

**JAN 2010 TRIP TO RWANDA AND BURUNDI**  
**reported by Bp. Jerold Gliege**

On Jan 19 Audrey and I embarked on a month of ministry and mission to the countries of Rwanda and Burundi. For 2 weeks of that time, we were joined by our bishop from Sweden, Thomas Andersson. Unlike the Americas and Europe, our experience of Africa is that there is little separation of spiritual and humanitarian work – the two fit like hand and glove. In large part, the need of these countries is so great, that any help is eagerly sought. Each country is still affected by the aftermath of the genocide between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes.

Our major contacts in these countries are Denis Mugabo, now consecrated EOC Bishop in Rwanda, and Telesphore Ntashimikiro, EOC Bishop in Burundi. Each of these men are heavily involved in the humanitarian relief and spiritual nurturing of their people.

**The work in Rwanda**

St. John's Evangelical Orthodox Church. **The parish church** meets in rented facilities in downtown Kigali, the capital city. In addition to worship, **classes** for English, Theology and Social Sciences are held 5 nights per week. Rental real estate in Kigali is expensive, and the local parish is struggling to keep this facility as we are encouraging them to assume more financial responsibility in all matters. Connected to this work is the **Good Samaritan Project** run by Dativa Mugabo. As money is designated for this ministry, Dativa purchases staple items such as rice, beans, salt and oil to distribute to the neediest families, mainly widows with children.

Bishops Thomas, Telesphore, and I participated in the consecration of Denis as Bishop and the ordinations of a priest and 7 deacons for the work in the Rwanda parishes. The 5-hour service was held in a large rented facility which overflowed with people who had come on foot and by motorcycle taxi, bus, and minivan. After the service of welcomes, elaborate speeches, music and dances, people stayed for fellowship and cold drinks.

Peace International School. This school has been run by Denis and Dativa Mugabo for the past 10 years. It is a primary school of up to 125 students offering classes (K-5) to the poor who are either orphaned or cannot afford tuition or the uniforms required by government schools. Presently, the faithful of the EOC provide the \$100 monthly salaries for the 7 teachers. The school is in the Mugabo's enlarged home, which is tentatively scheduled for demolition within the next year due to urban renewal. Through fund raising and donations, 5 acres of undeveloped land (with access to electricity and water!) has been purchased for \$23,000 . Now major funding is required, and has begun, for the building of a multipurpose facility for the school, church, and adult education.

Peace Sewing Center, Frank Sewing Association, and St. Joseph Church. The primitive village of Burema (population 5000), 15 km's outside Kigali, is the site of these efforts, housed in 2 separate buildings. **The Sewing Center** began in 2008 by a large donation from the Frank family of Canada. The instructor for the Center has 8 sewing machines for training. Already this year 28 students have enrolled – really more than space allows but the interest is so keen. In the first year 23 young women and a young man (ages 15-28) completed the course. Graduation ceremonies were presided over by Audrey (Frank) Gliege on this trip. The ribbon-cutting ceremony followed for the opening of **The Frank Sewing Association**, which currently houses 22 sewing stations where each recent graduate has their own machine (thanks to the 17 sponsors in Canada and the US who contributed \$200+ to buy the machines). The grateful students are now eager to sew and sell their creations to support themselves and/or their families. The Bishop has done an amazing job of refurbishing the second of the buildings, which now houses the Sewing Association, parish church, and an office and living quarters for James, the caretaker and overseer of the complex. The salaries for these Burema projects per month include James (\$60), the sewing instructor Eli (\$100), and a night watchman (\$40).

James is acting pastor for about 50 people in **St. Joseph's Church**, where he sets a fine example of overseeing the congregation, caring for the students and sewing facilities, and making a living. He has turned the several acres of land around the buildings into crop and vegetable production. We were fortunate to learn from a Canadian missionary agriculturist of a training program called GAKO, which can be a great asset to James agriculturally and in **chicken and rabbit husbandry**, as these are micro-economic projects suitable to African villages. We are praying and soliciting donations to pay the tuition for this month-long course. Not only would James impact Burema with this knowledge, but he would then be qualified to teach these skills to strategic persons in other villages. We are optimistic about these possibilities for self-sustainability as many thrive when the opportunities are presented.

St. Michael's Church Grassian and Lucien Sebakiga are a farmer father and son from the adobe-home village of Uwinana, 70 km from Kigali. They have been spiritually attached to Bp. Denis for some time and 8 months ago asked to start an EOC Church. Fr. Grassian was just ordained in the service in Kigali, along with a local man and a woman as deacons. We attended a Sunday service at St. Michael's and found 100+ people crowded into a makeshift tent. After the service when rain came, we all huddled in Fr. Grassian's house and small courtyard. As the sun came out everyone stayed to sing, celebrate (dance in the mud...) and enjoy fellowship and heaping plates of food prepared 'out of the blue' by these loving and giving souls. Land and adobe construction is very inexpensive in this village, and for about \$7,000 a good parcel of land can be purchased to construct an adobe sanctuary plus an equipped sewing center. The

villagers here seem quite aggressive with growing vegetables and crops (even rice) and raising cattle and goats. Rabbit farming here would be met with enthusiasm.

St. Augustine Church (in a village 40 km. from Kigali). As commissioned by Bp. Denis, this work has been started by a couple of enthusiastic newly-ordained deacons, Claude and Freddie. When we visited, 100+ gathered to greet us, worship together, and then present us with their vision for the village and parish church as together we shared lunch of a cob of freshly-roasted corn. Their stated goals include a rabbit industry, HIV treatment, gender equality, and a primary school for the poor and underprivileged.

## **The Work in Burundi**

Bishop Telesphore is an astute man with many contacts and friends (including the President of Burundi). He works part-time for the American Embassy in the capital city of Bujumbura, and his wife works at a bank. They have 5 children and care for 5 additional orphans. For 16 years he has worked at both building church communities and enabling micro-economic development among the people. To-date he has helped 72 people with loans to develop businesses which earn \$60 - \$100/month (60 of whom have repaid the loans and now have an ongoing small enterprise). Recently, I was given funds in memory of my deceased father, which I presented to Bp. Telesphore. He immediately purchased 8 pregnant goats, and now each goat resides with a needy family. Since my father's name was Henry, I suggested the goats be named Henry VIII, VII etc.!

Bp. Telesphore oversees 41 communities that have pastors and church buildings and another 23 communities with leadership in place and moving toward permanency. Many of these pastors are subsistence farmers who not only care for their families but orphans as well. A case in point being Simeon, who pastors Mount Zion Church, a congregation of 200+. His house, which has no electricity or running water and is not accessible by car, is home for he and his wife, their 5 children, and 5 orphaned children.

Bp. Telesphore has built an orphanage called **Hope Center** funded by people out of the UK and Australia. The orphanage currently houses 42 children in three houses and will expand soon to 60 kids with the completion of one more house. The director of the orphanage is Leonard, who with his wife and 3 children live in one of the houses with another 5 orphans.

I was privileged to travel with Bp. Telesphore and Simeon to several of their outlying churches. Evangelical Orthodoxy is very much welcomed by his people. It allows the vibrancy of their cultural music, encourages their personal relationship with Christ, and offers the liturgy and sacrament that most Rwandans and Burundians have known from their youth, albeit in the Roman Catholic Church. Bp. Telesphore asks that we help guide his people into the haven of the Evangelical Orthodox Church through our teaching, fellowship and prayer. We are very privileged and humbled in this task to work with true saints of God who are content with little and always offering much.