



## On the ground in Rwanda

### *Board members receive warm welcome at Rwinkwavu School*

The children were singing, dancing and drumming with all their hearts. Hundreds were present and their energy was palpable. They circled around their three visitors in jubilant celebration, even encouraging the “Muzungus” (westerners)

to join them in dance. The children’s gratitude for their school could not be contained.

More than 600 students were part of the celebration at the official announcement of Grace Rwanda’s partnership with the Rwinkwavu School. In addition to music and dancing, the March 26 ceremony also included speeches. “Each speaker was so grateful for what Grace Rwanda has done,” says Franco Bordignon, Grace Rwanda’s Vice Chair. “I didn’t think we had done that much, but that’s not the way they saw it.”

The school that Grace Rwanda is helping to build has 1300 students, with half studying in the morning, and half studying in the afternoon. All of the kids walk to school; there are no buses or parents dropping off their kids. Franco met one boy whose trip to and from school is 15 km. The dedicated student starts walking to school at 5 a.m.

Franco traveled to Rwanda with Elizabeth Mujawamaliya Johnson, co-founder of Grace Rwanda and a Rwandan genocide survivor, and her husband Paul, the president of the organization. The welcome celebration in their honour,

*The students were able to start taking classes indoors before the start of the rainy season*

which was broadcast on the Rwandan National News, was just one of the highlights from their three weeks in Rwanda.

During the trip, the board members saw the eight classroom additions that Grace Rwanda funded for the school. Although the rooms still lack some finishing touches, the students were able to start taking classes indoors before the start of the rainy season.

A Community Service Day was organized on April 3 to complete the sidewalks around the new addition. Grace Rwanda funds were used to purchase the sand and gravel and to pay the cement masons. The rest of the labour force were student and parent volunteers. Young students teamed up to carry buckets of water and sand, beaming at the thought that they were helping build their school.

Another purpose of the trip was to meet with Rwinkwavu civic leaders, the school principal



Clockwise from left: Rwinkwavu students enjoying a new classroom; dancers from the welcome ceremony; students at the ceremony - both Rwandan and Canadian flags were waving all morning.

and teachers. They discussed the community’s needs and how Grace Rwanda could continue to assist them. The school’s 1940s kitchen was recently demolished due to safety concerns, and a small temporary one currently takes its place. Most of the children receive only one meal a day, provided by the school. A kitchen will be one of the next Grace Rwanda partnership projects. The board members also met with Rwandan government and labour leaders. They spoke to representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition to discussing plans to help Rwandan communities,

*Continued from front.*

plans to promote genocide awareness in Canada were also formulated. (Sneak preview: This year's first-ever Miss Rwanda, coincidentally named Grace, may visit while on an American tour this summer.) Additionally, meetings with the Rwandan Development Board and a Coffee Co-op representing 1000 farmers may lead to direct Rwandan imports for Grace Rwanda to sell for fundraising.

Finally, the board members needed to finalize

an agency contract while in Rwanda, appointing a Grace Rwanda agent to be in charge of operations in the country. Franco, Elizabeth and Paul are pleased to announce that Apollinaire Kayumba, Elizabeth's brother-in-law will take this position. Having an agent on the ground will bring Grace Rwanda one step closer to gaining charitable status, and will keep opening doors for Grace Rwanda to continue impacting post-genocide communities.

## Defying death

### *Grace Rwanda's Franco Bordignon reflects on life after the genocide*

I had a difficult time imagining 258,000 people buried in one location. Standing at the Genocide Memorial and burial site in Kigali, my mind just stopped thinking.

The museum at the memorial had two rooms. One had hundreds of pictures of everyday people that were killed. The second room honoured

the children of the genocide. Large portraits lined the walls,

*I have a difficult time imagining 258,000 people buried in one location*

each accompanied by plaques describing their favourite toys, best friends and how they died. I had to leave the room without finishing them all. The violence is unfathomable.

I'm on the board of Grace Rwanda, and before this trip, I had never been to Rwanda. As I stepped off the plane in Kigali, I only knew to expect the unexpected. I never expected to find so much life in the aftermath of so much death. Nyamata Genocide Memorial used to be a Catholic Church. Ten thousand men, women and children sought refuge here when the violence erupted. Now their clothes lie in neatly folded stacks on the benches where people once sat and prayed. A statue of Mary hanging on the wall looks down at the scene.

Behind the church is another mass burial ground. A woman walked out from the underground tomb; she was in charge of keeping it clean. Every day she'd descend among the re-

mains of 48,000 people to sweep the floor. I was told later that all her children and most of her extended family are down there.

Elizabeth, our co-founder, and I were invited into the tomb. We walked down a narrow corridor lined with caskets and shelves of human skulls bearing obvious impact from machetes

and clubs. I was last to leave the tomb. I couldn't comprehend

my situation at the time, and it was not an overly emotional experience; there was a strange sense of peace.

Nothing is as I expected. Peace inhabits places of violent death; remorse outweighs revenge. The courts couldn't try everyone for the million murders of the genocide, so justice moved into community tribunals based on reconciliation. I heard of one story of a man who asked a woman to forgive him for killing all her children and chopping off part of her arm. Now they are friends and co-workers.

Stories like this are told like they're no big deal. Genocide survivors have no choice but to move on, and the country's leadership has followed suit. I can't think of any other nation in history that has taken such deliberate steps toward healing. The brutal events of 1994 put Rwanda on the map, but the country should be recognized for its strength and determination to be reborn.



## Who's who at Grace Rwanda

President  
**Paul Johnson**

Founders  
**Elizabeth Johnson**  
**Marie Louise Kaligirwa**

Vice Chair  
**Franco Bordignon**

## Our mission

Grace Rwanda supports sustainable community development by meeting the needs of Rwandan children and youth, giving them the tools to reciprocate further development by educating themselves and others.

## Contact us

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Grace Rwanda Society is a  
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