

Report from Nairobi

Dear Friends,

We had disappeared somewhat from the AIF radar with both family and professional commitments keeping us away from the internet. Joyce's Dad has had to have surgery for a complicated strangulated hernia, and my own mum is battling pains from nerves trapped by collapsed vertebral discs secondary to severe osteoporosis. However in all in these things we have seen the faithfulness of God, indeed we can testify that his mercies are new every morning. Looking up scripture I have come to a conclusion that God has a fondness of things new ... a new song ... a new thing ... making all things new ... a new something or another and for us all inter-church families he gives us new lessons and new opportunities everyday.

We have had a rather eventful time over the last several months all the same. One day in April we got a call to speak at a joint Presbyterian / Catholic marriage seminar. It turned out that the two parishes which are in the eastern suburbs of Nairobi are in constant dialogue, holding regular meetings. The Catholic parishioners pay the same rate as Presbyterians at a keep fit gym located at the Presbyterian church. Everybody else pays a little more!

Back to the talk, it of course had a fair share of questions and discussions related to liturgy during inter-church marriages, baptisms, what to do with nosy in-laws, etc. The Presbyterian clergymen present were particularly interested in our story which was rather nice. Most of those we meet are not normally this interested.

Given that everyone else prays about church unity in January, [*enough unity prayers flying around over the one week?*], these parishes hold theirs in May: they hold the week long prayers followed by a grand finale procession which ends in different parishes every year. A number of other parishes, Anglican and Methodist, are also part of this program which apparently has been going on for several years now.

Then in mid last month we had the Nairobi ecumenical round table meeting. This time we had a Catholic priest who teaches in one of the local seminaries [*and with the global shortage of priests our seminaries are doing rather well ... that's a story for another day*] and a Presbyterian lay preacher, who is involved in the civil society advocacy movement. She was in the organizing team for the World Social Forum held earlier in the year here in Nairobi. The focus of discussion this time round was the role of the church in promoting democracy and a just society. The general consensus was that governments in Africa and elsewhere are likely to heed the collective voice of a united church on critical issues of the day like corruption, and *the War*, [yea that war on 'terror'] Experiences in this part of the world indicate that many little voices from different church groups do not make much impact. And inept governments love it that way

Reflecting on big social issues [HIV/AIDS, democracy; abortion, homosexuality, free press, poverty alleviation etc] where our churches take a strong common stand; it would seem to us that they [the churches] are more comfortable addressing general '*macro*' issues at national level and perhaps shy away or are superficial with '*micr'o*' everyday issues at family level [support to inter-church families, baptisms, communion etc]. Do other people get this feeling?

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