

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Kenya: Land of Mission

On the fifth day of our Kenyan safari, our 17 people from Rochester arrived about noon at Kisumu. Our hotel was posh, touching the east end of Lake Victoria which is the second largest lake in the world. The temperature was in the pleasant 70s. We and our bags were settled in beautiful rooms overlooking the lake. A herd of deer wandered in the back, near the lake. A substantial lunch was served. Most rested a bit afterward, to prepare for the afternoon and evening.

About 2:30 we toured the city of Kisumu, intending to find the cathedral. Instead we found St. Joseph's Church, a parish church much like a larger St. Joseph's in Weedsport except the church sign read "Sunday Mass, 8:10; 9:30, English, 11, Swahili."

Our visit to the hippopotamus pool area drew a blank since no hippos appeared. But Mary Guidone dispensed gum to half a dozen youngsters from 5 to 12 years old, who were gazing at the funny white Americans. They chewed away in the same fashion, European and Far Eastern youngsters did during WWII when GIs were accosted by children everywhere with "Any gum, chum?"

When we returned to the hotel about 4 p.m., two Kenyan priests awaited us. Father Longinus Atundo is a graduate of St. John Fisher College who works for the neighboring Diocese of Kakamega and Father John Kwanga, who works in the education department of the Diocese of Kisumu. They were anxious we see a new church being built a dozen miles away. Half our group elected to go shopping in the city, the other half to see the new church project. All the cement blocks for the church were made by the parishioners, who also did much of the labor on the construction. It is a good functional church, on the lines of St. Hyacinth's Church in Auburn. It will seat about 300. The pastor is a youngish priest and though dressed in work clothes with a dozen parishioners helping him at the construction, he is the Vicar General of Kisumu. To show how one loses sense of color, I do not recall whether the V.G. is black or white, only that he is rather young, bursting with energy, cheerful, zealous and close to his parishioners.

Not far from the church, I noticed a dumpy building with children in uniform playing in the front, and three or four thatched mud huts. All school children in Kenya wear uniforms.

"What's that?" I inquired. "Oh, that's our school." Sixty percent of Kenyans are illiterate. It was an astonishing project. A School Sister of Notre Dame of Minnesota had arrived only the year before and was

in front of the building directing the children. She organized a school beginning with 20 children, starting with almost nothing.

She said: "When I came here (the education officials) gave me two books. 'What are these for?' I asked. 'Text books. One for you and one for the students.' Well, I settled that in a hurry. This year there are nearly 100 students. A couple of Kenyan teachers live in the huts nearby, sans running water, sans electricity, sans much of anything."

With her dynamism I suspect the Kenyan Education Department is quite conscious of her presence; and she will develop an extraordinary school of the locale. Primary teacher take home pay seems to be about \$120 a month.

We departed for our elegant hotel thoughtfully.

Dinner was at 8. Bishop Okoth of Kisumu, Bishop Philip Sulumeti of Kakamega, and Fathers Longinus and Kwanga were our guests. Our group was divided so four tables had the four clerics with whom to share thoughts and experiences.

I had brought 50 Sheen cassettes and gave some to each priest. The name "Sheen" is a benediction in Africa. When Bishop Okoth saw his tapes he exclaimed, "I would get a complete set if I knew where to get them." I sat with handsome Bishop Sulumeti and was startled when he said, "Why don't you come to my diocese and work for a year or two?" I thought he was kidding. But he was not. "Why, bishop, I'm old and retired. Whatever would I do?" "The same work priests do in the states: Mass, sacraments, sick calls, instructions, administration."

Then he added, "If any of your retired priests would care to come here for a year or more, there is work for them and I should be glad to have them."

VOCATIONS

Sister Barbara Moore, RSM, executive director of Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry, will speak at a program designed for women interested in exploring the vowed life, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Nov. 30, in the Trocadero community at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy. The program is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy Vocations Team. Interested person are asked to call Sister Sheila Stevenson, vocations director (716) 244-2175.

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