

BRIEF STORY OF THE BIBLEWAY BAPTIST CHURCH OF RWANDA, 2023.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rwanda, a country situated in central Eastern Africa, is a small and landlocked nation neighbored by Burundi in South, Democratic Republic in the West, Uganda in the North, and Tanzania in the East. It has a population of a little over thirteen millions and it is 26,338 kilometer squares in size.

Rwanda is third world country without much natural resources, and its economy is based on a yet to grow industry, tourism, and agriculture. Few people are employed by the Government, the private sector, and international aid organizations; while the majority of the population survives through subsistence farming.

In 1994, a horrible Tutsi Genocide which was orchestrated by the then ruling government decimated a whopping one million souls of Tutsis, and it destroyed the already fragile economy the country had together with the other areas of life of the country including social, education, health, and others.

From 1994, the country has been trying to build itself up but it is still hard because of the scars of war and the genocide.

In the 1900s Rwanda saw the first western missionaries come. They were mainly Roman Catholics but they were soon followed by other denominations. Due to the evangelistic work that has been done by white western missionaries and their African disciples who followed them, there can be found several churches around the country but unfortunately there are fewer Christians in those churches because there was no preaching and the teaching of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. The horrible result of this is the 1994 Tutsi Genocide and a population that practices syncretistic beliefs and does not care to live for and honor Jesus.

2. THE BACKGROUND

My personal background is one of a family that knew not and never spoke about Jesus even though my mother and father came from so called Baptist Union church. Our family life was riddled with hurt, pain, and sins. I suffered more as a first born child because my parents fought all the time and left us to fend for ourselves at a very young age. I hated dad and mom, was very angry; and according to my own understanding evil was mom and dad. By the grace of God, I was preached to, met Jesus; and I got saved in 1982. At my salvation I understood that the knowledge and acceptance of Jesus who is the light of mankind, a saved person is able to see through the light that is in him and he is enabled to live a life of light and transformation and change. I forgave my parents because I realized that they were not evil but had not met the light in their lives and they too were suffering and needed Jesus. Also at my salvation, God birthed unto me a passion and call to help the people of the world to also experience the same light I had

had which is Jesus so that they too can live a life of light and live transformed lives. This call was fully explained when I became 19 in 1989 through the help of a fellow Christian, and at that same time I surrendered to full time ministry. I started a church in 1991 upon completing my secondary school education.

The church plant grew big in numbers and everybody else loved and was excited by the work but I personally was not satisfied because I wanted to see true transformation but did not know how to reach that because I lacked education to help me shepherd God's people properly. Through this dissatisfaction, God birthed unto me a desire to go for theological education so that I can know how preach and teach God's people in a way that produce much needed change.

I started praying for an opportunity to study theology and God answered in the year 2000. I got trained and got a bachelor's degree of Theology at the Baptist theological Seminary of Zambia, and later on I got a master's degree of Theology from the Southeastern Baptist Theological seminary.

3. THE BIBLEWAY BAPTIST CHURCH

When God answered and provided me with an opportunity to study Theology, I had been a refugee far away from home due to the 1994 Tutsi Genocide and the wars that followed it.

As soon as I started to study, I also started to pray to God for direction and long term ministry vision upon the completion of my studies. Meanwhile, I served as an associate pastor at a church in Zambia. By the time I completed my studies, God had clearly spoken to me that he wanted me back home in Rwanda to start Bible believing and practicing Baptist Churches. In addition, I had prayerfully been designing a plan as to how I would by faith implement the vision of the church that God had put on my heart. In 2006, I obeyed to God and took a flight back to Rwanda.

When I left Rwanda, I was 24 years old and single; and when I returned I was married and had 4 little kids. I had no money, no home to go to, no church family, no ministry sponsor, and no idea as to what was going to happen to us as a family. It was a journey of faith and trust to God.

The Bibleway Baptist Church got launched in 2007. I wanted to start a good Bible believing and practicing local Baptist Church in Kigali. Note that in Rwanda, there are no known Bible believing and practicing Baptist Churches. There exist no locally autonomous Baptist churches around Rwanda. Existing Baptist Churches are nominal churches that do not preach the gospel and follow the leadership of an overall head of the countrywide church.

