

SOUTHOVER CHURCH

MISSION RWANDA PROJECT REPORT

This is a 'living' document to be developed by Mission Rwanda participants



Pupils at St Matthew's School, Cyangugu Diocese
(photo by Simon Hockley)

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What is Mission Rwanda?

Mission Rwanda is the name given to the initiative of Southover Church in Lewes in East Sussex to work in partnership with people and organisations in Rwanda, such as [Solace Ministries](#) in the capital Kigali and the Anglican Diocese of Cyangugu.

Solace Ministries supports women who were victims of the Genocide in 1994 and HIV/AIDS, and their children.

The Diocese of Cyangugu, in the South West of the country on the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, also supports many widows and orphans and administers many primary and secondary schools.

During the 1994 Genocide, around 1 million mainly Tutsi and moderate Hutu Rwandese were killed in 3 months in a bloody a civil war.

Mission Rwanda projects have grown to include the installation of a state of the art recording studio in Solace, house building for widows of the Genocide, health and education projects, rainwater harvesting, micro-enterprise training and eco schemes in Cyangugu. A link has also been formed with the Anglican Diocese in Kigeme in the Prefecture of Gikongoro. Importantly, it is also about listening and talking to the Rwandese people in Christian fellowship. Visits include time to acclimatise physically, emotionally and spiritually through talking and listening, and visiting Genocide memorial sites and projects run by local people.

Origins

Southover Church has been fortunate to be able build on the long history of work of Dr Richard and Prilla Rowland, who worked at a hospital at Gahini in North West Rwanda from 1973 – 1983 and have visited regularly since 2000 to conduct training courses in HIV/AIDS.

Southover Church's involvement came about following their Rector Steve Daughtery's suggestion that members of the Church could build on this work. There followed an initial feasibility visit in January 2006 by Jonathan Lamb (who was to organise visits by the larger groups to date), together with Richard & Prilla. They were accompanied by John Clarke (on behalf of Rotary) who wanted to explore the possibility of providing an autoclave at the hospital at Kigeme. After months of planning, preparation, meetings and prayer it was decided to go ahead with Mission Rwanda 1 in January 2007. To date (December 2009) there have been 5 Mission Rwanda visits which have included members from several churches. Larger groups of around 20 people have visited during January and February with smaller ones of around 6 going out during the summer. Most of the visits have been for a fortnight.



Why Bother?

What does the Bible say about our responsibility to the poor?

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. This will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour“. (ISAIAH 61:1-3)

“...look after orphans and widows in their distress...” James 1 v 27

The Christian Faith is both practical and spiritual. We can worship God in body, mind and spirit. We are commanded to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. Mission Rwanda is an opportunity for those taking part to respond to these words of Isaiah and James and to demonstrate and experience that love in practical action and fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Rwanda. We hope that all who participate will be strengthened in their faith in our God of miracles who has forgiven and redeemed us and demonstrated his love to all through the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Southover Church – The basis for its involvement

Mission Statement

As a church our mission is to be in a partnership with the people of Rwanda so that, through mutual faith sharing and service through the development of sustainable projects, we may be personally challenged and encouraged.

Strategic Aims

- Develop mission awareness and permanent relationships between Southover Church and the church in Rwanda
- Continue the ministry of Richard and Prilla Rowland in Rwanda and to build on the relationships they have developed over 25 years
- Gain an understanding of God's work in another country and in one that has experienced both Revival and Genocide
- Learn about the lessons of reconciliation and forgiveness from Rwandan Christians
- Step outside personal comfort zones and to develop skills and a sense of purpose where each individual can serve
- Provide a time for individual reflection, spiritual refreshment and personal growth
- Use the many skills available within the Southover Church family and community so that our work in Rwanda becomes all inclusive
- Use our work in Rwanda as an opportunity to bring people to faith
- Support the vision, strategy and core values of Southover Church

The Benefits

What are the benefits for Rwandans?

The feedback received suggests the following benefits:

- Recognition and care. The chance to be listened to, such that people feel better understood, to be respected and share hope is the richest benefit that many Rwandese have expressed to us
- Building relationships that are sustained by return visits and email/telephone contact in between these. These include relationships between organisations – Solace Ministry, the Diocese of Cyangugu, business people in Kigeme, the Peace Guest House, Jill Barham School, the hospital and the Mothers' Union in Cyangugu and Southover Church, as well as the many personal relationships between participants and between people of Rwanda and participants
- Rwandese people have had a chance to examine their own attitudes to understand our western rational, time controlled thinking better
- The various projects, which are a response to the needs expressed by local people to us, have been well received and have helped some Rwandese people in significant material ways

What's in it for Mission Rwanda participants?

Now that the link is in its third year and 5 groups, involving 34 people from England, have been out to Rwanda, it is easier to articulate the value of the work. Those who go invariably find that they receive far more than they are able to give.

The feedback from those who have taken part is varied and personal but some of the benefits expressed by participants are:

- Greater understanding of how God works in a developing country through hearing personal testimonies and seeing the work of the diocese
- The use of our skills and discovery of new ones is affirming of ourselves
- We are able to develop our skills in terms of how we relate to others
- It helps us to appreciate what it is to live in the moment when each day is precious
- Pushing and stretching ourselves results in greater sense of personal achievement
- It gets us out of our comfort zones
- It helps us to get a correct perspective on life and the world
- It is faith building for us
- We have made new relationships made with team membe
- It has provided a space for personal reflection in a beautiful environment
- It has given us a sense of accomplishment – we are trying to do something
- It has provided us with a way to respond to the guilt we feel as citizens of a very rich country who did too little when the Rwandese people needed out help
- Satisfaction for those organising the trips which have, so far, gone very smoothly

The Projects

1. SOLACE MINISTRIES

Summary of Solace Ministries and its work.

