



Did you know?



Go Fly a Kite

As oppressive as the heat here can be, reaching well over 90 degrees most days, we are blessed with refreshing breezes blowing in from the Atlantic Ocean 100 miles away, dropping the temperature into the high 60's or low 70's every night. Waiting for their homes to cool down, many people bring chairs out on the sidewalk in the evening and enjoy the breeze in the company of friends and neighbors, a nightly neighborhood block party on some streets of our parish.



A neighborhood boy flies a kite in front of our house (the white two-story). Note all the kites caught in the power lines.

Kids don't wait until sunset, however, to take advantage of the breeze. "Go fly a kite," it beckons them. And so, they head out, not with the kind of kites you might buy at a store in Minnesota but with their homemade kites. All they need are a few thin strips of bamboo from down by the river, a plastic grocery bag, a few rags, and the only thing you need to buy is the string. Growing up in Minneapolis, we flew our kites down at the local playground where there were no buildings, trees or power lines in the way. Kids here launch their kites in the middle of the street where houses come right to the sidewalk rather than being set back as in Minnesota and tall trees and power lines are all over the place. Getting a kite up in the midst of such obstructions is part of the challenge. When successful, it never ceases to amaze the boy in me. I stop and peer up, mesmerized by the sight of a kite looping and spinning so high, tethered by up to a thousand feet of string to a smiling kid down on the ground.

Not all launches are successful, of course, as evidenced by the number of kites caught in trees (Charlie Brown isn't the only one) or dangling from power lines on many a street. A couple months ago I had to shut down power to our house to extract four kites from the wires on the roof. Some kids down in the street watched, waiting for the pieces, especially string, that might still be usable. Then, as they say at NASA, they went back to the drawing board to prepare for their next launch.

The history of kite flying is often traced back 2,800 years to China where bamboo and silk for material and string were available. But kites were probably around for a long time before that as evidenced by a cave painting on Muna Island in Indonesia. The painting, dated from 9,500-9,000 B.C., depicts a man standing in a dynamic posture holding a string connected to a kite. Check it out.

It seems that earth-bound people have been fascinated for an awfully long time by the splendor and freedom of kites taking to the sky...just like birds, which is why the word "kite" comes from a bird of prey similar to an eagle or a hawk known for soaring and hovering for long periods of time. In Venezuela kites are called "papagayos" after a class of large colorful parrots. Given the exhilaration of watching kites lift into the sky and fly like birds, it's understandable that people would dream about flying themselves. Accounts of man-lifting kites in China and Japan date back hundreds of years. By the 1890's the British army was using kites for aerial observation in battles, part of the inspiration for the Wright brothers to go from bicycle-building to flying.

So, if someone tells you to "go fly a kite", instead of being offended, take them literally. Enjoy the exhilaration that draws kids on hot breezy afternoons to take to the streets here in Venezuela.

Points to ponder

When was the last time you flew a kite? How high did you get? Did you ever make a kite yourself? What are some other activities you enjoy during spring and summer?

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.