

Baptists join peacemaking initiative in Kenya

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A Texas Baptist minister on faculty at a Catholic university in San Antonio recently participated in an international peacemaking initiative in western Kenya.



Wilson Guthungu, coordinator of the Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation Initiative, oversees a homebuilding project in Kamwaura in which representatives of one tribe build a house for a family from a different tribe. (Photos courtesy of Aaron Tyler) Aaron Tyler, chair of the international relations graduate program at [St. Mary's University](http://www.stmarys.edu), joined an effort to help facilitate conflict resolution training for chieftains, elders and community leaders of the Kikuyu, Kalenjin and Kisii tribes in Kamwaura.

“That area was the locus of a lot of the conflict in 2008 after the elections,” said Tyler, who holds undergraduate and doctoral degrees from Baylor University.

Although he has traveled internationally to other areas with a violent history—the West Bank, Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Turkey—those journeys focused primarily on academic exploration, Tyler noted. This marked his first experience teaching peacemaking initiatives in a political hotspot, and it was his first trip to Kenya.

Tyler became involved through one of his students, Wilson Guthungu, who serves as coordinator of the [Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation Initiative](#), a grassroots peacemaking organization committed to stopping the violence that has surrounded general elections in Kenya most of the last 20 years.



Aaron Tyler, a university professor and Texas Baptist minister, participates in the peacemaking initiative in western Kenya. PRARI began after Guthungu wrote a paper about the moral dilemma of tribal violence as an assignment in a class at [Central Baptist Theological Seminary](#) in Shawnee, Kan. His professor, Tarris Rosell, challenged Guthungu to develop his ideas about biblical

justice and peace-building as part of his capstone course for his master of theology degree. That led to the first Kenya Peace Initiative in June 2011 and a subsequent training seminar in Kenya's Molo district.

Three Baptists from Zimbabwe joined Guthungu and Tyler—former pastor of First Baptist Church in Oglesby—for the recent training event in Kamwaura.

“The goal was to help them see themselves not in terms of tribal identity but to understand their identity as Kenyans and as children of God,” Tyler said.

“We used a lot of biblical texts, such as the story of Esther and the story of Paul, Barnabas and Mark, to talk about conflict. ... The idea is to empower the people there, sharing with them the tools to become peacemakers and bring about transformation.”

Tyler, a member of [Woodland Baptist Church in San Antonio](#), where he served 18 months as interim pastor, emphasized the peacemaking initiative at Kamwaura predated his recent arrival there. He pointed specifically to homebuilding projects that crossed tribal lines.

“There's a lot of humility required in the peacemaking process,” he said. “Honestly, I believe they taught me a lot more than I taught them.”