

A BALANCING ACT

Making sure that they learn the English and American ways that they need to succeed in this country while still maintaining their African culture is a tough balancing act for many of our adult Burundian parishioners. While the children pick up English easily and some even learn another language, it is harder for the adults, many of whom never went to school or even learned to read and write in their own language.



Detail of Burundi-style fabric worn for special celebrations.

If you want to get an idea of the struggles they have learning English, go to the English/Kirundi dictionary at www.engkir.com and you'll see how difficult that language is and how hard it must be for them to learn not just words, but grammar and syntax as well.

Like many immigrants who came before them, they are actively involved in ESL classes and their ability to understand and speak English is improving. Still, they want their children to also be able to speak and value their native language, as well as their African culture.

While they see many good things in American society, like the freedoms, access to education and opportunities to advance, they also are concerned about some of the behaviors they observe between parents and children in this country. As one teenager put it to a younger sibling, "Remember you are an African child. You respect your parents. You never point your finger at your mother."

At recent meetings for Burundian elders and youth, both groups agreed that maintaining their traditions of respect for elders and putting family and faith first were important to them. They are reinforcing this through greater involvement at Mass, serving, lecturing, being Eucharistic distributors, and sharing their musical heritage through song and liturgical dance. More and more they are getting actively involved in parish life, regularly cleaning the church and helping with odd jobs around the church.

A group of teens has also produced a documentary about their life as a community. It can be found online at www.engkir.com. Choose "English" and go to documentary. You'll get a taste of what they've been through and an even greater appreciation for their determination and courage.

— *Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate*



Example of common beaded and embroidered head adornment worn by our Burundi women.