

Did You Know...



News and trivia from our parish and the Catholic Church

-- contributed by the Christ Child Church Women's Club --



Christ Child Catholic Church

Dedicated to Growth in Christ and to the Challenges of Loving Service

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Did you know it's sometimes hard to find a church in Africa?

We recently took a "vacation of a lifetime" and spent five weeks in southern Africa. We went there to see wildlife and wild lands, but we also wanted to see - - - AFRICA. What's it like? What are the people like? How is it to live there, and what are the politics?

And of course, for Karin, "What church will I attend this week?"

That last question was a challenging one. To put it kindly, Catholic churches are widely spread in the countries we traveled (Namibia and Zimbabwe). It can take many, many hours to drive over horrible roads, potholes and washboard and mud and ruts (pavement is scarce) to get to a church of *any* kind. And the vast majority of citizens there don't have cars -- which would make the journey days and not hours. In short, not practical.

There are quite a few Catholics in Africa. But how do Africans gain a church experience, how do they experience a Mass and the Eucharist?

The short answer is that they often do without. Catholic presence in Africa has a long and storied history, and it hasn't always resulted in a plethora of churches.

Locals simply wait, until a traveling priest is able to visit their remote community, using a makeshift building, or perhaps even an open area, for the services. For one baptism, they simply gathered at a local river. (Does that sound familiar?)

Fortunately, in our travels we would occasionally happen through a larger township or city, where we could find a permanent Catholic church. At these places, Mass was held just like anywhere else, Saturday eves and Sunday mornings, and it was one such church in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, where Karin was able to attend a Mass in late July.



Many things about the Mass were "normal" -- readings, homily, Eucharist -- but one element that departed from what Karin was accustomed to was the singing during Mass, by a group of African women all dressed in what appeared to be standardized uniforms (no, not tribal dress <grin>).

The music was smooth, absorbing, rhythmic, the drums penetrating. The harmonies and counterpoints were mesmerizing. Some of the singers and altar servers wore mis-matched shoes; some were completely barefoot. But the entire performance was heart-felt, and soul-deep.

That music really evoked the essence of the African culture, beautifully integrated into the traditions of the Church. Karin sat quietly, tears streaming, and felt, profoundly, the true presence of God. On an inauspicious Sunday morning, these simple Catholics showed Karin what Faith was all about. She thought to herself, "Now I am really in Africa".

What got brought home to us repeatedly, throughout our travels in Africa, was how much we tend to take for granted -- even our humble little country church. There are many, many people around this Earth who would consider such a structure (and its resident priest) as a gift from God.

Knowing what other folks in the world routinely do without, we can all be aware of, and grateful for, our many blessings.

Still Curious? See these links ---

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_in_Africa

<http://catholicparishes-vicfalls.org/parishes/our-lady-of-peace>

--- *Karin and Greg Illes*

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