

Why Brawan mixes church and politics

By Steve Mkawale: Posted July 01 2007

Born to poor parents in Nakuru's sprawling Mithonge slum, Pastor Mike Brawan Lumbasio learnt at a tender age that pain and misery are a part of life.

Today, at his Metro Church offices along Kanu Street, Nakuru, there is nothing around him that betrays a hint of his hard, rough childhood.



Pastor Mike Brawan Lumbasio preaching in his new Metro Church Centre in Nakuru.

His ability to mingle with streets people and at the same time wine and dine with the rich and powerful leaves you wondering how he manages to switch the different lifestyles with such flexibility.

He is a man with a chequered history. Like Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of the Nairobi-based Jesus is Alive Ministries, Brawan confesses a brief career in black magic and alcohol.

As a teenager, Brawan, as he is popularly known in Nakuru, sold illicit brews and cut a niche as an expert bootlegger of chang'aa and busaa.

"That was before the Lord opened my eyes to a new call to serve the same people I served with the dangerous brews." He lost his parents at the age of six and on his tenth birthday, Brawan found himself scavenging for food in dumpsites near hotels.

Sleeping by night on the hard, cold concrete pavements of Nakuru, he rose up early to roam by day. Despite the hardships, he never lost hope in life.

The 33-year-old preacher-turned-politician seemed to know even then that his life would be turned around.

"I knew one day I will be a living testimony to many children born to poor families," he said during a recent interview.

A lavishly furnished- air-conditioned office with two computers, a laptop, and Christian literature neatly arranged on the bookshelves, may lead you to doubt his childhood story.

Seated behind the polished mahogany executive desk, Brawan, in a grey designer suit paints a picture of a man who 'has arrived'.

From a rogue to a trusted man

"I grew up on the streets of Nakuru. I spent most of my young life roaming the streets and scavenging for food. I feel like I had grown up by age nine," he says, staring at the picture of his wife and three children on his desk.

"I started by brewing and selling illicit liquor at Mithonge slums. I was poor, but never felt poor in spirit. I looked around and saw the gold in the rocks, the opportunities," he continues as he takes a call on his Nokia N-series cellphone.

"I cleaned houses, babysat, ironed shirts, worked as a magician at 14, anything that I could do to make money and teach myself the principles of being successful," he says..

His hope came in the shape of a pastor at Philadelphia Street Children Rehabilitation Centre, whom he refers to as "the most encouraging person in the world".

"He told me, 'Mike, you can do whatever you want to do. I believe in you.' I drew inspiration from that and believed I would make it through his words of love and encouragement," he recalls.

Brawan evolved from a rogue street boy to a God-fearing, trusted man. When he joined politics two years ago, he showed he was a cut above fellow clerics.

He courted controversy when he appeared at a pro-Orange referendum rally to oppose the Wako draft constitution in a tattered shirt at Uhuru Park in Nairobi. His picture graced many front pages of the dailies.



He blows a saxophone in the church.

"I wanted to show the people that we cannot have a constitution that is 20 per cent bad and at the same time claim it could serve a purpose," said Brawan on the torn-shirt-drama that galvanised criticism to the Wako draft constitution.

He caused more controversy when he declared interest in the Nakuru Town parliamentary seat that fell vacant following a Marsabit plane crash that claimed the lives of five MPs. Assistant Minister Mirugi Kariuki, the area MP, was among those killed in the crash, and Brawan sought to replace him in the by-election that followed.

In a bruising battle that pitted him as the Orange candidate against Mirugi's son, William, he hit the campaign trail. William, who campaigned on a Narc-Kenya ticket, won the by-election by a small margin, amid complaints that State machinery and resources were used to campaign for him.

He blames his loss in the by-election to bribery and tribalism.

"A large number of voters believe that a candidate has to buy them to vote for him. Most of my opponents did but I remained principled and stuck to the electoral rules," says the pastor.

No free time

He says tribal politics played a major role in the by-election as many voters rejected good leaders to vote for a person from their community.

