

# Kenya



The Republic of Kenya is located on the east coast of Africa. Its name comes from the Kamba tribal language name for the large mountain which sits close to the center of the country: Mount Kenya. The country is roughly the size of Texas—our second largest state—with a population of about one and a half the size of Texas. Kenya's capital and largest city is Nairobi.



Mount Kenya: the second highest peak in Africa

Most Kenyans are Christian (about 82.5%); slightly more than 23% of Christians in Kenya are Roman Catholic. A small percent of Muslims (about 11%) live in Kenya, as do people who practice no religion at all. The Catholic faith was

first brought to Kenya by Portuguese settlers in 1498 but it was one hundred years later before Augustinian missionaries reported the building of a church and the conversion and baptism of the first Catholics. When the Portuguese were expelled, the faith went with them. It did not return until the arrival of the Spiritan (Holy Ghost) missionaries in 1863.

The public education system in Kenya is referred to as 8-4-4: 8 years of primary school, 4 years of high school and 4 years of college. Unfortunately, only the 8 years of primary school are free. Many children drop out before completing their primary education to work on the family farm. The agriculture sector of the economy employs about 75% of all Kenyans.

Besides growing food for their own consumption, Kenyan farms grow coffee and tea for export. Recently, they have also started to produce flowers for sale in western supermarkets. This crop heavily depletes local ground water, causing problems for local farmers and families in need of clean ground water for drinking.

## A LOOK AT TWO SUNDAYS IN KENYA :

Mukuru is a slum in the Kenyan capital city of Nairobi, home to some 10,000 living in wood and corrugated metal shacks, crowded together, with no running water, electricity or sewage systems. Mutunguru is a place in the country, 60 miles north of Nairobi, an agricultural community of 2,000 families, spread out and surrounded by the beauty of nature, pineapples, and tea growing in abundance.

Yet every Sunday the similarities between the two become evident as music, dance, singing, and joy characterize the celebration of faith in Jesus and a commitment to carry His “Good News” of mercy and salvation to others. During the two-hour plus Mass at Saint Mary’s Church in Mukuru, the 50-member choir, which meets for rehearsal three times a week, sings and claps, raising their hands in praise. The joy, noted one visitor to the parish, is “palpable and uplifting.”



At the Offertory procession, along with the gifts of bread and wine are baskets of

vegetables, flour, rice, bread, and other necessities to be shared with less fortunate members of the parish. The community of Saint Mary’s embodies the spirit to which Pope Francis has called our attention this Holy Year of Mercy: “It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.”

Here, the words at the end of Mass, “go to love and serve the Lord,” come to life as Maryknoll Father John Lange navigates narrow dirt paths filled with ruts and trash to visit the sick and suffering. Lay people in the community have identified those in need; Father Lange enters their humble dwellings to offer prayers and help

and, above all, to be a presence of the Lord by Whom we are never abandoned.



“Keep God in your hearts,” Reverend Moses Kago tells the parishioners of St. Joseph’s Church in Mutunguru, during one Sunday homily. That rural community nurtured his vocation to the priesthood.

“The Spirit can help you do extraordinary things when bad things happen,” he adds. Father Kago, who serves as Pontifical Mission Societies director for the Archdiocese of Nairobi, also emphasizes the missionary dimension of our faith. “We do not only receive, we also give,” he explained. The call to Catholics in Kenya to be missionary is one stressed often in all parishes. “We encourage our Christians to live up to what we have received because of our dear missionaries,” explains Cardinal John Njue of Nairobi. Missionaries arrived in Kenya just over a century ago. “The seed has been planted and we need to make sure it is watered to grow properly,” the cardinal added. “We understand the importance of the missionary vocation of all.” Cardinal Njue’s words remind us all of the importance of World Mission Sunday.

One day a year, we are reminded that we are members of a global Church and that part of our Catholic vocation is to support missionaries in the world’s most vulnerable communities – parishes like Saint Mary’s Church in Mukuru and Saint Joseph’s Church in Mutunguru. Both young and old can help contribute funds to share with our brothers and sisters everywhere. On World Mission Sunday, the people of Kenya, those here at home, and around the world will encounter, celebrate, and share the mercy of God. That is very “good news!”