

# Anglican church in Illinois feels reach of Rwanda politics: Disinvites "Hotel Rwanda" manager

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An Anglican congregation in Wheaton, Illinois, that has distanced itself from the Episcopal Church and placed itself under the sponsorship of the Anglican archbishop of Rwanda has learned, according to critics, how long a reach the politics of an African nation can have on a U.S. parish.

All Souls Anglican Church was forced last month to cancel its speaking invitation to Paul Rusesabagina, the hero portrayed by actor Don Cheadle in the film *Hotel Rwanda*. Rusesabagina saved more than 1,200 Tutsi refugees while temporary manager of the Mille Collines Hotel during the 1994 genocide. His appearance at All Souls was intended to support the congregation's efforts to build a school in Rwanda.

What the pastor, ex-Episcopal priest J. Martin Johnson, did not know was that Rusesabagina is a controversial figure in Rwanda and in the Anglican Church there. "Truly I am horrified that we could have such a negative impact without meaning to," Johnson told *Christianity Today's* Web site.

News reports said that Emmanuel Kolini, the Anglican archbishop of Rwanda, asked the All Souls pastor to cancel the invitation over a concern that the lecture could strain relations between the Anglican Church of Rwanda and the government.

Rwandan president Paul Kagame has criticized *Hotel Rwanda*, and "authorities in Kigali and several witnesses" dispute claims surrounding Rusesabagina, according to the Rwanda News Agency. "Rusesabagina has been at odds with the authorities in Rwanda with bitter accusations" against one another, said the news agency story posted September 10 on allAfrica.com.

In his 2006 book *An Ordinary Man*, Rusesabagina, 53, criticized the Kagame regime as corrupt. “We have changed the dancers but the music remains the same,” he wrote.

Rusesabagina’s lecture was rescheduled at another location in Wheaton. But Johnson noted to *Christianity Today*: “The bigger reality for us is having to accept the whole concept of obedience, and that is a harder cultural pill to swallow than I realized.”

Blogs friendly to Episcopal Church leadership buzzed with comments on the possible perils of affiliation with overseas churches.

One commenter on Blogula-Rasa.com wrote: “I think in America we have no sense of how entangled church and state are in other regions—even if there is no official state church.” The British-based Thinking Anglicans liberal blog included the observations that “Rwandan politics has such a dreadful history” and that the Wheaton parish and its pastor are learning “just what it entails” to accept the much-sought “alternate primatial oversight,” or the authority of bishops from far outside the congregation’s locality.