

## In the Shadow Burundi

It has been an incredible week! Etienne (aka Papa Timo) and I flew from Rwanda to Bujumbura, Burundi. It's only a 40 minute flight. They are neighboring countries (and small ones at that), but coming into the country by the airport is a lot less hassle than the land borders.

We were met at the airport by Expert Bukene, leader of the Church of the Brethren Burundi. I first became aware of Expert in early fall of 2021 after learning of him from one of our Congo pastors who is working in Burundi. In October, Expert came to Rwanda to meet with me, Etienne and Ron Lubungo (Congo).



The picture shows Expert Bukene, his wife Agnes and four daughters - Gae, Karen, Neela and Asley. Agnes is a sweet lady with tremendous musical talent. She is an awesome worship leader. The girls all sing in the choir and worship team.

After arriving in Burundi last week, we had a sharing time with a group of COB pastors and visited several churches. There are 49 congregations at present. Many of the churches are very small and few of them have very good buildings. One of them only had 4 mud brick walls with no roof.

But the energy and enthusiasm is contagious. Worship times are filled with singing and dancing. There is inspired preaching and a commitment to learning "the Brethren way."

The "home church" is in Bujumbura. It is, in my opinion, a clunky sort of structure. The front section will eventually have three floors for offices.



You step across a ditch to come into the front door, the floor has a step down for each row of chairs. The pulpit is at the top of a half dozen or so steps that the choir/worship team can sing from.



They refer to the building as their cathedral. Alongside it, the church operates a small store of produce, groceries and household items.



They also operate a medical clinic that I found rather impressive. There is a dispensary, consultation rooms, minor surgery, even a birthing room. Not fancy, but great to see.



Among the other churches that we visited we met sisters and brothers encouraging us in America to pray for them. I didn't hear requests for money (except from the children, who probably would have been even happier if I gave them candy). They don't have much, but gladly share it. Check out the chicken dinner we had on Sunday! Two roasted roosters - they rode home with us in the back seat, a gift from one of the rural churches. Sitting pretty, majestically draped with spaghetti noodles and resting in a bed of rice, beets, and hard boiled eggs.



The meal included 50 kg of rice and 40 kg of beans. And there were no leftovers to put away!

There are lots of conversations yet to be held before the group is officially recognized as part of the global Brethren community. I just find it so amazing that these folks have come this far since 2015, when Expert was given the book "A Dunker Guide to Brethren History" and started a church with what he had read.

In the next post, Lord willing, I'll talk about agriculture and some of the exciting things that are happening in that realm.

For the Master, Chris Elliott with the Church of the Brethren Burundi