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Seattle archdiocese parishes celebrate Africa involvement

Dan Morris-Young | Apr. 22, 2013 NCR Today

The depth of involvement in Africa of more than a dozen schools and parishes of the Seattle archdiocese were highlighted at the seventh annual Catholic African Connection Sister Parish Conference on Saturday at St. Bridget Parish in Seattle.

Jesuit Fr. Peter Henriot, a Tacoma native who has ministered in Zambia and Malawi for nearly 25 years, keynoted the program.

Other speakers included Sr. Antony Tebitwenda, a Daughter of Mary, who spoke about growing up in Uganda and religious life in Africa; and Kevin Foy, who manages promotion and other activities of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in the Pacific Northwest.

According to organizers, the conference -- titled "Building Bridges of Faith" -- would also hopefully encourage others in "establishing Sister Parishes and other relationships beyond our borders throughout the world."

According to J.L. Drouhard, director of the archdiocese's missions office, "at least 80" attended the event, including participants actively exploring new school or parish overseas engagement.

Fr. Stephen Okumu, St. Bridget pastor and a Kenya native, presided at an 11 a.m. "African Mass" supported by the Swahili Choir from Holy Spirit Parish in Kent.

According to an online report by Terry McGuire of *The Catholic Northwest Progress*, a number of schools and parishes of the archdiocese "assist with everything from building schools and teacher housing to providing books and scholarships, funding micro-businesses, digging wells and supplying mosquito nets, among other projects" in nations including Malawi, Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho and Zambia.

In a March 30 interview [1] with McGuire, Henriot warned against what the missioner sees as a common misconception of Africa, that it is primarily a continent of poverty and conflict, beset with coups, dictators and genocides.

"The first thing I try and emphasize is every place has problems, and don't over-exaggerate the problems of Africa," Henriot told McGuire by phone from Malawi. "It's important for the people in the United States to realize that there's tremendous resources here: natural resources, human resources. There's a tremendous richness of culture."

Noting the church in Africa is growing faster than anywhere else in the world and that seminaries and religious houses full, Henriot said, "So you have to ask yourself: Why is that and can we learn something about the way faith is being experienced here that could be of help" to U.S. Catholics?

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[1] http://www.seattlearchdiocese.org/progress/ProgressSix.aspx