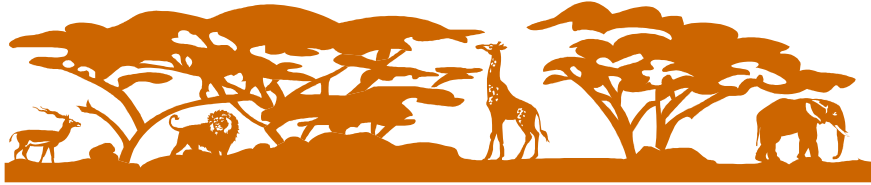


# MARYKNOLL FATHERS & BROTHERS

## AFRICA REGION



June 2009

### Inculturation in Africa

There are many meanings of the word inculturation that is described as the process of rooting the faith or earthing the Gospel in local cultures. Some people even call it contextualization. In Africa we often think of the inculturation of the liturgy. A Shona, Zimbabwe proverb says: *If you can talk you can sing. If you can walk you can dance.* Some years ago a major USA television network did a documentary on the Catholic Church around the world since the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. The producer was a Catholic woman based in Chicago. She and her team visited 18 countries worldwide interviewing over 100 prominent Catholics on the influence of Vatican II. In a radio interview she was asked what was the most striking, the most memorable moment of her whole trip. She immediately answered: “An outdoor mass in Nakuru, Kenya.” She found the joy and excitement of the large crowd “electric.” The singing and dancing was “thrilling.” The Kenyan bishop who celebrated the mass was asked by some American visitors: “How long will the mass go on?” The bishop answered: “Until the Christians get tired of singing and dancing.”

But the fullness of inculturation is more than wearing African vestments, drums in the church and liturgical dancing. It is a spirit, an attitude, even a way of life. When Archbishop Peter Sarpong of Ghana was asked what is the core value of African culture and society he answered in a single word: “participation.” This issue of our newsletter presents three fresh and timely experiences of inculturation in Africa: one Maryknoll missionary’s cultural safari, the challenge of Female Genital Mutilation, and Restorative Justice.

For those who travel on the internet there are many interesting examples and stories of inculturation in Africa. The Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers Africa Region Website ([www.maryknollafrica.org](http://www.maryknollafrica.org)) is a great resource on African peoples and cultures. The African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website ([www.afriprov.org](http://www.afriprov.org)) has an “African Story Database” that is an online, searchable, user-friendly collection of 572 African stories including folktales, historical fiction pieces, myths, parables, poems, prayers, riddles, song-proverbs and true stories. There are 44 stories on the theme or sub-theme of inculturation including “Suffering Five and One-half Hours of Inculturation” by John Lange, “Suba Feast” by Ed Hayes, “Conversion on a Bus” by Lou Quinn, “Becoming More Christian Like Them” by David Smith, “Retelling the Magi Story In Eastern Africa” by Bishop Akio Johnson Mutek (Torit Diocese, Sudan) and Joe Healey and “An Experience of a Lifetime” by Bishop Edward Braxton.

And yes, inculturation is just as important in the United States as it is in Africa.

## My Cultural Safari in Africa

By Dick Quinn

Theme  
Article

In this call for articles on "Inculturation in Africa" the first shocker is that the word "inculturation" doesn't exist in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. The second shocker is that the computer sees it as a spelling mistake and offers another version spelled "enculturation" that isn't in the dictionary either. So where are we? Has the Catholic Church and missiologists coined a new word that goes beyond the "acculturation" process that an individual goes through in learning the customs, beliefs, language and art of a particular society or group of people? For 55 years I have gone through a long process of studying, inquiring and learning the culture of several ethnic groups of East Africa. I was told once quite frankly, "Father, don't imitate us. Just try to understand how and why we do things." When I saw blocks of wood stretching ear lobes, six bottom teeth removed, three holes in the upper right ear and females being circumcised, I did not criticize but patiently sought the reasons of such "foreign" customs to me. They always had some sufficient and convincing answers to such unusual behaviors deeply embedded in their culture and traditions. It was up to me to find out with patience and diligent research. My first pastor, Father Del Robinson, told me that female circumcision would be the last custom to go. How prophetic he was. Now at this very moment in time, educated women and strong feminists are trying to stamp out and eradicate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) with some success amidst great resistance.

