

Out of Africa

Uganda Pilgrimage: Joyous and Spiritual Hearts Amid Poverty

by Michelle Hufford

An instrumental thought I used during the journey to Uganda was from a prayer and reflection booklet provided by Sister Rosemary and Sister Fran from the World Missions Ministry in our Archdiocese of Milwaukee. These nuns were instrumental in establishing our twinning relationship with St. Paul's in Mukono. In one reflection was a suggestion that as we approach our brothers and sisters in Uganda "to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy, and we may forget that God was there before our arrival."

How true and relevant that advice was. Everywhere I looked, God was evident, most especially in the joyous faces all around. It was the case when we arrived, with at least 30 people from St. Paul's at the airport to greet us, and continued to the students' and teachers' faces in the furthest school of the sub-parishes we visited.

It is a harsh reality that the further away from Mukono's economic center, people are poorer, the schools less equipped, everyday life more challenging. However, those realities did not affect the way that teachers, children and families shared their love, music, and what little materially they had with us. In a way I felt guilty, because the students and teachers had waited hours for our bus to arrive late at that outlying sub-parish, and yet they greeted us with song and speeches speaking of gratitude for us. They truly taught us joy in our relationships. God was in their smiling faces, in their generous hearts-and he was in ours also.

I believe that the Holy Spirit has guided and nurtured our twinning relationship with the people of St. Paul's. We stand side by side with mutual growth and learning. We at St. Francis Borgia give them hope that they can see and touch; we care for their future. They as a people amongst so much tragedy, including deaths from diseases, accidents and nature, grasp their faith tightly, and it is why it is so important to pray for them and with them in all times of need.

They give us a chance to expand our horizons and make us realize there is more to life than our problems. Yet they are truly concerned for us and many asked how we are doing here, during our economic challenges and our job losses. We are all connected through Christ Jesus as he loves us all and we are one with him.