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CHICAGO (ELCA) -- Rebuilding a nation divided by civil war and genocide has been a 14-year struggle for the people of Rwanda. The Rev. John Rutsindintwarane, general secretary, Lutheran Church of Rwanda (LCR), outlined progress of a planned hospital in the rural community of Mumeya, Rwanda, and the training that locals are undergoing to obtain the skills to run meetings, plan finances and hold governmental leaders accountable.

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Rwandan Civil War began in October 1990, when the exiled Rwandan Patriotic Front attempted to overthrow the government. Peace accords were signed in August 1993, but a genocide of the Tutsi people of Rwanda by the Hutu-led government ensued from April to July 1994. About 800,000 people were killed, and nearly 2 million refugees were relocated to neighboring countries, BBC said.

Rutsindintwarane worked with Lutheran World Federation (LWF) following the genocide, assisting refugees in the resettlement process. LWF set up two shelters in Rwanda -- Bukora and Ndego -- for people waiting to return home. "I was a volunteer interested in integrating peace-building and community development with the Word of God," Rutsindintwarane said. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and LCR are members of LWF.

Rutsindintwarane has served as a pastor within the LCR since its formation in 1995. He graduated from Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, in 2005 and is based in Kigali, Rwanda. Wartburg is one of eight seminaries of the ELCA.

After completing his degree, Rutsindintwarane felt called back to Rwanda. "I saw my Christians going back, returning home," he said. "Imagine a shepherd leaving his sheep alone. I had to go and tend the sheep that God had given me."

Upon his return, Rutsindintwarane used his experience as a community organizer with People Improving Communities through Organization (PICO), Oakland, Calif., to train locals in Mumeya in finances and accountability. PICO is a national network of faith-based community organizations working to create solutions to problems facing urban, suburban and rural communities. "Accountability is something that we need to build inside ourselves," he said. "Our approach is to let people know that

you are not held accountable for what you didn't say. You'll be held accountable for what you've said and promised.

The hospital in Mumeya is at the foundation stage, and Rutsindintwarane said it will take about \$100,000 to complete the project. The construction was jump-started when a meeting with the Rwandan minister of health secured approximately \$20,000 in funding for the project. "It depends on financial influx, but if we would be able to get financial support (the hospital) would be finished within two years," he said.

"We made mistakes -- genocide," Rutsindintwarane said. "Even though I didn't do it, I'm part of the polluted culture that did it, so I'm responsible. I need to educate people that we are interconnected, whether we are Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, Hutu, Tutsi -- we are all one person, and we need to be accountable to one another."

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Information about Rwanda is at

<http://archive.ELCA.org/countrypackets/rwanda/desc.html> on the Web.

An audio report of this story is at

<http://media.ELCA.org/audionews/080619.mp3> on the ELCA Web site.

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