

Presentation by Dave Percival at Parish Communion service, 14th May 2023

- Our Charity this month is Reaching Rwanda and the plan had been that Sam Hunt, who's Deputy Head at Sandhurst School, would be here to briefly remind us about it. Sadly, right at this moment Sam is in hospital having a serious operation - please continue to hold her in your prayers in the days and weeks ahead as she recovers and regains her strength.
- To help you understand the background to Sam's work I want you for a moment to shut your eyes and come with me to Rwanda 25 years ago – we're in your home – take a look at the familiar objects around you – the warmth, and security – suddenly your neighbours are at the door of your house yelling and screaming for your blood – your windows smash as someone hurls in a fire bomb – you run from the house into the screaming mob who set upon you with machetes mindlessly maiming and killing. The men are killed, but the women are subjected to most degrading violence of all. Although they live, they are deeply traumatised and excluded from society – the resulting children are abandoned to the streets, shamed outcasts.
- This was the reality for nearly half the population of Rwanda – a beautiful and fertile land, just 25 years ago – and the world watched, and wrung its hands, but did little to help. This is the background against which Survivor's Fund was set up to care for and support those most damaged by the genocide – to bring healing and reconciliation.
- Reaching Rwanda is a project set up as part of Survivors Fund by Sam to help educate the young people at Sandhurst School about the pathway to genocide – how it comes about. How is it that we as humans can get to the place where we will mindlessly kill "others"? And please don't think it could never happen here – don't forget Bosnia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine... The project aims to deeply change the minds and hearts of the pupils so they can alert others to the danger signs of the pathway to genocide. The young people befriend their peers in Rwanda via Zoom etc, and then in the sixth form they get the opportunity to travel to Rwanda to meet their friend in person, and to support and help them in practical ways like completing and outfitting homes for them.
- In recent years Sam has also established Philly's Place, a school for these young people. It's currently operating from temporary premises, but from September they will be moving to a new purpose built building. Sam tells me there are many opportunities for us as a church to support and help establish the new school – how could you help build a new future for these people?
- Each year Sam takes groups of both adults and pupils from Sandhurst school out to Rwanda. Last summer Brendan, Karen, Martin and Erica went out there and I'm about to show you a brief collage of their trip. After the service, over coffee they will be giving a longer talk on what their trip has meant to them.

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- Sam is hugely grateful for the support financially, personally and in our prayers as a church.
- As a church our aim is to continue to build a real partnership with Sam, Reaching Rwanda, and Survivors Fund. So do join us over coffee to hear from those who went out there last year and what the trip has meant to them.
- I'll also do my best to hear and pass on any ideas on how you would like to get involved – Oh and I can tell you the story of why the old bell from St Mary's is so important to Sam, and to this work!
- See you at coffee! Thank you