My first introduction to African culture was at Fordham University in New York in the summer of 1953 where I studied about a matriarchal tribe (now called an ethnic group) from Nigeria. I thought to myself, "Wow, these girls have come a long way whereas no woman had ever become President in the US." My second course was linguistics and this ended my formal training in learning about the cultures of people. I wish now that the Maryknoll Institute of African Studies (MIAS) had been here way back then when I could have learned more scientifically, quicker and thoroughly about African Cultural Domains.



The breakfast table and Happy Hour were some of the best times to compare notes in dealing with and understanding culture. I would like to give some humorous and enlightening instances that shaped my understanding of African culture. Learning and speaking an African language well was a keen insight in learning the African mentality and their ways of doing things. Learning a language like Kengoreme under an untrained teacher and small grammar book was tedious and exhausting. The *ng'e* and *ng'o* sounds didn't come clear until it was pointed out that we had the same sound in sing(ing). Rolling the r's in the back of my throat was nearly an impossible task to a hopeless singer like me.

Years later at another mission I learned that this teacher called Cypriani was fiercely protective and extremely suspicious of his two wives having extra marital affairs. He cut off the ears of his youngest as a warning. He was my first culture and language teacher. What an introduction to culture! In my third year at a parish council meeting something I said tickled the men and they laughed and clapped and told me, "Today you have become a man." I asked, "Why?" They said "Today you have thrown away the anger of your youth." Gosh, what kind of white pastor was I? It made me happy that I had matured in their evaluation and was accepted.

One day in the early years two young men were fighting viciously on the mission compound. I was determined that no blood should be spilt. Like a good referee I separated and continued to separate them many times until a wise woman came along and said, "Acha (Swahili for "Leave it") Padre, they are just young bulls and the strongest will win." What practical advice. It happened as she said.

It was circumcision time and the whole countryside was bubbling with joy and rebirth.

A young man to be circumcised pleaded with me to hold the colorful ceremony at the mission so we could Christianize it and eliminate those offensive pagan customs. I accepted. I was told that I was now the Grand Circumciser and responsible for the whole feast especially providing the meat. I said to myself, "O, God! Caught again!" AWA= Africa Wins Again. Twenty boys and girls were circumcised on the following day. A zebra and a topi were killed and all ate sumptuously. My name was recorded in the Annals of the Elders. Only about 50 miles away at another mission, Father Ed Bratton was zealously introducing a rite of passage as an alternative way of ending female circumcision. We were

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both successful in our endeavors. God must have smiled down on both of us.

My barber had a baby boy on 4 November, 2008 the day Obama won the USA Election. He was so proud of this coincidence. I asked him if he had named him yet. He said his first born boy was named after his father and the new born baby after his father-in-law according to his Embian (the Embu Ethnic Group in Kenya) culture. I then gave him all sorts of combinations squeezing in Obama's name here and there but he wouldn't budge. He shyly laughed and said it wasn't his culture. I had much better success with my own name, Richard.

Burials were another interesting cultural experience. People had to show their face and emotions or else no one would turn up for their own burial. This happened to one of my catechists who had no time for funerals. When he died he was frozen out with zero attendance. I officiated at burials from six ethnic groups. The Wasimbiti, Wakuria and Kikuyu are more demure, stoic and somewhat subdued. The Kisii and Luo fill the air with ungodly wailing, shrills, shrieks, groaning and unintelligible shouting and somewhat artificial gesticulations. My cultural contribution was one big shout NYAMAZENI (Swahili for "SILENCE PLEASE or SHUT UP") and then began the ritual peacefully. I gave the dead a moment of peace and sanity. The Baluyia's funerals were the best. After some bit of wailing the Christian audience would settle down, and then break out in spiritual hymns and praises giving that atmosphere a heavenly and peaceful environment.



My most memorable experience was burying a Kisii man in Kenya who died on the operating table from an auto accident. His scalp was hurriedly stitched up and ugly looking. We put him in the box and sent him down. The shovels were ready to throw on the dirt when a voice from the crowd cried out, "STOP, we can't bury him with a foreign object on his body." Up came the coffin, the lid quickly opened, the corpse pulled out rolling back and forth unceremoniously in the hands of the bearers who were trying to yank his iron studded belt off. He was now free from that curse and hastily returned to mother earth. God was happy, Father Quinn was happy and the bewildered mourners relieved. It was another beautiful day in Africa.

