

## COWS FOR PEACE

What do cows have to do with peace and reconciliation? Quite a bit, believe it or not! Cows are an important tool used by CARSA – which stands for *Christian Action for Reconciliation and Social Assistance* – to bring about healing in post-genocide Rwanda. This ministry attempts to alleviate the pain and guilt suffered by participants in the civil war that erupted between the Tutsi and the Hutu in 1994.

In a span of about 100 days, hundreds of thousands of Rwandan civilians were raped or murdered, perhaps as many as a million. Many of them sought refuge in churches, but the attackers set fire to the churches and killed their victims when they tried to escape. Needless to say, anger and bitterness run extremely deep even after almost 25 years.

The ultimate goal for those who attend a CARSA workshop is for reconciliation to take place, as difficult or even impossible as that might seem. One of the means by which survivor and perpetrator learn to communicate with each other and form a bond, however tenuous at first, is to share the responsibility in caring for a milk cow. The survivor is given a cow, and the perpetrator has the responsibility of milking it twice daily. When the cow gives birth to a calf, the survivor gives it to the perpetrator.

Christophe Mbonyingabo, founder and executive director of CARSA, has observed the mass incarceration that exists today in the United States. He contends that, in many cases, it is much easier for someone to sit alone in a cell than to look into the eyes of his victim and to confront the anguish that he sees there. Locking people up and ignoring or suppressing the memories of their painful deeds does not yield true peace and reconciliation. That can only be achieved by confrontation, repentance, and forgiveness.

CARSA runs many additional programs to promote healing and understanding. Cell groups meet regularly to share memories and experiences; the Mugina Peace Farm produces crops for local consumption and teaches best practices to local farmers; Peace Clubs meet in schools and train students to become agents of peace through membership in sports and arts programs; and High-5 Rwanda helps young children grow in their knowledge of the Bible and in the grace that can be found only in God.

The vision of CARSA is “to have a society where peace, solidarity, and unity in diversity are established.” Their mission statement proclaims their desire “to serve communities in supporting their journey toward healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and sustainable holistic development.”

If you want to learn more about CARSA, their peace-making efforts in Rwanda, and what you can do to help, please visit their website at <http://www.carsaministry.org/>.