

# **Voices: A Rwandan, an Anglo and a Hispanic come to the table**

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Our pastor was a bit nervous to ask Venantie Uwishayaka to preach on Sunday morning. Although he phrased her message as “sharing her story,” he couldn’t help but wonder how his small town First Baptist Church would react to a woman behind the pulpit.

Still, our pastor decided to take the risk. Not only did he ask Venantie to deliver the message on Sunday, but he also asked her to help distribute the elements of the Lord’s Supper along with himself and our youth minister.

Venantie shared a powerful message about how God had rescued her from the Rwandan genocide. In just 100 days, over 1 million Tutsi were slaughtered. Venantie cried out to God as a man held a machete to her neck. She shared how an angel spoke through her, telling the man: “Your machete is not sharp enough. Go and find something else to kill me.” Miraculously, the man left to meet with people who were fighting over money.

Many of Venantie’s family members and friends were killed in the genocide. After the killing stopped, she felt the Holy Spirit prompting her to find the men and forgive them. She intentionally sought out the men in her village and local jail, granting them each the forgiveness Christ gave her.

Venantie also feels burdened to reach out to the Muslim population in Rwanda. A niece of one of the men to whom Venantie had offered forgiveness confronted her and asked how she forgave. Venantie shared

how Jesus had forgiven her, and the Muslim woman knelt down and asked Venantie to help her believe in Jesus. The woman changed her name to Grace and has been working with Venantie ever since.

Venantie had the opportunity to earn her undergraduate degree in religion from Hardin-Simmons University and her master's degree in family ministry from Logsdon Seminary. Today, as a missionary to her own people, she uses the skills she learned by starting a family ministry program. Families who have been torn apart by the genocide are in desperate need of counseling. Venantie and her team provide these services in a Christian context.

After Venantie challenged the congregation to be missionaries to their own hometown, our white pastor read from 1 Corinthians to introduce the Lord's Supper. Next, Venantie—a Rwandan—gave the bread to the deacons, who received the cup from our Hispanic youth minister.

I could not help but remember a [similar Lord's Supper](#) I witnessed a few months earlier at the Texas Baptist Family Gathering. I felt the same joy at seeing diversity represented in the church. This time, I rejoiced to see a woman welcomed to the table, as well.

After the service, I observed as member after member approached Venantie with tears in their eyes, thanking her for her message and encouraging her in her work. No one criticized her or the pastor for allowing her to preach or distribute the elements. Instead, our congregation was touched and inspired by the faith of this strong woman of God.

My church may not be ready to appoint a female pastor or even elect female deacons, but I applaud my pastor for taking a risk and giving women like Venantie a voice. It is through small, courageous acts like these that women will be affirmed as equals in the sight of God. If my small

church in West Texas can set an example like this, I have hope for the future of Texas Baptists, and I would encourage other churches to follow our lead.

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