"I think I have done a lot to change that notion and it is my hope that Kenyans will open their eyes and vote with their brains and not stomachs."



Pastor Brawan and his family.

Although he came second, Brawan has no regrets for joining politics. Politics and religion, he says, cannot be separated since both are calls to serve people.

"Preachers too can be trusted to lead Kenya and we cannot just be locked out of politics simply because some politicians feel threatened by our entry into the political arena," he says.

"Church leaders can make good political leaders. Let Kenyans give us a chance and see the change," he says, adding that churches have played a major role in alleviating poverty and suffering across the country.

He hopes to go beyond his dream of representing Nakuru Town in Parliament. "One day, I might be the president of the Republic of Kenya." Brawan joins the long list of religious leaders seeking political office at the General Election scheduled for this December.

Among the clerics who have taken a stab at politics are Bishop Wanjiru, who is gunning for Starehe seat in Nairobi, and Pastor Pius Muiru of the Maximum Miracle Centre. Pastor Muiru is also gunning for Kamukunji seat and the presidency.

Brawan will be seeking to join the ranks of Rev Ken Nyagudi, the Kisumu Town West MP, and Archbishop Stephen Alloys Ondiek, the Ugenya MP who is also the Legio Maria spiritual leader.

"We need to have God-fearing people at State House because people have abused the mandate Kenyans have given them through the ballot," says Brawan.

As a church leader, Brawan is aware that his effectiveness as a preacher can only be seen if he rolls up his sleeves and meets the needy. He has played a great role in transforming the lives of many street boys and girls. He has started a young people Christian mission that is picking up in Nakuru.

Many of the young people who have joined the ministry are from poor families and who look up to him for inspiration.

Among the street boys who Brawan rescued from the streets and helped nurture their evangelistic careers are pastors Ken Oyondi, Peter Chege, Clerkson Otieno, Hezbon Okwaro and Dan Amakobe.

His former clients at his chang'aa den, rehabilitated street boys and girls now form a part of his congregation, which meets every Sunday for a worship service that is mostly dominated by music.

When Lumbasio is not preaching in Church, he is either with his family at home or meeting Nakuru Town constituents who consult him on various issues.

"I rarely have free time. Since I joined politics I have been having meetings, some of them unscheduled. It is tough to mix preaching with politics but it is worth the trouble," says the pastor, who holds as many as ten meetings a day. Members of his family appreciate this and encourage him.

"When I'm low and I need someone to talk to, I call my sisters, who have been very supportive. They were, however, not very happy when I declared my interest in politics," he recalls. His wife, Diana Wangare, rarely leaves his side.

"She has always been by my side," he says. "Even when I lost my bid for the Nakuru Town parliamentary seat, Wangare was there to support me." They have three children aged between 11 and two.

When he declared his interest for the seat, his opponents came up with all sorts of stories about him. Some even wrote to the head of Metro Church in London, Mr Ken Gott, telling him that his source of funds was suspect.

"I almost gave up because the propaganda was just too much but I was encouraged by my congregation, family and friends who urged me to fight on."

Lumbasio attended Kisulisiuli Primary School and later joined Kenyatta Secondary School through the assistance of the Philadelphia Street Children Rehabilitation Centre, which is run by the Free Pentecostal Church.

He moved to the UK, where he joined the International Bible College in London and later went to Good News Crusade Bible School for various theological courses.

Derrick Prince Bible College in USA awarded him an honorary degree before he returned home and founded the Metro Church.

This year, he plans to run for the Nakuru Town seat on an ODM-Kenya ticket.

He says problems facing the country, including the beheadings by the Mungiki, indicate that the country has serious underlying social problems.

"We cannot fully blame those young people who engage in illegal activities but we need to address the root cause, which is poverty," he says.

"Lastly, Kenya needs prayers to live in the ways of God. We pray that criminals shed no more blood and that God takes us through this trying year in peace and grace."

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