Solace Ministries was established in 1995 by Jean Gakwandi, a Genocide survivor, to comfort widows and orphans who had endured the trauma of the 1994 genocide in which around 1 million people were murdered.

Solace ministers to widows and orphans through:

- Comforting survivors by listening to them and providing opportunities for them to share
- Counselling and trauma healing
- Helping orphans to access formal and informal education
- Parenting
- Encouraging forgiveness through Jesus Christ
- Allowing survivors, specifically those with HIV/AIDS to receive ARV and fighting stigma by reintegration in the community through community home based care
- Teaching farming and other skills to provide individuals with more than just sustenance living

Solace Ministries is one of the 6 special charities Southover has chosen to support. Mission Rwanda teams usually spend a few days with the community based in and around Kigali, attending the Sunday worship meeting and joining some of the widows in their work on an income-generating farm.

Solace Sound Studio Project

This was a one-off project in response to a particular need.

In January 2007, Jean Gakwandi told the first Mission Rwanda group that the choir that had been formed by some of Solace's orphans, had engaged a sound studio to record their music. However, the studio had let them down, taking their fees but not providing anything in return.

16 months later, on 23rd May 2008, Rob Hoy attended the funeral of a young woman called Jo Swann at Southover Church. After the service, he chatted to one of her contemporaries, Dicken Marshall, whom he hadn't seen for 10 years and discovered that he ran his own recording studio! Recalling the sad story at Solace, he asked Dicken, tongue very much in cheek, whether he would consider helping Solace to build its own studio.

The outcome was more than anyone expected! Dicken decided that he would like to be involved, initially offering to help look at whom to target for funding, what equipment to use and to give advice about training.

In August, Rob visited Solace with the Mission Rwanda 3 group and talked through the project with Jean Gakwandi. An excellent outcome resulted with Solace and Southover working in partnership. Rob promised to raise the money required for the equipment and filming of the project and Jean undertook to provide the building. All this had to be completed within 4 months when the next Mission Rwanda team visited in January 2009 and Dicken had a window of opportunity available to carry out the installation work and training of the choir with his friend Jim Mortimore.

And so the race against time was on! Rob prepared the detailed construction plans to Dicken's specification and sent them to Jean for his contractor. In Lewes, the fundraising started in earnest. Eventually nearly £17,000 was raised to purchase the equipment and the air fares for Dicken, Jim and Kris (the film maker). About 15% of this sum came from the proceeds of 2 concerts by Dicken, Jim and their friends. Southover Church members donated nearly all of the remainder. In Kigali, Solace fulfilled their part and completed the building at a cost of £13,000.

In January the Mission Rwanda 4 team flew out with 19 boxes of equipment for which tax exemption had been negotiated with Rwandan Customs. 8 days later Dicken and Jim had completed the installation with a bit of help from John Mercer on the electrical installation.

The result was what many have said is the best professional recording studio in Rwanda!

The vision for the studio was to enable Rwandan choirs and musicians to record and produce their own music and give vocational training opportunities to those who have suffered so much as a result of the Genocide. It now provides the Choir members with training, transferable skills and job opportunities. The state of the art facilities enable the members to produce their own music to a professional, marketable standard and the recording studio has become an income generating, sustainable business. What is particularly attractive about this project is that the young beneficiaries will be able to use and develop their God-given talent to benefit Solace Ministries, the wonderful organisation that has supported them.

Following the sound studio project, Dicken was to change the focus of his career to further the cause of African musicians. He did this by setting up Rwanda's first record company 'Rafiki Records' to promote African musicians, many of whom have been denied the opportunity to record and share their music with the world.

In summary I feel this was a wonderful example of God in action – his goodness coming out of tragic circumstances, his generous provision through the financial and prayerful response of his family at Southover who worked in partnership with their Rwandan

brothers and sisters and finally, the many inspired to help who were motivated by love and a sense of justice to produce a fitting tribute to Jo, without whom it would never have happened, and to be used by those in need, to his glory!

Rob Hoy

2. EDUCATION

The Education Project is centred on Jill Barham School in Cyangugu, a residential school for some 700 girls who were in some way victims of the Genocide. These young people are now aged 14 or older. In discussion with the Headteacher at the school the focus of the support is in 2 areas:

1 Learning English. This is a high priority for the school since the Government announced in 2008 that the country was to switch from French to English as the main language. For young people this is highly significant as English is the world language for business and for the internet. We are trying to help the staff and students improve their speaking, listening and writing skills in English. On the visits there is a chance for participants to help in the classroom and we have tried to improve the skills and develop the capacity of the teachers in the school to improve their English teaching. Assistance has been given to improve the school library and some reconditioned computers have been donated. There is much more we would like to do.

2 Developing Enterprise Skills. The school is now a Business School and in January 2010 we are modelling a Business Enterprise Project (in English) with students for the school staff. This is a 3 day event where teams of students set up their own companies. It is fun and a great deal of learning can take place.

There have been 2 further initiatives to enhance the education resources at the Jill Barham School. In August 2008, the Mission Rwanda 3 team took out 7 laptop computers. Although these contained only elementary educational software, the students could practice their English and basic keyboard skills after receiving training from Iris Johnson and David Melville.

The other initiative, by Mary Hempshall, was the setting up of a library populated with books brought by Mission Rwanda teams.

