

## Sharing Knowledge with Parishes and Communities: Facing the New Indulgences in Churches Today!

In the pursuit of PIASS outreach activities under the project commonly known as **Sharing Knowledge with Parishes**, two batches of pastors attended training seminars from 23<sup>th</sup> (evening) to 26<sup>th</sup> (morning), and from 26<sup>th</sup> (evening) to 29<sup>th</sup> (morning) June 2019 respectively. The present seminars which fall under the project **H-RWA-2017-5394** sponsored by Brot Fur die Welt, focus on three key topics: The Reformation *legacy to churches in Africa*; *Governance in the Protestant churches of Rwanda* and the *Care for the environment*. This two-year second phase of the project started in September 2017 and targets to attend in training seminars 500 persons including 200 pastors; 200 spouses of pastors and 100 lay persons. The didactic materials for the seminars are conceived by PIASS directorate of Research, translated and published in Kinyarwanda. The first wave of the seminars November 2018 and March 2019 targeted one hundred pastors; one hundred lay persons and one hundred pastors' spouses. They focused in depth on the following volumes: Good Governance in Protestant Churches; the Care for the Environment whilst pastors' spouses had an additional focus related to duties and responsibilities of a pastor 'spouse, particularly at the parish level.

The program is an ecumenical enterprise. During the session that started on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> and ended on Wednesday 27, the participants came from the mainline, Pentecostal, charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches. The churches members of PIASS participated as follows: The Pentecostal Church of Rwanda-ADEPR (13 participants); The Free Methodist Church of Rwanda, EMLR (12 participants); The Presbyterian Church of Rwanda, EPR (6 participants); the Anglican Church of Rwanda, EAR ( 4 Participants); the Association of the Baptist Churches in Rwanda, AEBR ( 2 participants).

The charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches which are not yet members of the Protestant University of Rwanda [PUR], participated as follows: the Pentecostal Fraternity in Africa, PEFA (4 participants); the Eden Temple International (2 participants); the Church of Pentecostal Assembly in Rwanda, EPAR (1 participant); the Evangelical Church of Friends in Rwanda, EEAR (1 participant); the Church of Pentecost of the Assemblies of friends in Rwanda, EPADR (1participant); the Agape Sanctuary Church ( 1 participant).

The second session that started on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> evening welcomed 46 participants from the Presbyterian church of Rwanda [18 ]; the Pentecostal Church of Rwanda [6], the Anglican church of Rwanda, Byumba, Shyira, Gahini, Kigeme dioceses [14], the Free Methodist Church of Rwanda [ 4], the Revival Parish [1], the Eden Temple International [2]; the International Christian discipleship fellowship [1].

The PUR, as a High Learning Institution works hard to outreach no historical members, with the aim of empowering all Rwandans in general and Christians in particular. Core contents of the knowledge shared come from the finds PUR various research activities. In this phase the focus is on the legacy of the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century initiated by Martin Luther. The challenges to Christian faith addressed by Luther, raised huge attention, critical analysis by the participants who witnessed similar practices today practices in their respective churches. The seminar became a ground for individual self-examinations. At multiple occasions, participants confessed that they lie far behind Martin Luther's time and requested prayers for God's forgiveness.

### ***The 16<sup>th</sup> century distortions of the true Gospel found their way even worsening in today's church***

The approach to discussions is a simplified but engaging methodology. Facilitators of the seminar favor participatory methods: after a brief introduction each book, the participants divide into small groups of 10 to 12 people each to read and discuss its content to discover, analyse and criticize new discoveries; any challenges for their ministry; any issues that needed more investigation to script out a number of key areas they commit to implement personally upon returning in their respective parishes.

The first day of the discussions focuses on the legacies of the Reformation. Several articles initially published by PIASS in English and French on the occasion of the celebration of 500 years anniversary of the Reformation, were translated in Kinyarwanda. The content raised the curiosity of the participants about the historical events and people involved in the Reformation. In addition to Martin Luther that many participants knew almost nothing else but his name, pre-reformers and those who helped Martin Luther to survive the persecutions were discovered and their courage and determination hailed. The participants learnt about the deviant teachings, beliefs and practices which prevailed in the church of 16<sup>th</sup> century that provoked Luther's reaction. These include the doctrine and selling of indulgencies, the doctrine of purgatory, the Pope's infallibility and so on. Participants discovered that similar distortions of the true and saving Gospel have found their way in today's church through different expressions: the prosperity gospel, the abuse and misuse of ordained ministry, many different formulas and strategies used to force Christians to donate money even properties, the violation of the principle of universal priesthood of all believers, etc.

The participants were guided by the following protocol: to identify 5 issues that Luther was confronted with in the church of his time; to identify any 5 issues that are scandalous manifestations of similar errors of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Martin Luther fought against and yet are prevalent in our churches today; then 3 individual commitments to fight and eradicate these evil doing. They confessed restlessly that true repentance and radical change on both personal and communal levels is needed if our churches are to survive in our society. One pastor said: "clearly we run far away from Martin Luther's teaching. It all starts from above. Our hierarchies need to be talked over; they are the ones who monopolise all decisions". Another pastor from the mainline Pentecostal church in Rwanda said: "there is a practice called "Abasatuzi" [those who share the harvest], a category of nomadic preachers "talented" in forcing the Christians to donate huge amount of money; then the harvest is shared between them and the fundraising pastor. This category of preachers is often called "abumvishamyemerere", those who are gifted to convince Christians to pay substantial amount of money. A third pastor from a charismatic neo-Pentecostal church took a time to give his confession. "We keep insist on the fact that salvation comes from offerings. When we teach and preach, we use "rules and laws" putting people into fear; we organize monthly crusades not to help people to be transformed by the Holy Spirit but to collect money. Luther started from below, then mobilized many around him; he triggered change. Brothers and sisters let's try". And yet another pastor said: "Our group may be the one which read a small proportion of the book because we saw each aspect of the content as our personal mirror. We were all saddened, and we were so sorry. We want to confess and repent. Today self-proclaimed pastors bring an amount of soil or a jar of "holy water" from nowhere!. They keep their "treasure" in a box in the church. The price to touching it for a "blessing" is established in different gradations sometimes going up to five, ten even hundred thousand US dollars." "This is being done by the church hierarchy" another said: "some have

established not a church but a 'profitable shop'; for a junior pastor to raise a voice may not only mean dismissal but being accused of many dirty things".

***From Martin Luther, a world spiritual and Cultural Revolution!***

The second day of reflection is concerned with both governance in the Protestant churches of Rwanda and the protection of the environment. The participants appreciated that the seminar helped them to discover the motives behind the Reformation which has become a global spiritual and cultural revolution. They also loved the fact they were led in a journey of discovery of similar practices and attitudes in their respective churches today even worse. Discussing the principles of good governance, the participants vowed to imitate Martin Luther to address issues of bad governance in their institutions; they commended PIASS for the program and recommended to bring it home to church hierarchies. ///