



Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration

Testimony of Madame Marguerite Barankitse

Joint Commemoration of the Reformation

"We are the builders of Hope"

When the civil war broke up in Burundi back in 1993, I decided to adopt 7 children and that was the beginning of a mission. When the genocide began I hid these and other 25 children orphaned by the genocide. "I didn't know what to do," "But then I heard a voice of hope."

We refused the fratricide hatred, to create compassion. We rejected fate, to create creativity.

Yes, step by step, our organization *Maison Shalom* (House of Peace) built itself thanks to the faith and triumphant confidence in Providence. It was created to light a candle in the middle of the darkness; to console, reconcile and restore the hope to children who had lost everything. There is nothing utopian in that which was begun, but all was done in the conviction that **"The hatred never has the last word."**

I decided to gather the orphan children to love and educate them, to see them grow up and, through them, build a new generation that can break this cycle of violence.

Today, those children of 23 years ago, have grown up, raised their own families, and now we form a solid team to switch on this light of the hope. It is with this message that we broke indifference and dared to reconstruct our community and our country with various emergency programs, which later became community development programs. Thousands of children have passed through us, most of them have witnessed atrocities and many have lost their parents or became separated from them.

We were not able to keep silent when we saw a policeman firing at point-blank range on an innocent child who knelt down on the ground despite all the risks.

Today, the situation has become very dangerous. There have been death threats and even attempted assassinations have become daily occurrences. We therefore took the path of exile in Rwanda where we accompany our brother and sister refugees. We try to encourage them to remain stand up as God has created us.

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“Everyone thinks I am mad and that I have lost my reason—even my family! I say yes, I am mad, but you are mad too because you have started to kill. Who has lost their reason more—someone who is killing or someone who is trying to save lives?”

Allow me, before concluding my message to express to you my profound gratitude, especially those who understood that our sublime mission in this world “is to distribute HAPPINESS.”

Still, I dream. “With each of our dreams we advance humanity.”

Thank you.