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Preparing for the visit of the Pope to Africa

As the arrival date of the Pope to Kenya draws closer, the preparations and excitement has gathered momentum. The media has played a big role with daily articles in the newspapers and different programmes in the local TV stations. The whole country is in expectation of receiving Pope Francis.

11/24/2015

Last year was the beginning of the expectation that the Pope would come to Africa. Ugandan Bishops had invited the Pope for the 50th commemoration of the Uganda martyrs. The visit did not take place but was moved to this year. We were all very excited and started planning a trip to Uganda to see the Pope. Before all the details were featured into the plan, the Vatican announced that the Pope's visit would start in Kenya. The Pope would be coming to Kenya from the 25th to the 27th of November 2015. Excitement was in the air, everyone was psyched and thinking of how best to prepare to receive the Pope.

The request of Cardinal Njue to the youth of offering many Rosaries in preparation for the visit of the Holy Father was received with enthusiasm.

Strathmore and Kianda School encouraged the families of the students to recite the Rosary in family for this intention. If the parents forget, the little ones don't let a second day pass without reminding them.

Visits to the poor and the sick and Eucharistic vigils have been another highlight of this preparation. In Kimlea Training Centre this was a historical event: "It was the first overnight vigil. Many students participated. They spent the night in the school where many joyfully slept on the floor. Our dinner menu was delicious *Githeri* with tea for dessert; breakfast was a mug of tea and 2 *mandazis*. Most of the girls covered their slots and later returned for more adoration time and they all maintained a great atmosphere of piety. The Vigil started at 5.30 p.m. with Benediction and a beautiful homily. After the priest left, we

recited the Rosary together and then started the vigil. Several of the students who participated are not Catholics and they were all so devout. It was very moving. In the early evening, while some took their turn for the vigil the others were preparing dinner and later watched the movie "Marcelino Bread and Wine".

In the different Centres activities have been held to get to know the Holy Father and his role as Successor of St. Peter.

Kianda School choir is preparing to serenade the Pope the evening of his arrival at the Nunciature. They have been rehearsing intensely and learning *tangos* to alternate with African songs. They have also prepared an album with photos of all the families of the Kianda School students that they will send to the Pope so that he blesses them.

Faida Centre runs activities for girls between 10 years and 18 years. To prepare for the visit of the Pope they have a map of the three countries he will visit in his first African trip: Kenya, Uganda and Central African Republic. The map is sub portioned in small boxes that the club members are meant to shade according to the activity they have done to pray for the Pope's visit.

The seniors are learning how to bake an Argentinean cookie called *alfajores*. Different groups in the club are competing and the group that makes the best cookie will make it for the Pope.

A large group of Strathmore University students will be volunteers to help in the different events. The preparation included going for hikes to Karura Forest which helped some of them to discover they are totally unfit!!

The University choir will be also part of a larger choir (3,000 voices) prepared for the occasion. One of the staff members has prepared a video clip to help everyone prepare for the visit of the Pope.

In Teemba Study Centre, Kampala, since they got the news about the coming of the Holy Father, they have held various activities to get to know the Holy Father better and also to intensify their prayer for him. The university students have prepared a 'souvenir' which they would like to give as a gift to the Holy Father. The souvenir consists of a wall hanging made of paper fish and beads. The paper fish represent hours of study offered up by the students for the Holy Father, following point 335 of "The Way" by St. Josemaria Escriva, which states that "An hour of study for a modern apostle is an hour of prayer." The beads represent pilgrimages done, Rosaries said, and

visits to the poor also offered up for the Pope in preparation for his visit.

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