Robin Precey

3. ECOLOGY

The Conservation of a Country's Biodiversity and Sustainable Development is probably more important in a Less Economically Developed Countries like Rwanda. Forecasts of climate change will hit vulnerable parts of Africa most. Also as a result of poverty and war, high pressure is put on the natural resource capacity to the point of over utilising it. For example forests can be depleted for firewood and wild animals can be poached as bush meat or trophies for display or medicines on the black market. In fact a Forest Elephant in the neighbouring Congo was declared extinct for this very reason.

At Southover we have an interest in Christian Conservation through the eco-congregation initiative - part of A Rocha's a education process in learning to care for God's Creation. The Rwandan Mission Team have multi disciplinary skills which includes many with Appropriate Technology awareness and a spirit of two way sharing with our hosts in Rwanda.

The Head Teacher at Jill Barham Secondary School in Cyangugu beside Lake Kivu on the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo has an inspiring vision to use the school grounds as an outdoor classroom. We are working with the RM Education team encouraging him to realise this aspiration to enhance nutritional and eco-tourism learning.

This area of Rwanda has the Nyungwe National Park and while it does not have the Mountain Gorillas or setting of the world famous Virunga Mountains to the North is still an area of great potential and outstanding natural beauty. Rwanda has 700 species of birds (UK about 250) and hosts the highest concentration of birds per sq' metre in Africa! One third of Africa's bird species can be found here which includes 44 regional endemics and 4 pure endemics (unique to the area).

Another example of our Sustainable Development work are our Rainwater Harvesting (see Projects -Section 6). Rwandan projects we have visited include GAKO's organic farming training centre, run by Richard Munyerango at Kabunga near Kigali; also animal husbandry and crop management at the Anglican diocese's appropriate technology site called Murangi Farm in Cyangugu. We are currently investigating the provision of a cow in line with the principles adopted by the charity 'Send a Cow'. All examples of Schumacher's Small is Beautiful.

David Melville

4. HEALTH

We have been blessed to have quite a few Nurses, Doctors, a Therapist/carer & a former lab-technician in our teams, over the years! Because of the brevity of our visits, as usual we learn much more than we contribute. Some team-members have started to engage directly, & make their own private visits to Rwanda in between formal, Mission Rwanda visits.

Curative. Ian Hempshall has been accompanying Outreach Clinics from the Dispensary at Mont Cyangugu, effectively providing GP services to patients living with HIV. Over 3 years, he started by observing the local nurses & Dr Jane Hill in action, then participating himself, & in October 2009 he filled Jane's role solo for 2 weeks.

Health Promotion. Over 3 years, HV Trainer Jeanette Clifton has been building relationships with women of the Mothers' Union, together with Mary Rwubusisi, Bishop Geoffrey of Cyangugu's wife. They have been joined by Mary Hempshall, Nurse Dot & Therapist Liz as they listened to them, participated in their meetings. Many are widows,

living with the pain of untimely bereavement during the Genocide or through HIV, & finding solace increasingly through Jesus carrying their pain. Jeanette has also been involved with others in helping at a nutrition clinic for children and babies and home visiting.

Richard & Prilla Rowland have been facilitating twice-yearly, short Training-of-Trainers Seminars for church leaders in HIV/AIDS-awareness, prevention, and care, using storytelling & drama. Space is given to address issues of pain & reconciliation arising from the ways people were infected.

Teaching In 2008, Ruth Markby put together a day-training in First Aid, delivered to healthcare staff together with Julie Philpot & Jan Hoy with many practical demonstrations & a manual. In 2009, Surgeon John Lyttle gave a series of 6 practical day-trainings in general Surgery to the 8 doctors at Gihundwe District Hospital, assisting & encouraging them in Clinics or surgical operations as they arose, including one emergency procedure. Included was 1 day-training in endoscopy at Mibilizi Hospital.

Richard Rowland

5. HOUSE BUILDING

There is a shortage of housing for widows and orphans in the Cyangugu area. It is common for widows who do have a house to take in many non-family members and for orphaned householders to be looking after several younger siblings. The Anglican Diocese has an ongoing programme of building simple houses for the many who do not have their own home.

The Mission Rwanda visits have sponsored 5 houses to date during their 4 visits between January 2007 and January 2009. About 8m x 6m on plan, they now cost about £2,000. They are of simple timber frame construction with mud walls and floor with weather boarding to protect against the rain. The roof is made from corrugated steel sheets which are deafening during heavy rain! The beneficiaries were selected by the Diocese in consultation with the community who, together, have agreed a priority list.

Participants have assisted in building 4 of these homes. The other was completed solely by local builders with money donated by Southover Church. In practice, most of the work is carried out by a local building team in liaison with Charles Semwaga, the Diocesan representative who looks after the team members. By the time the team arrive, the site has been levelled, the basic frame of the building erected and all the materials procured. All the 'heavy' and most hazardous work is done by the locals, including the roof construction and excavating the long drop by hand, often to a depth of 50 feet! The involvement of the team is limited to simple tasks such as digging holes and drainage ditches, nailing thin horizontal tree branches (similar to long hazel twigs) to the thick vertical frame posts, fixing horizontal weather boards to the outside and (perhaps the

most fun activity!) helping with the mud walls. On one occasion there was great hilarity when many local widows came to assist, forming a human 'pass the parcel' chain from the mud stockpile, with the last person in the chain passing a ball of mud through the window to those inside. There is a need to forget appearances during this activity and the only solace offered to the women is to remind them how good the mud is for their complexion!

