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On being a Mission Partner (with the wrong kind of TIN).



I am trying to grasp that I am now more than halfway through my period of mission partner service here in Rwanda. When I left Birkenshaw for Wesley House, Cambridge, in August 2020, I packed my freight anticipating that I would spend a term in Cambridge and then depart for Kenya in January 2021 to serve the traditional 2 years and 9 months *in situ* before bringing my years of service to an end in by 'sitting down' in August 2023. Things didn't quite turn out as I'd planned. (Give God a laugh, tell Him your plans!) Maybe my calling was to experience community at Wesley House, during Covid and beyond?

However, I am grateful that, after 2 changes to my intended destination, I was able to come to **Rwanda** in mid-January this year. In the final days before my departure from the UK the shipping company were still anticipating having to send my freight by air, however, at the last minute they managed to secure its sea passage to Kenya and to find agents who could manage its progress overland from the port of Mombasa. The world was opening up for business after the scourge of Covid. Having never previously set foot in the country, I arrived in Rwanda with the contents of my suitcases. As I awaited the arrival of my belongings, I endeavoured to settle in to a new rhythm of life, staying in the Guesthouse, walking a few hundred yards to the Church or the Polytechnic, venturing a mile down the road to the Bank's ATM, (in a splendid bank building adjacent to a typical African market) and to beginning to assist in teaching, (with the knowledge that some of the books I wanted to consult were somewhere on the high seas).

I have read that Rwanda is the second most densely populated country in Africa (440.8 inh./km²). As you drive from Kigali to Kibogora there is the sense that all the land is being managed: there are rice paddies in the valleys, maize fields proliferate and banana vines cling to the hillsides. There are fields of coffee bushes and lush green tea plantations. The land is fertile and Rwandans ably cultivate it. The quality and freshness of the food available here is impressive. In subtle ways, the relative prosperity of the people is apparent: the vehicles seem well-maintained, the children wear smart school uniforms and the churchgoers are well-dressed and shod..

The Church, Kibogora FMCR (Free Methodist Church Rwanda) has just reinstated an English language service that had been in abeyance since prior to Covid, it seems that it is mainly for students and staff of Kibogora Polytechnic (KP). Since Kinyarwanda is the only African language in the country, English, consequently, is used as the language of education but not of the home or of worship, however, there was a past tradition of an English language service. I'm delighted that after months of understanding only a few words in a service, I am now able to fully comprehend the worship, (language matters).

The news reports on my Google feed all speak positively of the country's economic growth. Perhaps as a consequence thereof, there is a burgeoning middle class and the demand for Higher Education is surging. Kibogora Polytechnic (KP) is **the** Higher Educational institution in Western Province. It anticipates expansion in Kibogora and is already building a satellite campus 70Km to the south of here, in Rusizi. The first Free Methodist missionaries entered Rwanda in 1942 and settled here, the Guesthouse stands on their former mission station. Their Chapel has prospered, becoming a significant Church and the original basic Clinic has given rise to a major teaching hospital. Without the Church's investment in this location, Kibogora would be little more than a fishing village, a rural backwater with very few 'goods and services.' Kibogora is still so insignificant that the nearest (modest) Supermarket is in Rusizi. The government is efficient (e.g. it took only just over a week for my work permit to be granted and I'm told that speeding fines are sent immediately to registered drivers'/car owners' mobile

phones). Various aspects of life are carefully regulated: soon after my arrival, Kibogora Polytechnic underwent an inspection by the Department of Education (who raised concerns about library provision) and the Teaching Hospital is under the oversight of both the Department of Health and the Department of Education, hence the Health Sciences Faculty is doubly inspected!

To think that in other nations, in the presence of blatant corruption, I might have yearned for 'transparency' and greater government efficiency, I have discovered that efficiency has its disadvantages. I was notified that my belongings had arrived in Mombasa, so the agent wanted my **TIN**. What kind of tin? Wasn't it all in boxes? We learnt that it was a tax reference number and so gave the agent my UK UTR. The agent was frustrated, he needed an East African **TIN**. So, we gave him the Guesthouse's **TIN**, that allowed the shipment to be cleared from Mombasa without demurrage, but that action, it turned out, led to later problems. I was called to Kigali (2 days away, requiring overnight stay and travel) to 'identify' my belongings, (though all the boxes bore my name). "How many books?" asked the Rwandan agent. Weight and volume were not enough, she had to count them (not differentiating between books and monographs/booklets/pamphlets). Since it had entered on the Guesthouse's **TIN** we were told the consignment would be taxed as commercial property—I needed a **personal TIN**. (What use has the Guesthouse for a theological library?) Weeks passed with no progress. The Rwandan agent wrote a detailed inventory: each item had to be individually priced or valued and the total sum had to be identical to the (estimated!) clearance value given in Mombasa. At an impasse, the Bishop referred me to Jean Paul, the Acting Dean of Health Sciences, who had prior experience of clearing goods for the Hospital. He had lengthy discussions with the agents in Kigali, then took me to get a **TIN**. The government official's internet was down, so I filled in a physical form that had questions I didn't understand. Another week passed (with demurrage mounting) and a **TIN** was issued. Jean Paul triumphantly informed the agent, to be told it was **THE WRONG KIND OF TIN**. The government official had issued a **commercial TIN** (I had become a limited company!). So we had to go further afield to a Tax Office that could supply me with a **personal TIN** which took all of 10 minutes, including the courtesies.



At last, for US\$700, my belongings could be released and delivered here. They arrived in boxes that had been literally torn apart by those impatient to check their contents and some of the books are slightly damaged, but the library, which I am to donate to KP, was in my possession. I also have everything that I thought I might have needed for 2 years 9 months in Kenya (based on my knowledge of that context 25 years ago).

So I have been reminded that securing access to one's own freighted belongings is one of the stresses that afflict mission partners as we navigate our way around red tape.

If you're to come to Africa make sure that you have **the right kind of TIN**.



As the annual period of commemoration of the Genocide of 1994 draws to a close and my students are preparing to write their final exams and dissertations, before completing their fieldwork, please pray for those who work for peace and reconciliation and think too of the students, many of whom will serve a vibrant, growing Church as 'tentmaker ministers.'

Wendy Kilworth-Mason