

Missions

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Mission to Kenya

By Peter Thompson

RENEWAL MINISTRIES’ MISSION JOURNEY to Kenya this year encompassed the three dioceses of Nairobi, Ngong and Mombasa. This was the first time we had chosen to come at this time of year which is at the heart of the heavy rains. The mission to Kenya coincided with a request from the Ugandan bishops to come to their country and give teachings on defending the Faith. The bishops are concerned with the ongoing problem of Catholics leaving the Church, often due to a lack of knowledge about how to answer typical challenges to Catholicism made by Protestant Evangelical and fundamental sects. This three day presentation was held at Emmaus Renewal Centre north of Kampala.

Returning to Nairobi in Kenya, we undertook a series of visits to five different prisons in the area: three men’s prisons, one prison for young male offenders and another women’s prison. The focus of these visits was to remind the inmates that God had not forgotten them, and to proclaim the message of God’s personal love and mercy and their inherent dignity as human beings.

The prison conditions were deplorable but I was advised that conditions have improved over recent years and there is a new openness to allow NGOs to visit and minister to the needs of these men and women who are often incarcerated

for months or years awaiting trial. The time they spend waiting is not deducted from whatever sentence is finally imposed. With their practical needs in mind I had received donations from a number of generous people who knew that prison outreach would be part of our mission. We were able to purchase and distribute 1300 bars of soap plus toilet tissue. These most basic needs are only met if a relative or friend brings these items for an individual prisoner. In the women’s prison there were many mothers with young children and we gave them two bars of soap.

From Nairobi we moved to the Ngong diocese, staying at Embulbul Catholic Church where we were warmly welcomed by Fr. Joseph Dadiri, SMA, the recently appointed pastor of this large, vibrant, and welcoming parish. We also visited with Bishop John Oballa Owaa who was installed only ten days earlier. We shared with him the long history of Renewal Ministries’ involvement with the Ngong diocese which is the largest in Kenya and covers a vast yet sparsely populated region. Bishop John encouraged us to continue responding to the great commission to evangelize all nations by quoting from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “The Church exists to evangelize.” He asked us to consider going to the furthest part of his diocese in the far west, a full day’s drive away, to assist these remote parishes in their task of proclaiming Christ. We hope to do this at some future date.

For the next two days we gave a series of presentations at the Pastoral Centre to lay leaders, parish council members, religious sisters and others. This included 16 hours of instruction covering many areas of our Catholic faith, including doctrine on faith and morals, sprinkled with Church history and Catholic apologetics, and we allowed plenty of time for Q & A. Attendance for the two days was between 80–100 people. Our last day in Ngong was at the Embulbul parish where we spent a morning teaching on the Call to Holiness and how to deepen our prayer life.

Each day we were subjected to torrential rains causing flooding and chaos on the streets as cars stalled in water and drifted through the muddy streets. Blackouts followed nearly every day sometimes lasting through the night, with the inconveniences of no electricity or pumps. I was reminded of the words of St. James:



George Ndegwa, a long-time collaborator with Renewal Ministries in Kenya, ministers to prisoners through the proclamation of the Gospel message.

“Count it pure joy when you suffer all kinds of trials.” It is in these circumstances that we can grow in our journey towards holiness, utilizing these trials to die to self.

Monday evening we flew to Mombasa for a conference targeting catechists, lay leaders and religious. Stephen Mbugua Thoithi, recently appointed as chair of the Kenya National Service Committee for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal welcomed us to the heat of Mombasa. Over the next three days we repeated the series that I had given in Uganda and in Ngong in an attempt to equip these leaders to combat the daily challenges to their faith from a multitude of fundamentalist sects that are springing up throughout Africa, including a rise in the presence of Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses. An estimated 300 attended all or part of the series. From the response that I received in every location there is a profound hunger for clear and undiluted teaching of the Catholic Church, especially in the area of morals. +
