

By Peter Thompson
COUNTRY COORDINATOR
for KENYA

Peter Thompson recently retired after fifteen years from his position as Renewal Ministries' country coordinator to Kenya. This report details his final mission as country coordinator. Originally from England, Peter and his wife now live in Canada, where they raised their three children. Peter continues to serve the Church through a dynamic teaching apostolate that includes parish missions and teaching the Catholic faith, especially in the areas of Catholic apologetics, Church history, the New Evangelization, and the New Pentecost.

Spreading the GOSPEL in Kenya

This was my final mission to Kenya as a Renewal Ministries' country coordinator, as I am retiring from that position as I approach my eightieth birthday. Bohus Zivkac, from Slovakia, will take the torch as country coordinator and will lead future teams in undertaking the Lord's work that He gives to Renewal Ministries in this beautiful region of the world.



For my final report, I want to focus on one special aspect of our most recent time in Kenya. We served in the farthest and most remote parish in the Diocese of Homa Bay. Ours was the first mission undertaken in this region. When we met with Bishop Philip Anyolo, he advised us that it was an area that had seen much violence between tribal factions, especially with cattle rustling, although with an increased police presence this had been greatly reduced. He sent us forth with his blessing and desired to hear from Fr. Paul Ogalla, a priest who travelled with us, about the results of the mission that we were undertaking.

As there was no suitable accommodation in the parish or region, we had to stay at the nearest town, more than eighteen miles from the parish. Each day, we traveled over dirt and mud roads. Depending on the situation with either rain, mud, cattle, or traffic, it took us about an hour each way. In fact, on our first night returning to our accommodations after a day in the outstations, the drive back was one of those "Hail Mary" journeys with no light, slick mud, a narrow road, and oncoming traffic, motor bikes, cattle, and pedestrians. Thankfully, the Lord sent His angels to watch over and protect us.

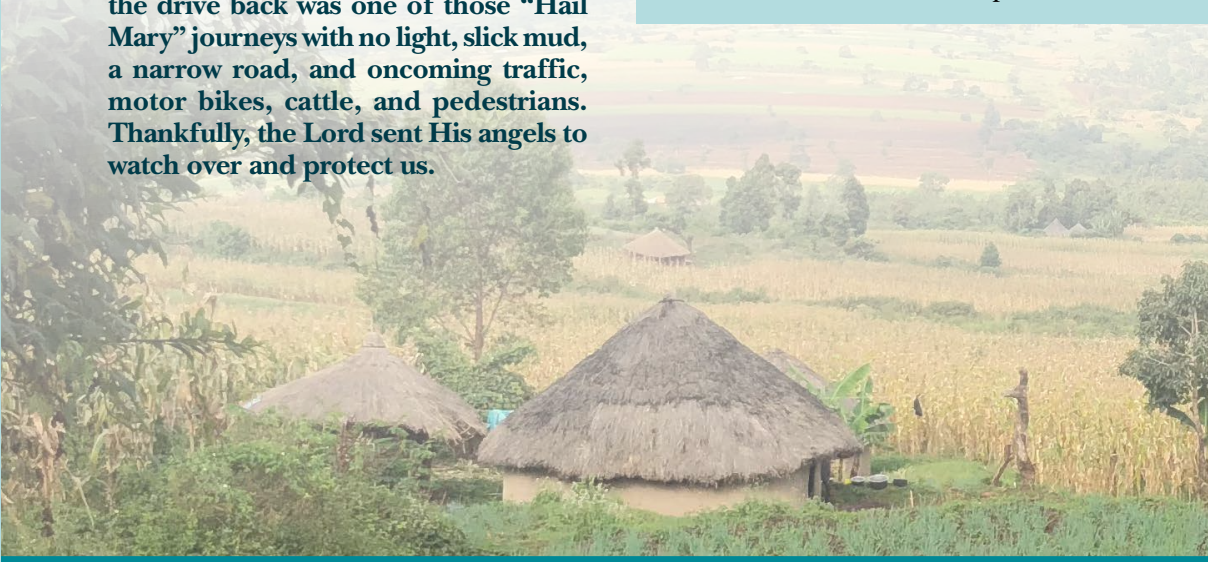
The first day, we separated into three teams and each visited a different outstation, where people could gather from nearby areas. The outstation I attended had a dirt floor, mud brick walls, no windows, and a tin roof with holes. There was a little table for the altar and rough wooden benches. We arrived to the sound of joyful song, and the little church was crowded to overflowing. We taught all day; it is always amazing to me how patient and attentive people are in Africa. They are hungry for God's Word and sit for hours with no breaks. Many attendees were writing intensely, taking notes. Also, we always allow time for questions and answers, which unleashes a flood of questions concerning the faith.