One of the fundamental purposes of the house building project is to develop lasting, supportive relationships with vulnerable people so that they do not feel abandoned. This is demonstrated in practice by ensuring that the houses are maintained in good condition, for example, by financing repairs to the mud walls when they crack after drying out. The houses have been built for those at the top of the priority list of those in need. Bernadette was widowed in the 1994 Genocide. Although she re-married, her second husband left her and now she lives with her 6 children in the house completed by the first Mission Rwanda team in January 2007. Emeritas is an orphan looking after 5 of her siblings. Josephine fled to the DRC during the Genocide where she established her home but was forced to flee the fighting there and return to Rwanda without her children. Assumpta is not married but looks after 8 children and one old man in her new house. All of Angela's close relatives were killed in the Genocide apart from one brother, Roger. Still traumatised, she smiled with gratitude for her new house, completed in January 2009.

Rob Hoy

6. RAINWATER HARVESTING

A common sight in Rwanda is people (mostly women and children) carrying jerry cans containing water. Whilst we in the UK tend to take this essential commodity for granted, turning on a tap without thinking about it, for most Rwandans in rural communities the collection of water is an onerous daily chore which has many adverse effects, for example:

- The time spent travelling to and from the source could be put to other uses
- Long term injuries from carrying the heavy loads (full 20 litre jerry cans weigh 45lb)
- The water can be contaminated if obtained from polluted watercourses, resulting in debilitating diseases

Conversely, rainwater has a number of benefits, for example:

- It's pure and fit for drinking
- It's plentiful in many parts of Rwanda
- It can be stored at the point of use adjacent to houses
- It's free

The project teams have installed rainwater harvesting for each of the houses they have provided in Cyangugu (now in Rusizi District), using readily available materials.

Guttering is fabricated by cutting up roofing sheets which, together with rainwater pipework, are obtained from the nearby town of Kamembe. The water is stored in plastic tanks originally intended for the storage of banana beer and each tank is provided with a security enclosure.

It has also been possible to source funding for a large-scale rainwater harvesting project. This was completed for the Jill Barham Secondary School at Cyangugu in March 2009. The local water company, called Electrogaz, previously supplied all the water for the school. However, the potential saving in water rates using rainwater, rather than mains water for showering and cleaning, was estimated to be £4,000/year – a sum that could be used instead for essential educational resources. An additional environmental benefit is the reduction in power and chemicals costs required to produce and deliver the Electrogaz supply.

Rob Hoy

7. MICRO-BUSINESS

Report on Microfinance Workshop 21st to 23rd January 2009. This is recorded in full as there is so much useful information that will be of use to those working in this area.

Background

The workshop on Microfinance was planned by the diocese of Kigeme in the Rwandan province of Gikongoro which is the poorest province in the country. It was attended by Mission Rwanda team member, John Clark who gave a talk on lessons learnt through his experience as a UK businessman. The cost of running the workshop of £1000 was secured from a charity known by Richard and Prilla Rowland.

John was very keen on the idea because he felt that the solutions to poverty would come mainly from the people suffering poverty but they need the right sort of help to do it.

There were 37 people attending from most of the self help groups in the 37 parishes of the diocese. The workshop lasted 3 days and for most of that time diocesan staff Francis and Ananias was translating for John with support from Mdme Virginie, the wife of Bishop Augustine.

Day 1

On the first day the Bishop encouraged the workshop members to be positive at all times and not complain about their problems but to go out and look at what they had and make the best use of their assets.

John Clark gave a talk introducing himself as a third generation owner of a jewellery retailing business in England. He went out of his way to stress that Western Europe did not make him an expert on what was needed in Rwanda, but he felt that in spite of the vast differences between cultures he may have something to offer.

He said a top priority for people anywhere is the need to cope with change in a quickly shifting world. Britain had changed from coalmines and heavy industry 50 years ago to communications, computers, banking, insurance and financial services. He said that thousands of shops and small businesses exist, giving examples of people making money from activities that those in Africa would not think possible, such as people being paid for dog walking.

He gave the example of how his business had changed by moving from buying jewellery wholesale to buying stones and materials separately and manufacturing the jewellery themselves thereby making more profit and being more competitive at the same time. All this was understood by those attending.

John stated that poverty in Rwanda is not a curse and that over the next 50 years he would expect it to no longer exist in this country. He said this is not a hopeless dream and that every journey must start with a single step and the prime architects of overcoming poverty will be the Rwandan people themselves.

He used the saying 'even God only helps those who help themselves'.

He had other suggestions and ideas for the attendees to consider:

- The way they must start to improve their lives is by starting to earn and save from what they already do.
- It is not enough to be good and careful farmers. They must learn to be business people and make a profit from what they do.
- In my business I learned the most by observing and questioning people who seemed to be doing things better than me. This is the quickest way to learn.
- Always be grateful for what you have but do not let a little success make you lazy; it is always possible to do better.
- Think of ways of perhaps earning extra money by seeing opportunities outside agriculture. 100 to 150 years ago 90% of the British lived on the land much as people in Rwanda do now, and now less than 2% do but still produce a lot of food by using mechanisation.

In his short time in Rwanda John had already met people who had improved their lives greatly by employing their own initiative. In Cyangugu he knew a widow's son who had gone from rearing rabbits to buying a camera and selling his services as a photographer.

Eustache started his lecture by asking the workshop what were the major challenges to progress. The answers given were lack of money, lack of knowledge and skills, mismanagement, illiteracy, laziness and selfishness.

He spoke well on important practical aspects of developing the village groups, including the need to diversify from cultivating.

He mentioned the importance of trust and good foundations, likening a group to a house. The 5 pillars holding the roof are: discipline, the requirement that group members must have the financial capacity and to contribute their share, leadership and management. The roof can be compared to conflict management and good relationships.

He also spoke of discord in a group.

Veneranda is a quietly impressive 42 year old worker in the diocese who spoke of how she had some land given to her by her parents when she was younger. She grew coffee to help pay for school fees etc.

She then helped a group of women make juice from maize including organising the packaging. She had primed John the day to stress to the attendees that it's one thing to grow crops but quite another to make money out of it. She advised that the voice of experience is always the one to listen to.

She stressed the importance of kitchen gardens as a source of fresh vegetables.

She made the perceptive comment that if we look to change others we must first change ourselves.

Bishop Augustine expressed the desire not to be so much a teacher as a co-ordinator of a shared view. He spoke at length on the need to focus on self-improvement in a practical Christian way, to improve everything you do and think in terms of doing well.

He drew two examples of success out of the attending delegates.

A woman who had been in prison for 10 years from 1996-2006 had, in the short time she had been out of prison, grown sorgum to make beer and earned enough money to build herself a house.

A man had done the same and was now building his second house with a shop to sell his beer.

The bishop then broke the delegates into discussion groups on what is most needed in their village groups. Some of the conclusions that impressed John the most can be summarised as follows:

Good leadership, working together as a team, an innovative attitude, saving money for the future, to support government initiatives, health insurance, education, modern agriculture, family planning, the need to be good thinkers and good 'actioners', to plan each day, to value time, to manage saving and storing, to improve all aspects of development, to look for markets, to recognise that you do not develop if you are waiting for help.

The Bishop then spoke at length about personal development.

Day 2

On the second day, **Eustache** spoke at length about the 5 Ms to strengthen a group: Mission, Membership, Money and Monitoring and evaluation.

Francis spoke at length and well about many of the important principles that must be employed in running a business:

- If you borrow be sure you can pay it back, use your own resources to earn, work hard, no project - no income - no life. Do not waste time.
- He also spoke about some of the complications of running a family business and the necessity to separate it from the family.
- A demonstration of how business neighbours can get in a tangle if simple business practices such signing for money owed are not followed was acted out graphically by members of the group.
- When offering generosity be careful not to touch capital. There should be no emotion in business. The business must benefit the family in an organised way. All this rang very true to me with my experience in running a family business and it was something I was never taught but learned the hard way.

3rd Day

Francis talked about project planning including, as an example, John's activities in making up jewellery. Some of the advice he gave:

- Show clearly the progress of your project.
- A good project ideally needs something special that discriminates it from the competition.
- Offer a good service so people will return.
- He stressed the importance of planning every detail. Plan Plan Plan! Materials required? Land required? Fertilisers? Storage? Nursery for small plants?
- Not to start too much at once.
- Constant monitoring.
- Know how to store so family will not take things without accounting.

Concerning resource requirements, Francis said that people in Rwanda do not get enough results, count all the efforts, all the costs and time. Eg manure, running about town. The effort and costs must equal the results.

John endorsed all this strongly and added the concept of notional costs. eg if your father helps you and you do not pay him what do you do if he suddenly cannot help you? Can you afford to pay someone to replace him?

When assessing the workers required for a project, a number of questions need to be asked: How many do I need ? If you have a shop will you be there all the time? Can you go and fetch stock? Do you need help unloading?

Francis then went through a project to buy potatoes wholesale, something the delegates were familiar with. He went through everything in the greatest detail even to assessing how long a chair needed for the project would last and working out the depreciation on it.

Broad elements of the project were:

Buying 180 tons of potatoes, packing, renting vehicle, renting storage, 2 big balances(scales), 1 small balance, 4 chairs, 2 tables, 1 cupboard, 2 calculators, unforeseen materials, treasurer at HQ, treasurer at selling location, assistant treasurer, 2 watchmen

John Clark

Personal Reflections

Reflections of Jean Gakwandi, Director of Solace Ministries

A fruitful partnership for the Glory of God

1. Historical Background:

The link between Solace Ministries and South Over Church was initiated by Richard and Prilla Rowland, personal friends to the founder of Solace Ministries and a regular supporter to the ministry since 2003. The first contact at large took place in January 2006 with the visit by Jonathan Lamb.

From 2007, brethren from Southover visited Solace Ministries on a regular basis. We received them in January 2007, January 2008, August 2008 and January 2009. All these visits resulted into a special friendship and also partnership which is one of the most fruitful ones, in terms of encouragement, ministry, equipment and financial support.

2. Activities

The Southover Church was involved in various activities to help build the ministry of Solace.

1. Apart from ministering to the us and to the widows and orphans, teams participate in local visit on community level and participate in day to day activities with widows and orphans, such as cultivating in the farms or harvesting crops.

Experts have advised us in various techniques of farming and watering the plants by irrigation. The following is an excerpt from a report on their visit in 2008:

For 2 days, Monday 21 and 22, the Southover Team participated in preparing the land for the demonstration farm of Nyamata, labouring together with widows and Solace staff. Part of the team weeded and harvested the groundnuts, the other helped in digging the new acquired land for the next sowing of the agricultural season B. Their hard work was a sign of an unequalled humility, once again showing the love of God to His people, the same way Jesus came down to the earth to save us from our sorrows and sins.

The Southover Team proceeded to the blessing of the land they were digging in and also the surrounding. A wonderful joint and individual prayer time was taken as a closure to the visit to ask God to bless that land that showed lots of signs of curse over the years. Too much blood has been shed in Bugesera and the area was hit by terrible droughts over the years, resulting in frequent episodes of famine, though the local land is very fertile. A prayer of the kind was an imperative. The hope is grounded to the fact that the Cross of Jesus and the blood shed on that Cross has the power to heal Nyamata and Bugesera from the curse.

