



Weather: can you live with it?

Who would have thought that, for several days in late June and early July it has been hotter in Minnesota than here in Venezuela? When it comes to temperature variation, if our part of Venezuela were a merry-go-round, Minnesota would be a rollercoaster. In the course of the year, the temperature here rarely drops as low as 68° or soars as high as 100°. Daytime highs range between 85° and 100°, nighttime lows from 68° to 76°. The Minnesota rollercoaster is a whole different ride. In a typical year the temperature ranges 120 degrees or more.



Temps in the Twin Cities have hit 108° (July 14, 1936) and fallen to -41° (January 21, 1888). Statewide, the range has been a scorching 115° to a bone-chilling -60°. As with a rollercoaster, the temperature drops can be rather dramatic. On February 2, 1970, the temperature fell 72 degrees in just 24 hours. Most notorious (ask any Minnesota weather buff), was the Armistice Day blizzard on November 11, 1940. The temperature fell almost 60 degrees in just 12 hours, and 17 inches of snow driven by strong winds buried vehicles in huge drifts.

As far as precipitation is concerned, our part of Venezuela receives 42.68 inches per year compared to 32 inches average in the Twin Cities. Half of our annual rainfall occurs in the 60 days between mid-June and mid-August. We are currently in the middle of the rainy season and can count on the skies clouding up and drenching the earth at least once almost every day. In this, precipitation is more predictable here than in Minnesota, but both locations have their rollercoaster moments.

The summer heat and humidity in southern Minnesota combine to produce an average 27 tornadoes and 30 to 40 thunderstorms each year. For one such storm on the morning of July 23, 1987, Noah would have needed his ark ready. By the time the storm ended the following day, the heavens had dumped 11 inches of rain on the Twin Cities. We have no tornadoes in our part of Venezuela and only an occasional thunderstorm, but we have our own dramatic weather episodes with hurricanes, tropical storms (the same as a hurricane but with winds under 74 mph), and low-pressure troughs. Folks here recall Hurricane Gilbert, one of the largest hurricanes ever, which hit Mexico the hardest but wreaked havoc from the United States all the way down to our area in September of 1988, producing torrential rains with flash flooding. A trough is an elongated cell of low-pressure squeezed between two zones of higher pressure. Troughs several hundreds of miles long



can form in the Caribbean with so much warm humid air being drawn up that, when it reaches land, it can dump huge amounts of rainfall over an extensive area for several days. One such trough in 1999 dropped three feet of rain at Maiquetia on the coast in three days. So much rain fell here in our area in early August of 2017 that many low-lying barrios of our parish were flooded for over a month. One woman mentioned seeing a pair of Anacondas swimming through her patio.

Another remembers seeing kids, trying to cross the street after school, being swept up in the current.

At Maryknoll's language school in Cochabamba, Bolivia, we were told that it takes about six weeks to adjust to a new climate. Winter-acclimated and toughened Minnesotans vacationing in Florida hit the beaches while the natives shiver and shake their heads. Here in our parish, it is not uncommon for folks to don sweatshirts when the temperature drops into the mid 80s. I recall that, at an outdoor predawn Mass some years ago, there were folks on the benches shivering although they had down jackets. It was 70° out.

We all have our comfort zones, some broader than others. It's been known for some Minnesotans to run their furnace one day and their air conditioner the next. On the other hand, I remember folks coming to church in shorts and a t-shirt in the middle of a snowstorm. Over the centuries we have gotten more adept at protecting ourselves from weather extremes. Did people in the past have broader comfort zones or did they just suffer a lot? Probably some of both, be it the weather of Venezuela or that of Minnesota.

Points to ponder

How broad is your comfort zone? Do you stay indoors or get out and get acclimated to the changing seasons?

What do you think it was like for people long ago without air-conditioning or good heating in their homes?

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org or 651-368-7324.