

Rwanda Trip May 2022

The Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury District has been in partnership with the Free Methodist Church Rwanda since 2008. Groups of adults, youth & clergy have regularly visited Rwanda over the last 14 years. Friendships have been formed, funds have been raised and churches and schools have been twinned.

A group of nine adults from the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District and from Bath were the first visitors to arrive at the Good News Guest House, Kigali, since March 2020. Yvonne and Annie, who led the group, have been to Rwanda 12 and 6 times respectively. Malcolm, a retired motor mechanic, was on his 10th visit – he spends his time in Kibagora at the Free Methodist Church Hospital, repairing and servicing vehicles. For the rest of us, it was our first visit to this beautiful country.

On our first morning, the Free Methodist Church Rwanda were holding a meeting of Superintendents and Church Leaders in the Pastoral Training Centre and we were warmly welcomed by Bishop Samuel and all there. It was great to start our trip by hearing how the church is flourishing in Rwanda.



We then had visits to the Kigali Genocide Memorial, where 250,000 victims of the genocide are buried, and the Nyamata Genocide Memorial where over 45,000 victims are buried in mass graves. The church, where the massacre of 10,000 people took place, houses victims' clothes and belongings. It is almost impossible to process what we saw and learnt:

“Genocide memorial

No words
there are just no words to describe the horror
the inhumanity
the senseless loss of life
the absolute brutality
Behaviour that we were never created to enact.

The failure of the world to respond and act

How do you keep you faith amongst such atrocities
in the midst of such inhumanity?

But here
where 250,000 are buried
there is a feeling of peace
engendered in the hope that things are

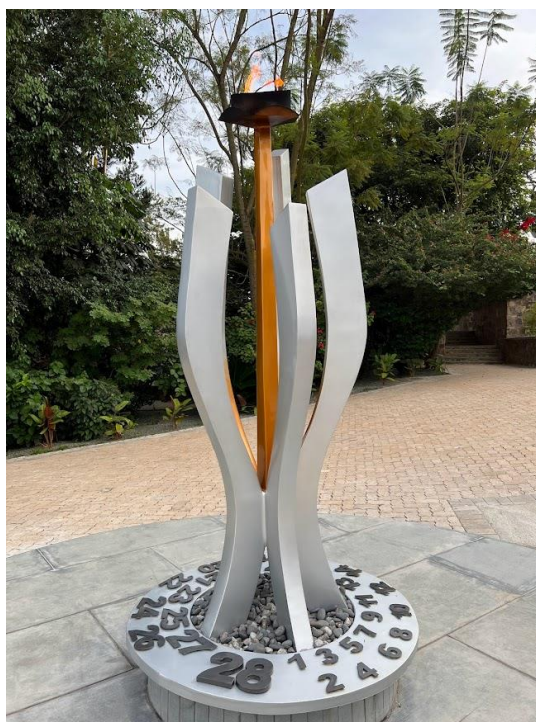
and will
continue to be different.

But at what cost?

I look at the faces in the photos of some of those so brutally slaughtered
and the horror stories of the things that children went through, saw
and experienced
and I can't help but ask why
and to question
'where were you God'

But you were there
in those who reached out to help
in those who provided refuge
and in those who have worked and continue to work tirelessly
for a united Rwanda
where all that matters is that they are Rwandan.

May your peace forever reign in this land that has suffered so much."



While we were in Kigali, we shared in worship at the Free Methodist Church. It was joyous, vibrant & colourful with wonderful choirs and dance groups. Rev Ian Souter, one of our party, preached on the ascension and our unity in Christ.



In Kigali we visited projects run by PHARP (Peace Healing & Reconciliation Project) which included sewing groups for girls and a project that works with people who have HIV / Aids. It was humbling to hear stories from the girls of how their lives have been changed and the hope they now have for the future as a direct result of attending the sewing schools. And to hear from the HIV/Aids group about how they had no hope but now their lives have been transformed. We took gifts of blankets and teddies, hand knitted by many people back home, to give out to the single mums and their children. The kids wanted the blankets tied round them with their teddies on their backs – just the way they are carried as babies. The gifts were received with dancing and singing as God was praised for the blessings they had received. We received far more than we gave.

A highlight was attending the graduation for three sewing classes from 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22, together with the carpentry class. Their parents looked on proudly and it was wonderful to see the students taking their certificates to show their families. Four girls are selected by the community each year to receive a sewing machine to enable them to set up in business. They pay back 50% of the cost of the machine from the profits they make. One of the recipients from 2019-20 explained how this had saved her from prostitution. She now has her own small business, a small piece of land and has bought a pig and goats. She is now able to support other members of her family and is mentoring two other girls. She encouraged others to take the opportunities they are given.

Anastase and Julienne, the Directors of PHARP do amazing work amongst the poorest and most deprived communities and are an inspiration. They have transformed so many lives. The work they do is driven by their love of God and their calling to make a difference.



We moved on to Kibagora on the shores of Lake Kivu and stayed at the Methodist Mission Centre, where missionaries from America arrived in 1942 and established the Free Methodist Church. We spent time visiting the Kibagora Free Methodist Polytechnic, where we were shown around the nurses' skills labs which was really interesting, especially for the three qualified nurses in our group. We also met with six theology students who are sponsored by the Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury District and heard their stories and how thankful they are for the support they receive. It was great to see the books we had brought from Queens Foundation in Birmingham, being logged into the library.



We were also incredibly privileged to be able to attend morning prayers in the Kibagora Free Methodist Church Hospital Chapel. A wonderful way to start the day, worshipping God in a different language, with our brothers and sisters in Christ.



Whilst in Kibagora it was wonderful to visit projects and churches that the Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury District and churches in the district are supporting. We had an amazing boat trip on Lake Kivu in the boat that St John's Methodist Church Bloxwich bought to enable people to travel across from the Shara Peninsula to sell their goods in the market at Kibagora, saving hours of walking. Money raised has been given to help with the maintenance of the engine and petrol to enable this valuable community service to continue.



We worshipped at Ntumba church with three Methodist congregations on the Shara peninsula. As ever the hospitality was amazing and we were treated to a feast of local produce including fish from lake Kivu.

St John's has donated money that has been used to build the church at Ntumba and during covid, the Methodist Churches in Bath raised money to pay for a handwashing station to be built and water to be piped over half a kilometre from the nearest well to the church at Marama, enabling the church to re-open.



Money raised as part of our trip was donated to widows, who are members of the church in Marama, to buy a piece of land to form a cooperative, so that they can share their stories, support one another and provide for themselves and their families. Money has also been given to complete the building of a classroom where a sewing group will be able to meet inside, rather than outside in a garden. And gifts were taken to the school in Ntumba.



We have brought back holdalls full of bags, aprons & nativity sets, made by the groups we visited, to sell to raise more funds for the projects.

I had the privilege of preaching at Ntumba. I finished my address by saying:

'Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation." This is what I have experienced in Rwanda. On your beautiful mountains I have heard your good news, I have witnessed peace and received your good tidings, and I have experienced the salvation that only Christ can bring. I feel truly blessed to have been to Rwanda. Truly blessed to have seen the extraordinary beauty of God's amazing creation and truly blessed to have met so many wonderful people. I will continue to pray for healing, reconciliation and forgiveness for Rwanda, and ask that you in turn pray for healing, reconciliation and forgiveness for the world.'

My heart has been touched. Rwanda has been for me a thin place, somewhere I hope to return.