

Progress of the EOC in Africa

The initiating factor for the trip taken by Audrey and myself over the New Year was the invitation by Parables Ministry in Burundi to come and present information about the EOC to the pastors and deacons of their Churches who were meeting over the first weekend in January. The Parables' Churches number 49 across Burundi and number almost 7,000 people.

We arrived in Kigali, Rwanda on December 29 and spent several days with Fr. Denis and St. John's Church. We were immediately thrust into their English and Theology classes held at their Church meeting place. We both taught several evenings and enjoyed the spirit of the people. We found housing in a Catholic retreat and conference center in the middle of Kigali - walking distance from the Church, the Mugabos, and the City Center. The rooms were simple and inexpensive at \$6 US/night.

Five Days in Burundi

Fr. Denis and I left by bus for Bujumbura, Burundi on New Year's Day. The ride took 5 hours, and the scenery both in Rwanda and Burundi is wonderful. Upon arrival we were met by Bishop Telesphore and several of his priests. Bujumbura is on a large lake, and we spent the evening walking the beach and enjoying the Burundi New Year's Day celebrations.

On Friday we were taken to the Church where the Parables Ministry people were holding their conference and, after many introductions, - Africans love introducing people with flowery stories - I was asked to share about our Church. My talk was punctuated with many questions, and in all the conversation lasted almost 4 hours.

On Saturday we attended an afternoon Church worship in one of the two Bujumbura Churches. After a fair bit of

singing, the traditional introductions took place. I was then asked to preach, which I did with joy.

Sunday we attended the large Church, and the place was packed. The singing was very charismatic and lasted a long time. It seemed that a shift had taken place in that a decision seemed to have been made that they were going to be EOC. I was introduced as their father. My response was that Bp. Telesphore was their father, but I would be happy to stand in as grandfather. This was given a round of cheers and clapping. Again I preached.

The Burundi people are very poor, so poor that the Bishop states they cannot afford to hold Eucharist every Sunday. The Bishop himself seems very astute financially and is working on micro-economic development. He told of a woman to whom he had loaned \$50 to establish a peanut vending business. She has since repaid the loan and is now making a living. A living in Burundi is anywhere from \$50 and up. If one makes \$200 it would be considered very prosperous. People live together in houses and that way afford accommodation. Bishop Telesphore shared that in his 49 Churches the wars of the last several years have increased their widowed and orphaned families by 17. The burden of this ministry is monumental.

The next step in the developing relationship with the Burundi Churches will take place in Spring when Bp. Joshua will visit to teach. Bp. Telesphore refers to his Churches as “fire that needs a foundation”, and he sees the EOC as having the theology, tools, and ability to provide that foundation.

It was interesting being in Bujumbura with Fr. Denis. He had lived here for several years, and also many of his seminarian colleagues and members of the choir he led for 7 years in seminary live in this city. Their joy in reacquainting with Fr. Denis was truly remarkable. Even in this city Fr. Denis visited several poor families whom he knew, and they were

overjoyed to see him. He seems like a big brother to many people.

Back in Kigali

One of the highlights of the trip was 2 visits to the Peace Arts Training Center (sewing school) in the village of Burema. It is in this village that Fr. Denis acquired 2 buildings years ago to help the widows and orphans there. Audrey's family, along with one other donor, provided \$3,000 for the establishment of Fr. Denis' dream - the sewing school. Fr. Denis reworked one of the buildings, bought 6 treadle sewing machines, hired a teacher, hired his friend James to live in the building guarding it and teaching English, and in no time had 40 applicants for school. Of these, 23 were selected and a couple of months into the program they have learned to sew place mats, children's clothes and a uniform for themselves. In addition, James has planted garden all around the building and has established a new Church, worshipping each Sunday with 20-30 people. At the time of writing this report I got word that the new congregation has named themselves, "St. Joseph's Evangelical Orthodox Church". Jakob Palm, who followed us to Rwanda to stay on several weeks, spoke highly of James' servant heart and care for the school and the people. The ongoing cost of the school and Church in Burema is around \$250 a month.

Good Samaritan Project

Denis' wife, Dativa, has a special heart for orphans and the poor. With any extra money she provides food for those who cannot afford it. I gave her \$100 of the EOC tithe, and it was a great joy to accompany her to the market to purchase beans, rice, salt, and oil. Audrey had the greater joy of watching the poor come and receive food and Dawg shoes which we had sent on ahead of us. The money spent gave 9 families basic food for a week. There is a great part of a whole generation in Rwanda who will need outside help if they are to live. Truly this is a good work for us to support,

and Dativa is a very conscientious head of what she calls, "The Good Samaritan Project".

St. John's Church

Audrey had the privilege of attending Divine Liturgy as led by Fr. John while Fr. Denis and I were in Burundi. Fr. John is a loving, well-disciplined priest and an essential part of the work of St. John. He is educated, having taught philosophy and psychology in the University and at present teaches in the city high school. He is at the Church 5 nights a week taking English and Theology class or teaching classes in his specialties. Often he stays at the Church overnight with the guard so he will not have to walk so far to work in the morning.

The Sunday I attended Liturgy we were privileged to receive 12 new members into the Church and baptized one of the deacon's newborn daughter. Nearly 100 people were present, and during the thanksgiving time after the Eucharist there was much joyous sharing. After the service a Muslim priest identified himself, telling us that God, by way of a dream, had directed him to be in Church that Sunday. We prayed with him and encouraged him to take the courageous step of confessing faith in holy baptism. Also this Sunday, James brought his choir from the Burema congregation. They walked into Kigali leaving at 5:30 AM and were in Church an hour early!

School for the underprivileged and orphaned

On our last day we visited the school of Fr. Denis and Dativa. The EOC helps Fr. Denis employ kindergarten through Grade 5 teachers and an administrator in the school. The school is held in the Mugabo house and several small out buildings on the property. Much more of the house is dedicated to the school than living space for the extended Mugabo family. The teachers are energetic and dedicated, the children enthusiastic and polite. All wear blue and white uniforms - the standard in Rwanda. These students are here because they cannot meet the requirement of providing

tuition and uniforms in the public system. Here they are given their uniform. A few help with a tuition fee. This money is used for pencils, paper, and other basic supplies.

The property used by the school is scheduled for demolition in 2010 - a program by the city to get rid of the poor areas and rebuild. This presents a need and an opportunity at the same time. We visited land available, for around \$21,000 US, some 8 to 10 acres on the fringe of the city, which would provide the space for school, Church, living quarters for a number of families, a shelter for the homeless, and enough ground for gardens and grazing land for goats and chickens - a wonderful property. At present we have established the beginning of a fund designated for this project, and it is my prayer and hope that God will miraculously provide for this need, which seems beyond our means at this time!

Official Opening of Peace Arts Training Center and Burema Church.

Ceremony, introduction, and naming are a very important part of the African culture. The North American delegation of Audrey and myself included Mother Pilar and Donna Connelly, who had arrived the day prior for a 3-week visit. The Mugabos and ourselves traveled by taxi to Burema for this joyous celebration. After many introductions and speeches, Audrey and I cut the ribbon at the doorway declaring the school and Church open. Then Audrey proceeded to present each student with her uniform, after which they went into a back room to put them on. They sang and danced for joy!

Back Home

Our reflection as we are back in Canada is that truly God has called us to this work. There are challenges ahead. Communicating cross-culture is difficult. Offering help that is appropriate to the African way of life and discernment as to appropriate expectations on both sides will take time and patience. However, the work is worthy and fulfills the criteria

of true religion, which is to help the orphans, the widows,
and the underprivileged.