We concluded each day with Holy Mass, which was a great blessing, as normally people in the outstations might get Mass only once every four to six weeks. Also, Fr. Paul made himself available for confessions throughout the day, and there was a constant stream of penitents.

“After each conversation with the Lord, my soul is extraordinarily strengthened, and a profound tranquility prevails within and it gives me such courage that I do not fear anything in the world ... except making Jesus sad.”



St. Faustina's
Diary (610)



Over the next three days in the main parish church, we once again dedicated time to teaching about living the “Life in the Spirit.” Attendance here was good, with approximately eighty people taking in the whole seminar. Fr. Paul had advised us that with the beginning of the rains, many would be planting their crops, which are so vital to their needs, since many are subsistence farmers. Saturday was different, however, and the church hall was filled to capacity, and many of the attendees were young people who ranged in age from little ones of about six to teenagers. The audience was captivated to see the development of life within the womb from seven to twenty four weeks, and especially to hold in their hands the tiny models of the unborn babies.

We were also able to visit a small prison that was newly built on the outskirts of the town, which held about fifty prisoners. Meeting under the sun, with a little shade from one solitary tree, we shared the Gospel, and Bohus spoke of true freedom in Christ, focusing on the conversion of Zacchaeus. We gave them soap and toilet tissue, and they asked us if it was possible for them to receive a small donation to build a shelter with a tin roof and wooden posts to shade them from the sun and rain, so that they could meet together for prayer. The cost was equivalent to \$100. With our prison ministry funds, we were able to meet that need, and we trust that they will be able to build this most basic of structures. The facilities in these prisons are invariably very basic, and even necessities like soap are only available to those who have friends or family members to bring them such items.



Team member Celeste Martin used fetal models to teach about the sanctity of life.

On our return to the parish, one of our cars got a flat tire; however, the Catholic prison chaplain who had met us there had his car, so we were able to pile into his vehicle to continue our journey. Meanwhile, Fr. Paul, who waited with the car until the repair was complete, was asked if he would conduct a funeral for a villager who had died. So the Lord in His goodness worked all things to the good.

Sunday was once again a great celebration. Fr. Paul asked our team member Deacon John Hust to not only give the homily, but also to baptize six babies who were to be baptized that morning.

Mass began at 9:30 a.m. and concluded at 1 p.m., even though Deacon John did not undertake the one-hour homily that is typical in that area at the Sunday Mass. We had to leave shortly after Mass, to drive to Kisumu for our flight back to Nairobi the next morning.

On our arrival into Nairobi, we went immediately to an appointment with his Eminence Cardinal John Njue of Nairobi. He welcomed us and, with searching questions, asked us in great depth about the role of Renewal Ministries and how we had been able to serve the Church over these past years in Kenya. From our varied gifts and service, we were able to share with him the details of Renewal Ministries’ work and especially its growth over the years and how the Lord had called Renewal Ministries to serve in so many diverse regions of the world.

The cardinal also was very aware of Bishop John Oballa’s desire for a priest’s retreat and advised us that he would be very open to Renewal Ministries addressing all the bishops of Kenya at an upcoming annual conference of bishops. We hope this will come to fruition.

As we left for home, team member Celeste Martin, who had already taught English to seminarians in Vietnam for a year, left to begin another year of service there.

The Lord in His great love and mercy led us, protected us, blessed us, and, I pray, used us in building His Kingdom in the new regions of Kenya where He led us. Thank you for allowing me to serve.

Peter Thompson taught on Life in the Spirit at the Parish of St. Peter & St. Paul in the Diocese of Homa Bay.