Dear Lord, I could go on and on. I ask forgiveness for all my cultural sins, all my ignorant ways, misconceptions, misunderstandings and rash judgments. Accept my sincere apology for all my mistakes. I tried my best. I was accepted because I acted in good faith and love. If only Father Mike Kirwen had been here earlier I would have not erred. I would have learned quicker, faster and brighter. Anyway my soul cries out, "Forgive me Lord, May your name be praised."

## Challenging Female Genital Mutilation in Tanzania

By Edward Hayes

Theme  
Article

In August, 2008 Bishop Michael Msonganzila of Musoma Diocese made his first pastoral visitation to Rogoro Parish in Masanga, Tarime District in Tanzania. After visiting several of the outstations he had the final Mass and Confirmations at the Parish Center. The Mass was outdoors before a huge crowd who had come to see their new bishop. During the singing after the first reading, the Bishop said to me, "Mogaka (Kuria for "elder"), would it be proper for me to speak about girls' circumcision?" I assured him it would be. He asked again, "It would not be offensive to the people?" I answered, "No, Bishop, *wakati ni huu*" (Swahili for "now is the time"). During his homily the bishop gave the best presentation I have ever heard as to why now is the time to stop female circumcision. He did not harangue the people as most leaders do when discussing this evil. He assured the people that the Catholic Church always respects the culture of different people. But the time comes when some customs should change. He gave the example of the custom of cutting the ears of both men and women. Looking out at the crowd only the very old men and women and the middle aged women had their ear lobes cut. Here in Bwiregi it was about 40 years ago that the girl children stopped having their ears cut. The boys had stopped much earlier before I arrived. The bishop said, "At one time, you and your elders decided that it was no longer good to hold on to this ancient custom of the Kuria people. They felt that in these modern days it was not necessary to have their ears cut." You could see the people agreeing with that.

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He then explained the evil of female circumcision. He very frankly explained what this mutilation does to a woman. He said that God made man and woman in His likeness and in the act of love God wants both husband and wife, not just the man, to experience pleasure as they show their love for each other. But by circumcising a girl we are taking away her God-given right to a happy sexual life. Again, all this was said in a most respectful, peaceful and calm way. And I could see that the people were listening. After Mass the secretary of the "Wazee wa Kimila" (Swahili for "Traditional Elders") spoke to the bishop. He said, "We have heard you and at our next meeting we elders will discuss what you have just taught us."

Thus challenged by the bishop, the Christians of Rogoro Parish led by the community of religious sisters of the Daughters of Charity from the Congo (DRC) Province, with great support from their pastor Father Anselm Tarimo, A.J., took on the task of bravely challenging female circumcision among the Bwiregi sub-tribe of the Kuria people. A parish team of seven people was formed, both men and women, and they attended a seminar on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) at St. Mary's Pastoral Centre in Nakuru, Kenya. The seminar followed the program set up by Sister Ephigenia Gachiri of the Loreto Sisters of Kenya. When they returned home, the process of educating the people began. They met with various groups, gave instructions in the primary and secondary schools of the parish and met with leaders of other religions.

On one occasion I came up from my parish of Komasa and met with the chairman and the secretary of the traditional elders. About 123 girls signed up for the program called "The Christian Rite of Passage." The camp was to be set up during the month of December, 2008, the traditional time for circumcisions. This year, because of a war going on between Nyabasi and Bwiregi, they started early. The camp was opened on 25 November and 53 girls between the ages of 12 and 16 showed up. The others did not come either because their parents refused or because they themselves were frightened. The girls were told that the camp would be attacked by the warriors and they would all be forcibly cut.

The objectives of the Camp were:

1. To help the girls to know that God created everyone very well so everyone is a beautiful perfect work of a loving God.
2. To help the girls to understand that they can pass from childhood to adulthood without removing anything from their bodies that God created with love, and to make them respected and received by their clan just as they are.
3. To know the importance of learning and education. Education is a key for life and a way to help themselves, their family and society.
4. To know and understand the functions of their body and the serious problems which come from circumcision.
5. To know their rights and duties as young women in the society.
6. To make them realize that they have the same possibilities as all other young women in the world: to become someone who has the capacity to lead and succeed in important positions in their society.



Who were the girls? One day I came to visit and was asked to give an hour's instruction. I began "Kwa jina la Baba" (Swahili for "In the name of the Father") and suddenly realized that it seemed most of the girls did not know the Sign of the Cross. They were Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites, Anglicans, Traditional Religionists and a few Catholics! The SDAs have been fighting a losing battle against female circumcisions for years and now, for the first time, they had an alternate choice which, at least in words, was accepted by the elders.

