Light where there is no darkness at all.

It is true! "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:1-5).

If you would be interested in obtaining a copy of the Cleansing of a Genocide Site Liturgy, please email your request to bodishba@aol.com