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## If These Volcanic Stones Could Shout



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I grew up in what some refer to as the 'Deep South'. My family lived and farmed in a small rural community; we attended a conservative Methodist church. Worship was a solemn, peaceful, even sacred experience. The tranquility of the sanctuary echoed Psalm 131, '*I have stilled and quieted my soul*'. This is my background and what resonates in my inner being when I contemplate worship.

The place where we now worship in the city of Goma, on the rugged volcanic Congo-Rwanda border, is anything but conventional.



My church in South Carolina was built in the early 1800s; the lumber was hewn at a mule-driven sawmill, the bricks from a nearby kiln. Brass chandeliers, marble-topped tables, hand-planed benches, and custom stained glass windows enhance the interior. It has withstood centuries of weather and wear... and memories of that familiar church are a respite for my soul, even when I am thousands of miles away.

Our church in Goma was built from rough stone carved from the cooled lava spewed during the 2002 volcanic eruption of Mt. Nyiragongo, which incidentally burned the former chapel to the ground. The chairs are blue molded plastic, the walls rough plastered, and the lighting is comprised of fluorescent bulbs hanging from wires. The atmosphere is anything but contemplative...in fact, the singing and praise is so loud even the tin-roof resonates! One hardly gets to sit as much of the service is spent on our feet...which is good, because within ten minutes there are few, if any, of the 400 seats left to sit in.

Heal Africa's chapel is an extension of the hospital, serving patients from all walks of life: the injured from the never-ending armed conflict, the crippled afflicted by polio in earlier life, orphans whose mothers succumbed to HIV/Aids, girls and women victims of unspeakable violence. The chapel is not only for the hospitalized; many come in from the street: widows, the homeless, former child soldiers, all with heavy burdens seeking relief. These are God's people and He loves them all: rastas with dreadlocks, street children, and day-laborers dressed in t-shirts and worn jeans dancing hip hop/freestyle to their favorite worship songs. They have found a home to jubilantly worship, sing, and dance to the Lord in an outpouring of the Spirit. I sense God's presence in both.



I love the joy and spontaneity of worship in this inner-city hospital chapel with plastic chairs ... as I love and miss the solemnity and quiet worship of my familiar church in South Carolina.

One can only imagine what heaven will be like. I trust there will be a place to find a quiet corner to be still and take in the glory and awesomeness of His presence...but I suspect God will have an even larger place for these who are joyously jubilant to be in his presence...the hip hops, the dreadlocked, the street children, the wounded and abused ... who will throw their crutches in the air and let their wheelchairs skate away as they stand in joy to shout and praise the Lord. I will be there too, humbly in their midst...and may have a few burdens of my own to throw in the air.

*Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. Isaiah 51:11*

*Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Psalm 150:6*