The girls graduated on Holy Family Sunday, 28 December. On that day they were received by their parents with much joy and celebration. During the ceremony each girl was blessed by her parents. During the feast a speech was given by the head of the elders who announced that this Christian Circumcision was accepted by them and no one was to object or attempt to cut them. It was a very joyous and happy occasion.

Only one of the 53 girls was forcibly circumcised after the graduation. Some of the elders did not agree with what was done. The elders from Kenya sent their woman circumciser with the mandate to

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cut all 53. Unfortunately in Muriba Village they captured one girl and she was forcibly and very badly mutilated. They tried to capture another girl but she was hidden by her aunt and then rescued by her father. The circumciser has been arrested and is in prison in Tarime.

Now education must start again. There is still a lot to be done. The team of Termination of Female Genital Mutilation (TFGM) met last week and set up a plan for educating the whole of Bwiregi before the next initiation rites in two or possibly three years time. We met with the leader of the elders. They are going to set up small groups of five or six elders in each ward and we will instruct them on FGM. I was asked especially to be with the team when they meet with the elders. The plan for 2009 is to educate key groups including the 15 women circumcisers, 150 Traditional Elders, seven Secondary Schools, 30 Primary schools, and religious and government leaders. A project request has been sent to the Daughters of Charity International Projects Service who sponsored the training of the team at Nakuru, and the camp of the 53 girls and 15 facilitators, cooks and food during the month of December.

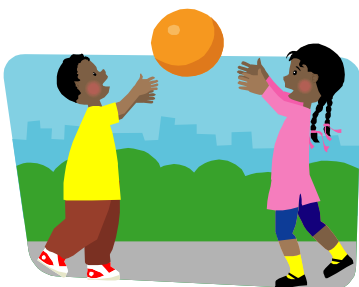
How has this been accepted? I know that much education has to be done. As I talk to various people I hear, especially among some Catholic women, some hesitancy. The question asked is, "Will these girls get married?" They think that no Kuria man will marry an uncircumcised girl. When I reply that they were circumcised but in a different way, they just smile, meaning, I take it, "But they weren't *really* circumcised." So, again, much education has to be done, especially among the Catholics, the Traditional Elders and the Women Circumcisers.

Meeting the girls who went through this beautiful Christian Rite of Passage that is a wonderful example of the inculturation of Gospel values is a pleasant experience. They all look so very happy and seem to have been completely accepted by their peers, at least here in Masanga at the local secondary and primary schools. It is important also that they return to the camp for some days during the school vacation so that they can be together again and share their experiences.

So something special has happened here at Masanga. There is still much more to be done, but for the first time, a door has been opened in the fight for justice for young Kuria women. Many thanks and congratulations are due to Bishop Michael Msonganzila, the Daughters of Charity, the Apostles of Jesus, and the Christians of Rogoro Parish, Sister Ephigenia Gachiri and the Abundant Life Centre for FGM in Kenya. Pray that we will all have the fortitude to continue the journey.

## Tanzanian Children's Poem about Circumcision

Theme  
Article



Culture, culture, culture,

**I love you my culture.**

All over the world

People know me by you.

Shukas, pangas and beads,

That's my dressing.

Busara, Ntobeke, gichure,

Mmm! That's my food.

**BUT!** One thing, circumcision

It is for the boys

And not for the girls.

You hurt, humiliate and destroy me!

Please culture, don't be a monster.

**Say "NO! NO! NO!" to female circumcision.**

As for boys, not the old man's knife,

But, to the hospital.

Thank you!

By the Students in  
Standard Two (2nd Grade)  
St. Catherine Laboure  
Primary School  
Masanga, Tanzania  
February 2009

## Promoting Restorative Justice in Africa

By Kenneth Thesing

Theme  
Article

Almost from the time of my arrival in Juba, Southern Sudan at the beginning of 2007 I began seeing articles in the local newspapers and magazines about the ongoing peace talks in Juba hosted by the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). These talks aimed at resolving and reconciling the long-running rebellion of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda with the Ugandan government that had spilled over also into Southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and even the Central African Republic.



As 2007 and then 2008 wore on I began hearing and reading more and more about the impending possibility of an International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment of Sudanese President Omar al Bashir for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide stemming from the Sudanese government's activities in Darfur. Eventually we know the indictment was handed down and recently also a warrant for President Bashir's arrest was issued. It is still outstanding.

