

ENDORSEMENT FROM KIREHE MAYOR FOR CLINIC

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November-December Reports from John Rutsindintwarane Lutheran Church of Rwanda

A significant milestone in efforts of villagers in Mumya to build their clinic was reached at the end of December when Mayor Patrick Nkunuzwami of Kirehe committed \$7,000,000 Rwanda francs (about \$14,000 US) toward building the clinic villagers are pushing for and agreed to provide 200 iron sheets for construction of the storehouse. In addition, he agreed to write a letter of recommendation that would open doors to government offices at the national level for consideration of funding.

After two milestone meetings in November and December, Mumeya villagers are inches closer to having a clinic in their remote village, thanks to their strategic planning, training, and persistence. The need for a clinic had emerged from hours of one-on-one interviews and discussions among the villagers dating back to last summer. The recent training prepared ten village leaders to meet Nov 8 with the mayor, so as to state their well-researched case for having a clinic in Mumeya--primarily to cut down loss of life among pregnant women and newborns--and to press him for information on possible funding sources from both governmental and nongovernmental sources. Although at the end of that meeting the major funding issue remained unresolved, the mayor did promise 200 iron sheets of roofing for the storehouse being built to hold building supplies for construction of the clinic. The mayor also agreed to meet with the committee again if needed.

Meanwhile, 300 men and 154 women had continued to split rocks for the clinic's foundation. They also cut down and delivered 30 trees for construction of the storehouse.

On Dec. 16 John met privately with the mayor, pressed him further on possible sources of funding and asked his advice on approaching the national government and nongovernmental organizations for funding. The mayor agreed to meet with the committee on Dec. 23. At that meeting, the community thanked him for donating iron sheets for roofing and again asked how to go about obtaining funding from the District, from NGOs, or from the central government. He responded that the District did not have sufficient funds for the entire project (estimated to be about \$108,000 US), but he did pledge 7,000,000 Rwanda francs (about \$14,000 US) toward construction costs and agreed to write a letter of recommendation to facilitate further requests for funding from other sources.

Earlier the mayor commended the committee for their careful preparation and for providing him with essential information. He commented to John, "I find this method is better than preaching the word of God at the pulpit...I am afraid many ...preach but do not know how to integrate what they preach into daily life."

In other events, John left inquiries with Simon Ntare, former Member of Parliament, and with the Office of the President for their ideas on whom to contact to facilitate additional

funding. He worshipped with villagers at Catholic and Lutheran churches, updated villagers on the organizing process, and listened to their advice. He also joined the community to plant 250 trees at the site of the proposed clinic.

MINISTER OF HEALTH PROVIDES SUPPORT

Another victory was gained at a meeting of Rwandan bishops called by the Minister of Health, who asked the bishops how their churches could help to improve public health. Representing the LCR, John described how the community of Mumeya was mobilizing to find the resources to build a clinic. After the meeting, the Minister congratulated John on the work in Mumeya and agreed to supply an ambulance for the clinic after it is built. (The current ambulance service consists of four people walking in all weather, carrying the patient on a stretcher 30 km to the nearest clinic.) The minister agreed to meet with the Mumeya community if needed.

Noting the conspicuous absence of Catholic bishops from the Minister's meeting, which had including family planning on its agenda, something the Catholic bishops oppose, John encouraged the eleven Protestant bishops present to continue to work together with Catholics whenever possible because "we have a lot to learn from one another."

LUNCH WITH RICK WARREN

Back in Kigali, Robin and John responded to Rick Warren's invitation to lunch, to celebrate the translation of Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, into Kinyarwanda. John again took the opportunity to inform Rick Warren and other church leaders present about the community organizing work being done at Mumeya.

VISITORS FROM PICO, OAKLAND

Also in Kigali, John met friends and mentors Fa. John Baumann and Ron Synder, from People Improving Community through Organizing (PICO), of Oakland, California, who were spending 10 days in Rwanda to review John's organizing work. Among the things they discussed were the following:

- *Consulting with experts on the current workings of the Rwandan political system
- *Sharpening ability to ask questions
- *Creating a list of people to learn from
- *Finding out what the government of Rwanda wants; building relationships
- *Learning who gets approval and for what kinds of projects
- *Sharing with churches the PICO model for organizing
- *Continuing to conduct one-on-one listening sessions to find out how people assess their own communities

John set up meetings for Fa. Baumann and Ron Synder with community and government leaders in Kigali, including Protaise Musoni, Minister of Local Government, whom John had first met in 1995 when Protais was a local government official in Kibungo. John, then a pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania on his first trip to

Rwanda, had contacted Musoni to arrange for the repatriation of what may have been the first Hutus to move back to Rwanda from Tanzania following the genocide. Musoni helped facilitate the safe return of the mother and young daughter to their home, thereby paving the way for others to follow. Musoni now holds a national position overseeing local government. (One of his former positions was Minister of Good Governance, in which he provided oversight and ombudsman services between local people and all levels of government.)

During this period John also shared with the Lutheran Church of Rwanda's executive committee the importance of community organizing within the LCR. He demonstrated the PICO model to participants and showed how it had been transforming and empowering people in Mumeya to deal with the issues around them.

NOTE: In 2005 John had received funding from the ELCA to work with PICO as an intern at their agency in Oakland, California. This experience proved to be an excellent practical follow-up to his academic work in Theology and Development, which he had just completed at Wartburg Seminary.

Goals for 2007:

1. Bring the Mumeya community's faces in front of the public authority; push for funds
2. Train more leaders in how to research the issues and do strategic planning
3. Build relationships at all levels
4. Aim for 80% participation in making blocks for the walls
5. Build the clinic walls
6. Maintain communication with all stakeholders
7. Create strategies to fund the cost of operations
8. Expand one-on-one conversations to more government authorities in Kirehe and in Kigali
9. Make operations and methods of Congregations Rebuilding Community in Rwanda (John's own NGO) understandable to people interested in making a difference in their churches
10. Share knowledge with more churches
11. Inform more religious leaders in Kirehe and Kigali about community organizing
12. Begin organization efforts in the Kigali parish