

Rwanda Direct Newsletter

Autumn - Christmas 2024



Dear friends of Rwanda Direct,

As the Advent season and Christmas draws closer, please carry the Church of God in Rwanda in your prayers and gifts. It is facing issues that threaten its life and existence as we have known it.

Church Closures

As we face major challenges within the Church of England as an institution, so the Church in Rwanda is facing its own challenge. Upon the re-election of President Paul Kagame, one of his first acts has been to insist on the application of the building standards as they apply to religious premises, that is all religions, Christian, Muslim and others. In many parts of the country, this has had a devastating impact on the life of the Church. Here are some of the statistics as we know them.

- Around 8000 places of worship closed across the country
 - Byumba Diocese 32 out of 383 churches open
 - Kigeme Diocese 23 out of 262 churches open
 - On those figures less than 9% of churches are open in rural areas
- Chapel shut in 2018 – official notice on door*



Back in August Bishop Assiel of Kigeme said 'As you said the challenges of salary payment to Pastors and catechists will be very hard and very difficult, so continue praying for us. I have called all pastors to come for a retreat of one day this Wednesday on 28, August to pray together and see how we can put effort together so that we can choose some few churches at each area to complete what is required for being reopened.' In November he said 'Our prayer requests:

1. To pray for 43 Parishes to fulfil all requirements so that they may be reopened
2. To have scholarship for 10 pastors that we have sent at PIASS (Protestant College) (3) and EACC (7).
3. Wellbeing of Pastors and catechists since the churches are closed no offertory and tithes.
4. Wellbeing of Diocesan staff.

Thank you so much for your love and concern.'



In our Spring Newsletter we featured the life and work of Gatare Chapel and how the Church Teacher, Josephine, had learnt from a course that Rwanda Direct funded in Kigeme Diocese. This helped to transform her ministry and as a result the Church was growing and serving the community holistically in multiple creative ways.

It's now SHUT.

Also in August, Bishop Emmanuel of Byumba asked for prayer. He said:-

‘This has made everything paralysed: we can't find incentives (pay etc) of pastors and office staff, fuel, ... above all, we have a serious challenge about paying bank loans, because half of it was from parishes. Please, seriously pray for us and share this with all friends possible! We always appreciate how you stand alongside us in a holistic way. May God bless you.’

More recently Bishop Emmanuel described the impact on communities as removing hope. After the time of Genocide, the Rwandan people found hope in the churches. Now this source of hope has been removed. There are numbers of people backsliding and some returning to the bars and maybe worse.

Bishop Manasseh Gahima of Gahini has echoed many of these thoughts as they struggle to repay diocesan debts for the construction of the cathedral and try to meet the building standards in some churches so that they can re-open quickly.

Some churches that have been re-opened but only in Kigali and Butare (Huye) Dioceses. In Byumba, none have been allowed to re-open. The impact is not just on the churches, but also the work of Scripture Union is being affected. Revd Dr Appolinaire Hakizimana who leads SU says ‘we are sharing the same experience with the churches, because we work with the churches. Since many churches can't meet, we are also not able to serve them as much as we wish to serve them.

Whilst the financial situation is deeply concerning, and could bankrupt some dioceses, the spiritual damage could be very serious indeed, opening the gates to influences that could devastate the country.

Please pray!

Qualifications and Taxes?

The government requirement for all key pastoral leaders to have a degree level qualification has now been fully implemented. This has caused much upheaval, particularly in denominations that haven't been able to prepare for this requirement. The Anglican Church had to make some major changes, and many senior trusted staff have had to step back, allowing younger pastors with degrees to take the lead. The pastoral work was able to keep going, thankfully, until the church closures took effect. However more graduate pastors are still desperately needed particularly in the poorer dioceses.

There is now another threat on the horizon, and that is a possible tax on church donations. Quite rightly there is concern about certain leaders (often Pentecostal) who peddle the ‘Prosperity Gospel’ through which some pastors seem to particularly prosper, at the expense of the poor who give. If a blanket tax is brought in, this could cause yet further serious damage for the life of the good, safe churches and all the valuable work they do in the poorest communities.

Marburg Disease Outbreak

The Kigali area has suffered an outbreak of the highly infectious Marburg Disease, contracted from Fruit Bats. It is like the better-known Ebola disease. In other parts of Africa the death rate has been between 50% – 80%. Due to a rapid and effective government response using the most up to date methods, the death rate was only 23% with 66 cases and 15 deaths. Former leader of Scripture Union Jean-Baptiste's son in law is a doctor in Kigali and due to working with some of the infected had to isolate, but thankfully prayer was answered, and he did not fall ill. The disease has now been stopped. Praise God!

What Now?

People in the UK ask 'is this persecution'? It's not direct persecution, however there is a clash of reality and unreality which is leading to decisions that have serious consequences, probably more than are realised by the leaders implementing these directives. This then adds up to effectively a form of possibly unintended persecution. The financial demands on Christians to build new churches to the standards required are simply impossible. Rwanda Direct doesn't have the resources to help with building needs. It would take millions of pounds for each diocese! However, as we saw in the time of Covid, when the Lord opened the gates of generosity the extra funds that we received allowed things to happen that we couldn't have dreamt of. Gatare Chapel in Kigeme Diocese, was just one story of renewal, as was the saving of SU and the transformation in Gahini Diocese. God did miracles through 2020 – 2021. What could He do through this time of suffering if we both pray and give?

Geoff and Hope Price, who helped found Rwanda Direct, found this quote from Mother Teresa of Calcutta helpful:-

'We, the unwilling, led by the unknowing, are doing the impossible. We have done so much, for so long, with so little, we are now qualified to do anything with nothing.'

Also, from 2 Corinthians 6:10 which they thought relevant to the situation.

'Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.'

So in this season as we remember the gift of the Christ child, soon to be persecuted by the puppet King Herod, what can we give back both in time to pray and gifts to give?

Rwanda needs the Body of Christ to be alive – living out the story of salvation in all its fullness!

Worship in Gatare Chapel

Let's worship with them in Spirit and Truth this Christmas wherever we may be!



PRAYER TIME

Do join our **Zoom prayer meetings** usually 1st Friday evenings of the month at 8.00pm. Rwandan Partners join us from time to time so that we can hear directly from them. Barbara Willingham will send you the Zoom details and dates once you have told us you are interested. Contact details below.

Newsletter Circulation – Spread the News Further!

If you know of others who may be interested in helping the Church in Rwanda, do share this Newsletter with them and suggest they get in contact with us as below.

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