3. Support in infrastructure

Solace Ministries is building its facilities. Grants from South over enabled us to put a concrete floor in the main hall which formerly was an uncomfortable dusty place.

4. The Recording Studio

The Solace studio was a unique donation from South Over Church. When Rob and Jan told about the possibility of getting a studio at Solace, that was only a dream on our side. In fact we had been disappointed by a dishonest

producer. We find this as a tremendous sign of the great things the Lord is planning to do through us. With modern equipment, it stands up as the best recording studio in the region. High quality music has been already produced there and although it takes time, the studio is being known and will generate income for the ministry at large.

For us South Over remains instrumental to make the promises God gave us be fulfilled.

5. Stay at Solace Guest House while visiting Rwanda

We consider this as a privilege and the proceeds help us to continue our work.

6. Participation with education for Children

Some orphans at Solace have been supported by members of the South over Church for education.

Jean Gakwandi, December 2009

Personal reflections of participants

Two poems by Ian Graham

Kaleidoscope

*Praise you, Lord, for kaleidoscope:
Bright colour, bright sun, bright sound.
Thank you, Lord, for warmth:
Warm air, warm faces, warm greetings.
Praise you, Lord, for Job;
Pain and loss which turn to gain.
Thank you for Rwanda;
Valley of sadness and river of hope.*

Jesus of the Skulls

*Rows of skulls with empty eyes
Gaze on a church from a shelf.
Round the plain wooden pews piles of garments:
Once life-bright, then death-soaked, now faded.
On the altar a brown stained white cloth,
The brown all that's left of the blood.
Here the hunted expected security
Safe in the House of the Lord.
But the only incense a rain of grenades:
From God's people just hate and betrayal.*

*Are you really a God of love?
Are those empty eyes filled with accusing?
Jesus, if this is your church built on rock,
We can only accuse you and mock!*

*But over this dark church an awning,
A shelter from sun and from rain,
Images for us your sheltering wings
Over signs of repentance and hope.
Those graves now decked out with fine linen:
Can love grow from the red soil of hate?

Where were you, Jesus, in Genocide?
Did you look on in helpless despairing?
Or stand by like blue-bereted, hand-washing troops
A cold-hearted, indifferent God?
But on that stained altar of horror a cross,
Bears the same dark marks of death.
A cross that has borne all that horror;
Bleeding, naked, a curse on a tree!
Jesus, gaze with us now on those empty-eyed rows
From their death-song dance in your new life!*

Jeanette Clifton

Why did I go to Rwanda and go back again twice more? It was something I had always wanted to do since my teens and had been put on the back burner. At the time I needed new direction in my life and this certainly provides a challenge and an opportunity to get out of my `comfort zone`. I had never been to an African country before but I am fascinated by other cultures and just wanted to learn as much as I could

Initially, it felt as though I was walking through the pages of the National Geographic magazine, as the colours, smells and people of Rwanda walking along the road hit my senses. There was an immediate buzz about the country, as well as beauty and profound poverty. The warmth of the people and their outward love of Jesus is refreshing in a place where brokenness has been part of their lives through the history of the Genocide.

The experience of Rwanda has changed me in subtle ways.. Returning home is a huge culture shock when leaving behind absolute poverty and then visiting a supermarket packed with consumer goods. I am more appreciative of good roads, a National Health Service and a full food cupboard.

Coleen Jackson

Thanks to Robin Precey for his faithfulness in sharing with me his experiences in Rwanda and thanks to the inspiring words that were given to me at a Prophetic Conference at about the same time I became the interloper in the Southover Rwanda team that went in January 2009.

My background is in education and as a former Secondary Headteacher who now works in a University I hoped that my experience in education would be of some value. Our work was with Martin, Head Teacher and a small team of teachers who spoke English at the Jill Barham School. English, rather than French, had just been declared the new national language of Rwanda. The idea was to support them in terms of how they could help their colleagues to learn English and incorporate it into their lessons. Conversing with students whilst walking around the school soon meant we had a following. Everyday as we walked from Peace Guest House students would emerge to welcome us or practice their greetings. My week finished with a very moving assembly with the students; voices that are angelic; preaching to encourage and prayers that were heartfelt; a fantastic end to my visit in Rwanda.

Not to disobey God or Robin I went to Rwanda; I thought to give but I returned with more than I could have imagined.

Am I going again – YES I AM!

Gretchen Precey

I went to Rwanda because I was curious and I wanted to test myself in an environment that I imagined would be uncomfortable, hostile and outside of my experience. In the event Rwanda was none of those things and all of those things.

What was familiar was people wanting to connect, wanting to tell their story and wanting to express themselves. What was different was the openness and enthusiasm of that expression compared to us self-conscious, repressed visitors. We all slept under the same moon, we all worshipped the same God, we all needed human contact, understanding, and forgiveness. That was not different.

What I had to get used to was that all those things happened with little respect for time (i.e. punctuality) or organization or reliability. My ways were not their ways and what I had to examine was the assumption that my way was preferable (like did I really have to check my BlackBerry every two hours?)

Rwanda was exasperating, it was beautiful, it was evil, it was joyful, it had lots of soul and lots of sorrow.

Am I going back? Absolutely.

Iris Johnson

I went on the first Southover Mission to Rwanda in January 2007. On the day we left - I recall we sat on the bus and everyone was very quiet - I felt we were not quite sure what to expect. On the day after we arrived in Kigali we went to a 3 hour service and we stood at the front to introduce ourselves. Then we sang "We are marching in the light of God" and the congregation swayed and clapped. Suddenly I felt as though I was being swept from where I stood and I moved to stand with two ladies in the front row of the congregation and sang and swayed and clapped with them. We were given such a warm welcome by everyone.