But as those two events were unfolding, also taking place was a growing debate whether and how an indictment against President Bashir should be handled. Or even if the indictment should be issued or enforced at all. The African Union (the leadership of the 53 African countries), for example, asked that the indictment be deferred for one year as the ICC is empowered to do. The rationale offered was that an indictment (and even more an arrest warrant) could disrupt the fragile peace that has prevailed in Sudan since the 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government of Sudan (GoS) and the SPLM (Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement). This agreement resulted in the creation of the semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) and also with the SPLM as the junior partner in the Government of National Unity (GoNU) now ruling Sudan. Two key events outlined in the CPA are national elections, re-scheduled for 2010, and a referendum to be held in 2011 in which the people of Southern Sudan can choose either to remain part of a united Sudan or to secede and form their own independent country.



Many argued that this peace, achieved after such a long struggle (22 years), overrode the moral demand for justice that the ICC indictment sought for the victims of the crimes committed by President Bashir's government against the people of Darfur. It was not a question of denying the crimes committed that cried out for application of justice. Injustices had been done. It was rather a plea that the peace attained be given preference to be played out and not be jeopardized. Others though pleaded for justice to be applied now. They argued that not to continue the ICC process already begun (that after investigation had in fact resulted in the indictment brought against President Bashir as head of the government and also the subsequent decision of the judges to issue a warrant for his arrest) would be wrong. Justice delayed would be justice denied for those who had suffered and continue to suffer in Darfur. Also that if this delay would continue it would even be seen to condone a too prevalent situation of impunity for leaders in power, in Africa and other countries.



As these conflicting arguments continued I also became more aware of the literature that speaks of another way of doing justice in Africa that many feel can be an alternative to the either-or, justice or peace, dilemma of the ICC process. This other way is called "restorative justice." It is a system that African cultures have traditionally used to resolve conflicts, resulting in both justice and peace. In northern Uganda the Acholi peoples' traditional system is called "Matu Oput." Rwanda's is called "Gacaca." Other cultures' systems have other names such as "Ubuntu" or "Palaver" (talk). With all of them there is an expressed philosophy of reconciliation through the admission of, and acceptance of, responsibility and apology for the crime committed (on the part of the offending party... whether individual and/or also family, clan, community). This includes compensation. The offended party (individual, family, clan, community) in turn accepts the apology and compensation given and offers in turn its forgiveness. Then follows a rite of reconciliation led by the elders symbolizing and cementing through ritual the restoration of relations between the parties/communities, between the offenders and offended.

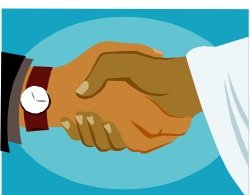
So first and foremost both parties seek restorative justice in which reparations and compensation are just one side of the response. Restorative justice seeks both to punish and renew. There is an

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element of retribution (like in modern criminal courts of law), but this is weighed against and balanced with other aspects such as redistributive and social justice. Restorative justice attempts to reach comprehensive justice by dealing with all aspects of the societal situation. In these African traditional systems it is both peace and justice that is sought. One may be prioritized over the other, but the two go together as there can be no peace without justice nor can there be justice without peace. The goal is bringing about peace achieved through reconciliation while at the same time delivering justice. There is no greater injustice than denying people peace and so for African tradition the achievement of peace is also a way of ensuring that justice is achieved at different levels. African traditional systems recognize and play out in their rituals the truth, the realization that it is not the trial and punishment (modern court of law systems) of the offender(s) alone that can bring about peace and justice. There is also need for social, political and economic (and perhaps religious and cultural) reconciliation in the communities. Only through a comprehensive restorative process at all these levels can individual and community relationships be restored, thus achieving reconciliation, justice and peace.

