

Transformation, forgiveness, reconciliation in South Africa

By the Rev. Dr. Anne Hunter,
Deacon, Church of the Good
Shepherd, Rangeley

This summer I had the extraordinary opportunity to travel to South Africa on a prayer pilgrimage led by two priests: the Rev. Mpho Tutu (the ordained daughter of retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu); and the Rev. Katherine Stiles. The Tutu Institute for Prayer and Pilgrimage, which sponsored the pilgrimage, has as its mission to bring together "intentionally formed communities of pilgrims who are open to receiving the blessings that God offers in human encounters across cultural, racial, and economic differences." And for me pilgrimage seemed the best way to visit a country whose history includes inhuman cruelty and suffering followed by transformation, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Opportunity for human encounter came early in our pilgrimage. We spent the first four days in Soweto, where we were put in close touch with the events of the Soweto Uprising of 1976. We visited a township called Kliptown, where people are still living in squalor. As we were invited to sit for a lively show of song and dance, a little girl of three or four climbed into my lap and proceeded to put her hands on mine and clap them for me throughout the performance. Then when we were listening to a talk about the local youth center we were visiting, she sat on my lap again and gently played with my fingers.



In Kliptown, outside of Soweto, a young girl and I enjoy the program together.

The pilgrimage offered a number of widely contrasting encounters. One day in Soweto we visited the Apartheid Museum.

We were accompanied by a friend of Leah Tutu (the archbishop's wife), and at one point I came across her lingering in front of a video screen. The video playing was of the forced evacuation of a community called Sophiatown, where Leah's family had lived. She told me she was looking for members of her family in that video, and she did spot her father. Dramatic contrast with the Apartheid Museum experience was provided when we attended the Sunday morning Eucharist at the Soweto Anglican Church. Words are inadequate to describe the powerful sense of the Holy Spirit's presence in the welcome, the Peace, the sermon, and most of all the music in that three-hour service. There were two women in our group from Cape Town, both Coloured, that is, of black African and white Afrikaner heritage. One of those women shared a heartbreaking story. At the age of 14 her mother threw her out of the house after learning that the authorities were denying her the house she had waited years for because of her daughter's involvement in political activities. Our friend broke down describing how she then lived for years with other relatives. Contrast with that story came when our other Cape Town friend invited all of us to her family's home for dinner. In a tiny home filled with an extensive family and 14 pilgrims, we were fed a delicious curry dinner and then engaged by the young generation in some hilarious dancing. We had a whole day on Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela had been imprisoned for 27 years. The guides for the prison-turned-museum are former prisoners who describe the facility from the point of view of personal experience. It was

helpful to have a whole day there, which included extended periods of silence and a lovely, intimate Eucharist in a tiny Anglican chapel on the island.



A spirit-filled Eucharist at Soweto Anglican Church. (Photos by Maya Stiles-Royall)

After Soweto and Robben Island, when I was starting to speak of what I was calling spiritual overload, in a brilliant bit of planning our next stop was a one-day safari in Kruger National Park. A few hours into the morning, when we were all itching to see lions, in the true spirit of a prayer pilgrimage came the prayer, "God—lions. Amen." Five minutes later along came the lions! So then I prayed, "God—leopard. Amen." And soon the unheard-of happened, and we saw the most nocturnal and secretive of all African animals. Powerful, this prayer thing! South Africa is truly a country of stark contrasts. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was created following the collapse of apartheid, achieved some historic forgiveness and reconciliation under the chairmanship of Archbishop Tutu. But many black South Africans are still living in squalid conditions. And they have little political or economic power despite the fact that they now

have the vote. More than once during our pilgrimage we heard concern expressed about the future of the country after Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela are both gone (Tutu is 76 and Mandela 89). They are both so revered as icons that the concern is that their passing will lift the lid on the potential for violence over the indignity of life in the townships. They have a lot of work to do. But still we were witnesses to real joy. Let us all pray for the people of South Africa.

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Spiritual Practices

Article by the Rev. Pierce Klemmt, Rector, Christ Church Alexandria, Virginia

Christian faith is cultivated and lived out in an ecology of practices. They provide holy habits and sacred rhythms that connect us to each other through God. As we exercise these practices, we grow spiritually and serve faithfully. They unite body, mind and spirit into a powerful trinity of resources to follow Jesus, putting legs on our faith. Spiritual practices are as wide as they are deep. Some we sing. Some we pray. Some we dance. Some we write. Some take us to people and places we would never have imagined, crossing boundaries to make the way for justice, freedom, and peace. In times of spiritual hunger we grow restless for the guidance that practices offer to anchor us with God and each other. Journaling, yoga, meditation, fasting, confession, and labyrinth walks are just a few. In times of spiritual searching we often reach back through time and cultures to ancient practices that once served the holy hungering of our forbearers. One thinks, for instance, of the practices and rhythms of Benedictine and Franciscan communities. Congregations that foster spiritual practices are wise and healthy. They design shared activities that address basic human yearnings and that, woven together, witness to the transforming nature of their community way of life. Encounter with these practices changes how they live each day. Leaders of congregations monitor these practices to shape worthy communities of faith. Without spiritual practices to guide, shape, and connect us, we run from task to task, busily being shaped by others' agendas but increasingly uncertain about the significance of our own lives. Practices form companionship for the journey of faith. Practices are things people do together in response to God's active presence to discern, witness, and heal a world badly fragmented and divided. Practices make room for God in our over-functioning lives and room for each other that is not competitive or economic.

Practices move us toward simplicity, a sense of purpose, and sanity. The regimen of weekly worship is the essential starting point to adopting practices that will connect you to God and one another. There are no back doors to these rhythms and disciplines. Sunday worship is the door and the pathfinder to fortify you with the strength that practices will bring to your spiritual growth. In worship is the entire ensemble of available practices that will shape and embolden a holy life: forgiveness, generosity, hospitality, testimony, discernment, confession, and the amendment of life, to name a few. In our time of spiritual ambivalence and division, many are reaching back to an ancient practice that has sustained the focus and strength of the Church over millennia. Pilgrimage, once relegated to literature and history, has re-emerged as a potent instrument in the ecology of spiritual practices. In an age of religious division, polarity, and violence, the disposition of pilgrim, for anyone wearing a religious stripe, is one of openness, hospitality, availability, and trust. The pilgrim searches but also carries with him or her a spiritual center that is ready to share without threat or opposition. Whereas tourists visit and take what they can, pilgrims visit, receive, and give back. Pilgrimage is a metaphor for Christian journey. Pilgrims have for centuries traveled to sacred sites to explore, deepen, or rekindle faith. They travel as itinerant communities without the comfort, landmarks, and busy routines that keep God at bay. Pilgrims are not people of special holiness. They are ordinary people searching to enrich their faith. Under our own roof are the offices of the Tutu Institute for Prayer & Pilgrimage. I invite you to go online at www.tutuinstitute.org and visit the menu of their opportunities for pilgrimage to explore and deepen your faith life and engagement in this community of faith.

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Photos by Maya Stiles-Royall*