

OPINION

Thursday

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Ordinary folk nurture peace

Powers of good outnumber tyrants, find common ground

Doctors Without Borders, the world's largest independent international relief agency, received the Nobel Peace Prize on Oct. 15. The 28-year-old organization sends 2,000 volunteers from 45 different nations to provide medical relief to victims of armed conflicts and natural disasters. Doctors Without Borders received this award in a time when civilians are increasingly the targets of armed conflicts.

At the same time, near Geneva, Switzerland, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, some of whom come from these war-torn countries, were peacefully sharing a meal of hearty soup, fresh bread and milk.

A month before they had been total strangers.

Most of them left families and jobs and native tongues to gather in an unfamiliar 18th century chateau tucked between the apple orchards and sloping vineyards of Switzerland.

Fifty-two years ago, in the aftermath



H. Katharine Swearingen

Voices

of World War II, John D. Rockefeller gave \$1.5 million to buy this old chateau and turn it into a new thing: the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey. Since that time, the institute has become a place to keep doors open among nations — not for the advancement of narrow political agendas. Rather, the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey is a center where Christians, both lay and ordained, come and live and listen to one another in an atmosphere of trust. In this way they strive to become ambassadors of peace.

Rose is one of them.

Rose Gakwandi has over 500 children. "I started with 40. People said I couldn't do it. But now," she smiles, "I

have found homes for hundreds of orphans left in the wake of wars and the AIDS epidemic."

I wonder how a woman who has seven children of her own and is married to a Presbyterian minister in Rwanda manages. "Who helps you?" I ask.

"Most of the young adults who could help me have been killed in the genocide," Rose said. "I do my best to care for children who've been traumatized. Many are only 2, 3 and 4 years old. They saw mothers and fathers massacred. I know what they are going through. As a girl I lost my own parents. Missionaries found me and took me in. They told me that God loves me. Even in all my loss and despair I have found God with me always. I have forgiven those who murdered my parents. So, now I am free. Free to help God help these hurting children."

"Do you need help?" I ask.

"Yes," she said. "I need people to show us how to care for children who've witnessed brutal deaths. I need nurses to teach our people how to protect themselves from the growing HIV epidemic. But right now, I need to get back to these children."

I know evil powers thrive in this

world. Warlords massacre whole families. Diseases ravage entire communities. Terrorists extinguish human life in the wink of an eye. Personal fears of a single leader cripple entire nations.

But there are other powers in the world, too. Powers that are for good, as found in civilian volunteers of Doctors Without Borders, the Christians at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, and a young mother called Rose.

As the season of light approaches, it seems true agents of peace are often ordinary folks, folks striving to heal the hurts and bridge the differences between us with simple human compassion. Far outnumbering the troubling tyrants and suspicious politicians are the masses or ordinary people, perhaps like you and me — people who discover unusual powers as they seek peaceful common ground.

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