



# SEEDS

June 2007

GOOD NEWS *Associates*

13730 15th Ave NE , A302, Seattle, WA 98125

[www.goodnewsassoc.org](http://www.goodnewsassoc.org)

---

## BURUNDI: CENTERED IN THE HEART OF GOD

By John Braun

“Africa just happens to you,” I said. It was my attempt to calm a group of nine work camp members traveling to Burundi from two Washington churches this past April as the initial experiences associated with being in Africa began to overwhelm them. The sights, sounds, smells, urban density and swarms of people. The people! People walking along the sides of country roads, people riding bicycles or pushing them, loaded with hundreds of pounds of agricultural products. Each new experience unsettled more of our cultural assumptions.

We flew into Bujumbura, on the shore of Lake Tanganyika, where we spent two nights at the Swedish mission guest house. Burundi’s capital looks across the longest lake in the world to the eastern mountains of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Lake Tanganyika is 416 miles long, with 12,355 square miles of surface and depths to 4,823 feet, host to 214 species of native fish and borders on 4 countries. Our Sunday morning worship was with 700 people and 5 choirs at the Kamenge Friends Church, where you can still see machine gun bullet holes in the metal roof, remnants of the murderous Hutu-Tutsi clash that took 300,000 lives in this country in 1993. On Monday we motored eastward, up out of the Western Great Rift Valley to Gitega in the center of the country and our work site, at an elevation of about 5,000 feet. Nights were cool, thunder storms floated over and stopped our work a few times and everything was lush and green, with crops of many kinds.

We had come to Burundi to help construct a chapel/training hall building for Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS). But in addition to this project, we took advantage of the landscape to build an amphitheater with native quarry stone that was trucked in. The amphitheater sits at the top end of a ravine which runs through the property as it slopes down hill toward a river. The view is stunning, across to the hills beyond the river and the mountains



The amphitheatre takes shape. Photo courtesy John Braun.



David Niyonzima in his garden.  
Photo courtesy of Lorraine Watson.

behind them. Something about it gave the feeling of being at the center of the earth. We set stones to form a barely perceptible cross in the middle of a circular flagstone stage. Knowing that the heart of the cross is Jesus, we imagined healing spreading out through the many THARS listening centers in Burundi, on to Rwanda and Congo, through the continent and beyond to the world, as God continues to reconcile all people and all things. The theme of forgiveness and reconciliation at THARS is forging a new peaceful future, not just for Africa but for all of us.

Our presence there and the reality of us doing dirty, physical work completely surprised many locals. They had never seen white people work like this. We were outnumbered by THARS staff and many other locals were so impressed that they volunteered to help. If they helped, they also got to share in the noon and evening meals. When we offered to show up for an all-community work party on a Saturday morning, it became the occasion for some team members to meet the President of Burundi. He used our participation to promote volunteerism in his televised address, which was aired on the evening news.

On the following Sunday afternoon, we visited the location where THARS President and Founder David Niyonzima's pastoral trainees were slaughtered and buried during the ethnic violence in 1993. He told the story of this incident in detail, including God's clear call for him, the only survivor, to embark on this work of promoting forgiveness and reconciliation.

According to David, development of this vital service has been helped by a 3-year USAid grant, including a cross-country, 4-wheel drive, 9-12 passenger Toyota van that some of us rode in. However, a crisis was looming. The three-year grant runs out this September. Facing a drastic loss of income, relocating the THARS headquarters to the land granted in Gitega is urgent. David had been praying intensely for this work camp to happen.

After the work project, on the way back to Bujumbura, David mentioned that the van belonged to USAid and he wanted us to pray that it might be granted outright to THARS. We agreed and prayed for that to happen. A few minutes after unloading us at the guesthouse, David returned to report that he had just received a phone call to bring the van to the USAid office on Monday. The USAid staff wanted to check it out, put a value on it and donate it to THARS.

Once again, we were reminded that we were in the midst of miracles and people who believe in them. From the team members' perspective, what we gave was small in comparison to the riches of culture, community, faith and hope given to us.



A member of the work team, Patty Federighi, with the THARS van. Photo courtesy Lorraine Watson.



John Braun, a GNA Board member, is the pastor of Wenatchee Brethren-Baptist Church United in Wenatchee, WA. He is a theologian, counselor and businessman. His heart is prophetic, his vision is global and his actions are entrepreneurial. He can be reached at [johnwbbc@nwi.net](mailto:johnwbbc@nwi.net).

To subscribe or unsubscribe to *SEEDS*, click here:

[www.goodnewsassoc.org/seeds.html](http://www.goodnewsassoc.org/seeds.html)