A few days later we travelled by minibus to Cyangugu where we helped to build a home for a widow and some orphans. Later we went down to the lake beside the Peace Guest House and some went in for a swim. There were some African boys with a boat and Prilla asked them if they would take some of our group out for a trip on the lake, and they agreed. I wasn't going to go, as I'm not a good swimmer but Steve Daughtery said "Come on Iris you've come here to move out of your comfort zone". So Mary Hempshall, Nick Bird, Bill Cronk and I decided we'd go. As I got into the boat it was very unsteady and rocked from side to side. I screamed, as I thought the water, which was very near the edge of the boat, was going to come in. I held on to Mary. Then we discovered the boat was leaking and we had to keep emptying the water. I was really frightened. The views of the hills leading down to the lake were just amazing and there was a beautiful sunset.

It was only after I arrived back in Lewes and saw a video of the group in the boat, that I realised one of the young African boys was holding my arm to comfort me when I was screaming!

Ian Hempshall

What particularly impressed me is the way the Rwandans have no separation between the mundane and the spiritual. Everything they do is wrapped in prayer and has spiritual significance. Every journey or activity is naturally preceded by prayer. As I helped to hoe a field in the village of Nyamata, where two and a half thousand people were killed as they took shelter in the church, I felt I was helping convert something cursed and deserted into something resurrected and blessed.

After we had finished the cultivation on the second day we had an impromptu service in the field. Two roots were presented: one was of a particularly vicious thorn that we had great difficulty in digging up out of the field; the other was a manioc plant, a blessed plant that survives even in bad drought years. Two pieces of wood tied together were our cross and it was explained how the innocent blood shed on the land had been a curse, just as the blood of Abel in the Bible. The curse was then very graphically removed by one of the young men running off the estate carrying the root and hurling it away.

I was really challenged by the Rwandans as to how I lived my life. They have a great sense of community and were willing to share with anyone all that they had and would often take orphans into their already poor homes. I was made a richer person from their examples.

Julie Philpott

My impressions of Rwanda are many, varied and of mixed emotions and memories. Memories of hundreds of children walking to school in their uniforms looking smart and well-behaved and hardly an adult in sight. Memories of taxis in the shape of motor-bikes, with the passengers riding side saddle. Not so good memories of country roads with lots of mud and potholes and of squatting on turines. Memories of a beautiful countryside, hills, lakes and heavy thunderstorms, especially at night, which made one realise how awesome God is in the huge claps of thunder and bright lightning.

But my greatest memory was of the people. Ladies who we met in the street, maybe with a child on her back and one on each hand. Her said eyes suggested a lot of hurt, maybe violence and possibly HIV, yet if you made eye contact and smiled at her she may spontaneously smile back with a beautiful smile and hold out her arms for a hug, as though greeting a long lost friend. Memories of the children who had never seen the bubbles and balloons I brought, chased them until they burst and then could not understand where they had gone.

I feel very privileged to have gone to Rwanda to meet such beautiful people who have such a mature faith in God and rely on Him in ways that we, the affluent, cannot begin to imagine.

Karin Pett

The main reason for us being asked to go to Rwanda was so that we could share fellowship and our story of loss with people who had suffered far more than we had. In October 2004 our youngest daughter, Emily, died of cancer aged 9. Often people in Africa think that we in the West never have to go through suffering and we hoped it would be beneficial for us to share our story.

There are many shared experiences of Mission Rwanda, some of which will no doubt be expressed by others, but what I would like to share is our very personal experience of, courage, compassion and the love of Christ shown by the people we met.

Martin and I, spoke about Emily and our wish to share our story and fellowship with our brothers and sisters at a church service at Solace. When we said about Emily's death there was an audible gasp from the whole congregation. When Bernice from Solace prayed for us I could see that tears were running down her face. It transpired that she had lost her husband, three sons and two daughters who were both raped in the Genocide. She had also been badly beaten and spent three months hiding in the forest with surviving child who was then just 18 months old. This was so moving that someone who had been through so much still had the compassion and love to feel for us who had suffered nowhere near as much as she had. Her faith and love of Christ, as well as assistance from Solace has got her through. This has helped Martin and I tremendously on our faith journey and in helping us to come to terms with our own personal loss. We went on this trip thinking that we had a lot to give; there is no doubt that we received a lot more than we could ever have given ourselves. The people of Rwanda may be materially poor but are spiritually very rich.

Martin Pett

Once we had decided to take part in Mission Rwanda, I started to think about how I could best use my skills and experience as part of the project. My background is in Horticulture and environmental work. Given that 90% of the population of Rwanda are subsistence farmers I was sure that I could be of some help, even if it was only encouragement for existing projects.

Through some of my contacts in the Horticultural world I was able to find out about various schemes that are in progress in Kigali & Cyangugu. First of all a colleague of mine who runs the Horticultural Correspondence college sent me a copy of the Tropical Agriculture course so with a lot of perseverance I was able to give myself a basic knowledge of the crops grown in Africa.