My deep desire was not only to see a good church started where I was to be based, but also to see several of the same kind of church started and built up in different parts of the country and beyond. I had been blessed with a good theological training and many

years of pastoring experience and exposure to good Baptist churches in Zambia; and I was ready share those with Rwandan leaders. I wanted to train and help other called pastors so that they can start and build up good churches.

Not only would the Bibleway Baptist church be a local church which I would pastor, but it would also be a place where pastors would be trained and empowered. At the same time; as a registered legal entity it would also serve as a legal platform for all the yet to be started local Baptist churches around Rwanda till they can be healthy and process their own legal document.

Gahara Baptist church was launched in 2007; and then with the help of Kelly Sager, an IMB missionary who worked with in Rwanda at the time before being moved to Tanzania; we were able to train several pastors at a bible school in Kigali and started fourteen different church plants. I served as resource pastor to those pastors.

In 2009, I started Kigali Bibleway Baptist Church and became its pastor. After three years, the church was moved to Muyumbu due long term strategic and development plans. The land was acquired and a plan to develop it was in place, but there was no money to fund it.

In Muyumbu, the church found a shelter to meet in and it was there till it got closed in the 2018' ten thousand church closures.

The Bibleway Baptist Church secured registration papers with the Rwanda Governance board in 2018, and in the same year a building permit for the Muyumbu project known as City on Hill Project was guaranteed.

4. THE NEW GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS FOR FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

When we came up with the City on Hill project and Muyumbu local church building plans, we were looking at decent but affordable building plans. It was a faith work that was going to be worked on as the church grew and money came in. We hoped that we could continue to use the facility we were in even as we build our own facility. We believed that God would enable us to find funds for all the building project plans over time. This thinking was not only for city on hill project and Muyumbu church building plans, but it was also for all the other church plants we were involved with around the country. They also used simple and temporal shelters available to them in their respective areas. All seemed to work well.

Then, great changes related to laws started to happen. The easier 2012 law regulating got replaced with a more demanding 2018 law, and then after few months got hardened with more requirements within the 2018 compliance law regulating faith based organizations.

The laws require a church to have at least a half hector of land in order to be recognized and offered permit. On the land there has to be a building that meets government building requirements for that type of building and it has to be checked and approved

before use. Some of the building requirements include solid building material, a sound proof system, modern toilets for both sexes, spacious parking place, garden, water catchments and recycling systems, fire control systems, lightning systems, and a place for children games.

A church can only be allowed to meet in a hall that was specifically build as a whole and certified as such.

Also, among the regulations includes the education of pastors. All the pastors have to have a bachelor's degree education to be allowed to preach and teach. A grace period that was offered expires this year of 2023 and the enforcement of the law follows.

Overnight in 2018, ten thousand churches got closed; including close to 20 of church plants. We were able to salvage one church in the village of Gahara which was started in 2007. A church can only open if it fulfills the requirements.

In addition to these requirements, a church also is expected to participate and report in role in social and development life of the country.

5. MUYUMBU LOCAL CHURCH LIFE AND HOPE FOR FUTURE.

When Muyumbu local church got closed, it was still a young church with about 130 members including children. Being placed in a new residential neighborhood without many churches, Muyumbu has a huge potential for growth and expansion. Most people who come to build and live in Muyumbu do so due to affordability of land compared to high cost of land in Kigali. These people do not have a church near where they can come to and have their families cared for. There are no churches around, and above all a good church is what people need. Muyumbu Bibleway Baptist Church is that church. If the Church is built, in addition to Muyumbu people around it; it will also serve people from the neighboring areas of Rugende, Kabuga, Mbandazi, Nyagasambu, and Nzige. A total of more than 15000 people will one or the other be impacted by this church.

For the time being, as we wait for the church to be built; the church meets regularly in members' home through a strategy we have called "family churches." Since cell meetings are not possible due to the law that forbids meetings in unregistered places; we have taught and keep encouraging church members to meet as families where whoever is the head of the family is the pastor and the family members are the church members.

In addition to meetings and visitations to leaders and families by the leaders to talk about ministry, family life, and wellbeing; Muyumbu local church uses events and celebration opportunities in the lives of church members to meet and have fellowship with one another.

One negative effect of not having a church building to meet in as corporate body is the loss of many members, failure of some people to be able to lead, a high and

uncontrolled longing for meeting with other church members, and fear that the church building will never be built.