This leads to the question of the ICC and how its system of justice can apply in Africa and be accepted. The ICC was established through the Rome Statute of the UN in 1998. It tries to deal with the consequences of conflicts (between nations or groups within nation-states, e.g. Darfur) by punishing the individual and/or responsible offenders/perpetrators of serious crimes. It was set up along the lines of the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials after World War II. But the ICC at its creation was situated also in a contemporary historical context. It sought to deal with the consequences of “failed states” or realities of weak security and lack of law and order in many contemporary conflict situations by addressing the needs of victims and survivors of the conflict. Specifically Articles 75 and 79 in the constitution of the ICC give the court wide powers of discretion in the exercise of its jurisdiction. So before proclaiming an order under Article 75, subsection 3, “the Court may invite and shall take account of representations from and on behalf of the convicted person, victims, other interested persons or interested States.” Therefore the court, before deciding on awarding reparations or compensation, can consult the concerned communities about the principles to be applied in awarding reparations, restitution and rehabilitation. The court therefore is not only empowered to ensure that sentences are imposed on those found guilty or who confess to crimes but also to ensure that civil society and the affected communities play their part in moving the court towards the institution of restorative justice as a new system of international law and international humanitarian law. There is room to ensure that the ICC pursues decisions aimed at restoring harmonious relations in communities by addressing the needs of the victims and survivors of conflicts in general.



So many places in Africa (and perhaps in other places of the world with similar traditional systems) where there is conflict are also countries or areas within the country where law and order (security) has broken down and is non-existent. The traditional systems of restorative justice offer the potential for creating a new global institution of justice for the 21st century that renders states or areas within a state more democratic and accountable.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* or “Working Document” for the upcoming II Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops to be held in Rome in October, 2009 has just been issued as I write this article. The “idea” of restorative justice is included in the document. The process of inculturation underlies the statement: “The African concept of justice is the same as reconciliation and peace, because it is grounded in the idea of restoring harmony—individually or in society as a whole.” (cf. Section No. 55). Unfortunately the term restorative justice itself is not used. Hopefully one or more of the African bishops will introduce it and speak to its meaning and relevance in their interventions at the synod itself.



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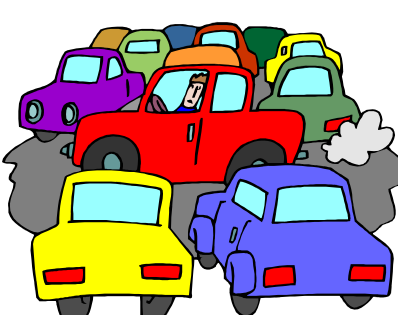
Rev. David A. Smith, MM  
P.O. Box 11246  
Mwanza, Tanzania

Or by Email to:

[DASmith@Maryknoll.org](mailto:DASmith@Maryknoll.org)

## IT COULD ONLY HAPPEN IN AFRICA

By Joe Healey



I was driving on Waiyaki Way in Nairobi, Kenya. Drawing close to the turn off to the Maryknoll Society House I encountered a huge traffic jam. "Jam," by the way, is one of the most commonly used words in Kenya -- in all the local African languages! Several trucks had broken down and were blocking the four-lane highway. Every vehicle that reached this spot started passing the trucks on the left or on the right, squeezing through the narrowest gaps and passageways. I followed suit. As I squeezed my Toyota Corolla Sedan through on the left, I had to drive off the paved road and onto the gravel footpath. Inching along, my left wheels suddenly slipped off the gravel and into a dry cement drain that is used for the excess rainwater. My car tipped to the left and stuck fast. In fact, both front and back left tires were off the ground. Soon a crowd gathered to watch my predicament. With the jam, many small buses with their passengers were stuck on the highway. I had visions of having to telephone the Automobile Association of Kenya. Then, after a two to three hours wait in the hot sun, a maintenance vehicle with a winch pulley would come and lift my car out of the cement drain.

But then I had an inspiration: do it "the African Way." I spoke with the driver of one of these small buses stuck in the traffic jam. Within seconds, 20 men surrounded my Toyota. With some intense heaving, they lifted my car out of the cement drain and back onto the highway. I gave the driver of the small bus \$40 for him to divide among his many helpers and was immediately on my way. Surely, it was less than ten minutes from start to finish. It could only happen in Africa.

Remember to check our African Region Website regularly for updates and new information:  
[www.MaryknollAfrica.org](http://www.MaryknollAfrica.org)

Society Members of the Africa Region are also reminded to read and contribute to the Region's  
 Bulletin Board via Maryknoll.net: [www.maryknoll.net/forum\\_Africa](http://www.maryknoll.net/forum_Africa)

## Call for Articles for Our Next Issue

**Date:** December 2009

**Theme:** Ministry of Ecology in Africa

**Material to Editor by:** 1 November 2009

Please send material to the Editor, Joe Healey, by Email to:

[JGHealey@aol.com](mailto:JGHealey@aol.com) or by paper mail to: Maryknoll Society House,  
 P.O. Box 43058, Nairobi, Kenya (for scanning into a computer).