I am also a member of the Sussex Branch of the International Tree Foundation, they support a number of tree nurseries in various parts of Rwanda including one in Cyangugu, right next door to the Peace Guest House where we were staying, I was able to have a good look at this nursery, being shown round by Valentine, who is one of the Cyangugu Diocese project managers. These nurseries grow a range of fruit trees such as Mango's, Lemons and other citrus fruits, papaya and passion fruit amongst others as well as trees that can be used for agroforestry. This gives a canopy of shade under which other crops can be grown, but these trees can also provide timber, firewood, medicines and animal fodder as well as helping to stabilize the soil. Most of these plants are given to community projects or sold at reasonable prices to help fund other diocese projects. We bought some plants, passion fruit and lemons which we then planted alongside the houses that Mission Rwanda had constructed, hopefully to give the family some food to help fight malnutrition but also to give something to sell at market.

On my return I was able to persuade the Lewes and District Garden Society to fund this nursery for a year.

An organisation I had come across prior to going to Rwanda was 'Send A Cow', that supports agricultural projects in Africa. Some of us visited GAKO, a training centre just outside Kigali that is helped by Send A Cow. During my visit I saw many methods of growing, these included bag gardens, keyhole or Kitchen Gardens, double dug beds and seedling nurseries. These are all ways of making the most of the soil. I was most impressed by a three storey animal shed; goats were kept on the ground floor, rabbits and chickens for eggs on the middle floor and broiler or meat chickens at the top, this means that a lot of animals can be kept in a small space.

On return to the UK, I had been so impressed with what I saw at GAKO that I became a volunteer Ambassador for "Send A Cow" to raise the charities profile and attempt to raise money for training projects.

Mary Hempshall

An overall impression was the friendliness of the Rwandan people. They have experienced so much hardship and heartache, and yet they are ready with a smile. We visited a farm and watched while the women harvested groundnuts and mulched pineapples, and the men hoed a large field. It was explained to us that the people had been through so much trauma during the Genocide that many of them felt that life was not worth living. However, when people like us travel 5000 miles just to be with them, their lives have worth once again. To hear that statement was so humbling.

One of our tasks was to build a house for a widow, Josephine. I came outside after a session of slinging mud on the wall frame, with a glove, a hand and two boots covered in sticky mud!! Josephine proceeded to clean my glove with a stick. A little boy started to clean my hand, also with a stick. Josephine shook her head and whispered something to him, and he dropped the stick, picked up a banana leaf from the ground and carried on with his task. At the same time, my boots were being cleaned. I felt really pampered.

Rwandan people give quality time to each other. Someone has said: "The Europeans have the watches, but the Africans have the time!" That is so true. The European pace of life is frenetic; we can learn some valuable lessons from the inhabitants of the "land of a thousand hills.

David Melville

What made my trips to Rwanda a special experience was their contribution to my faith journey. I was prepared to be out of my 'comfort zone' and certainly expected to receive more than I could possibly give. However I was not prepared for the emotional effect brought on by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to be so abundant! On a daily basis I had tears welling up inside which were of joy as often as sorrow.

Examples of Joy were being in the company of hundreds of orphans at Jill Barham Secondary School and hearing them sing despite their privations and basic boarding school accommodation and food and with a monsoon rattling on the tin roof for extra effect! Their dancing display and harmonies put on especially for us was what can only be described as heavenly. Equally there was emotion and empathy for Genocide survivors such as Emmanuel, who, at the Murambi Memorial site, told us that he was one of four who survived out of 50,000. He himself lost all 49 members of his family.

I believe my faith was strengthened by such experiences and working with people in Rwanda at the sharp end of life. They demonstrated faith that was truly biblical, in that hope and faith were all they had, but so precious some would say it was worth more than diamonds or gold. Be prepared that God will use you in unexpected ways!

John Clark

This is a brief story of my visits to Rwanda in 2006, 2008 and 2009

My involvement with Rwanda started through my membership of Rotary. Richard and Prilla Rowland came along to one of our meetings and spoke of their work with Aids education workshops in Rwanda.

My club, the Rotary Club of Lewes Castle pledged £5000 to provide a mobile Aids testing unit in Kigeme Diocese in a fairly remote part of South West Rwanda.

I decided to go out to Rwanda in January 2006 to see the results of our funding. I was impressed with what I saw there. I was taken to a remote hospital at a place called Kaduha to see testing taking place. On that occasion 70 to 80 people were tested and I also saw training on how to avoid aids taking place. I have a note that between 14th May 2005 and 2nd November 2005 1205 people were tested of whom 69 were found to be HIV positive. The final number tested was much more than this, about 3000 from memory. The people who are found to be positive are put on anti retroviral drug, paid for by the government, which take away the symptoms of aids and allow people to live normal lives. I remember visiting a widow who had been housed by the diocese. When she was brought in she weighed 20 kilos, when I saw her she weighed 50 kilos and was able to live a full life looking after her child.

On a subsequent visit to Kigeme I was taken round the 140 bed hospital there and the blackened autoclave they used. This is an essential instrument used to sterilise surgical instruments and linen. My Rotary Club raised the £5000 for a replacement to be flown out from England. I was privileged to attend a seminar on micro finance, funded by a charity in England. This was organised by Bishop Augustin and his staff at Kigeme and I was impressed with the quality of the instruction to local people encouraging them to start money making projects. There were people attending who were already successful.

This Lewes Castle Rotary Club sent £1000 to the hospital for their charity to help people who cannot afford to pay for treatment.

Over the course of my visits my involvement with the members of Southover Church has been a real bonus. I have found their company very rewarding spiritually and now regard the people I have gone with as my friends. I have joined in with their house building projects and by sharing their experiences learned about the tremendous courage of the Rwandan people in overcoming the unspeakable events of the 1993 Genocide. During my 2006 visit I went to the North of the country to see the gorillas and the east to visit the Akagero National Park, travelling on my own encountering nothing but friendliness. All in all my Rwandan experiences have enriched my life considerably.