

Carried By God

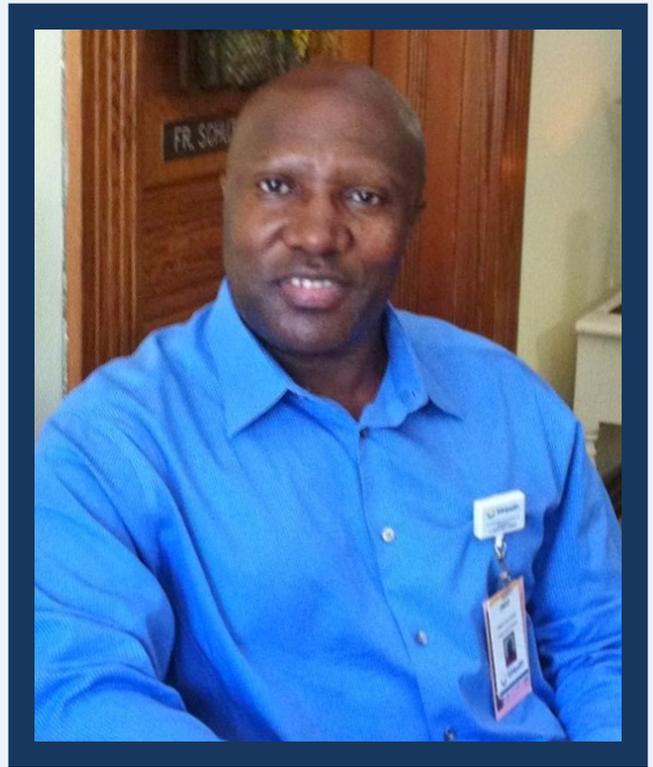
“I thank God. I can’t explain any other way that I survived the war in Rwanda,” says Obed Nkuriragenda, the newest member of St. Leo’s staff. He will be serving as a community health worker aiding nurse Mary Beth Basch through the TriHealth outreach nurse ministry program. A lot of his work will be with other refugees from Africa, many of them who speak his native language of Kirundi.

It’s been a long journey from Africa to St. Leo’s and Obed believes God carried him along the way. His childhood in Rwanda was peaceful until April 6, 1994, when the plane carrying the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda was shot down. What followed was a bloody war between Hutus and Tutsis. “It was horrible—neighbors killing each other for no reason. People would die right in front of you. You didn’t know if you were going to be the next one, I kept thinking I was going to die” he said.

He fled to Congo with his family, leaving everything behind. Refugees there were crowded into a small space. “There were so many people and no food, water, toilets, or medicine,” he said.

With help from the UN he went to Senegal and was able to come to the United States because a former high school classmate lived in Dayton and was willing to help him get adjusted to life in a new country. When that family moved to Cincinnati, he came here too.

“I knew no English except ‘Good Morning’ when I came to the US,” he said. “At first I felt hopeless.” But he remembered his family’s focus on the importance of education and knew that’s what he had to do. He began working and going to school. He had a good foundation from his Catholic education in Rwanda where most of the schools were Catholic. He worked hard and studied harder. He is currently finishing his last class for a degree in health education and community and



public health. “It was a struggle,” he said. “I was tired. Without God I could not have done it. With God’s grace, I tried to stay away from trouble,”

Since he has been here, Obed has become a citizen and married Lawrence, a girl he knew in high school in Rwanda. She also is completing school. They have a seven-year-old daughter, Audrey.

He first met St. Leo’s Burundian community as a translator and believes God led him here. “I am so happy to work with the people I love,” he said. “I am so excited.”

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate