

Genocide survivors striving to heal Rwanda

**FAITH
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WORKS**
Peter Smith



Fifteen years ago this month, the assassination of Rwanda's president unleashed genocide in that African nation, claiming at least half a million lives in just 100 days.

Now, some of the survivors are spending the rest of their lives trying to heal the devastation.

One of them, David Bucura, has been visiting Louisville and other American cities this month, speaking about the efforts he and others have been making ever since to bring healing and reconciliation to Rwanda.

"If you want a good future country," he said, "we need to work with young people."

"The former leaders (of Rwanda), they used the young people to destroy," he added, "they used the young people to kill."

Bucura spoke at a luncheon gathering this week at the Peace Education Program at Central Presbyterian Church, which teaches conflict resolution skills to youths, their teachers and other mentors. Bucura is a Quaker and a teacher and pastor in the Evangelical Friends Church in Rwanda.

He has helped teach conflict resolution and inter-religious cooperation in Rwanda -- efforts that have received assistance from Louisville volunteers.

The genocide -- ignited almost immediately after the president's assassination on April 6, 1994 -- came during a time of severe economic and environmental stress on Rwanda.

The nation's Hutu-led majority, using radio propaganda, incited mobs that used machetes, clubs and other blunt instruments to target the Tutsi minority as well as many Hutus. Bucura himself, a Hutu, lost several siblings to the genocide.



Activist David Bucura helps teach conflict resolution and interfaith cooperation in an effort to heal Rwanda.

He said it's difficult for survivors to forgive killers, but the nation had little choice but to seek reconciliation given the tens of thousands of perpetrators.

And he has sympathy for some of the killers, whom he said were forced to kill by the ringleaders.

In grass-roots courts known as gacacas, killers who confess their deeds and ask forgiveness have been reconciled with survivors, he said.

"We saw people asking forgiveness," Bucura said. "We saw people give forgiveness."

This is Bucura's second visit to Louisville.

In 2007, he and several others received training in mediation skills from the Peace Education Program, which is based at Central Presbyterian Church.

This man is a great peace-maker," said Eileen Blanton, executive director of the program.

"The work he's done in the aftermath of genocide is incredible," she said. "We could learn a lot from him about what it takes to rebuild community."

Last year, Bucura and other Christian and Muslim leaders in Rwanda formed a Center for Interfaith Relations, modeled on Louisville's organization of the same name, after training sessions with its then-director, Jan Arnow.

Arnow is returning to do further training in Rwanda and its war-torn neighbor, Congo, "not to do the work for them but to help them do the work."

You'll have another chance to hear Bucura speak in Louisville on Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Christ Church Episcopal Cathedral, 421 S. Second St. Admission is free.

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