

**St. Isidore Youth Ministry Director in the National Catholic Media...**

**Around the church in 365 days**

By Megan Sweas,  
Assistant Editor of *U.S. Catholic*

David Heimann was tired. About halfway through his world tour of 365 churches in 365 days, he didn't want to visit another church. Still, he made his way to a small Catholic village in northern Galilee. After a long discussion, his host admitted that he, too, wasn't looking forward to Heimann's visit, expecting another Holy Land visitor trying to teach him about the Bible. "I came to learn. Is that so unusual?" Heimann asked. "You are the first one," his host responded.

THE DREAMER: Heimann, 33, wasn't visiting the Holy Land to proselytize or see the sights, like many who fantasize about traveling around the world might; he was there on a yearlong pilgrimage across the world to meet and learn about the people who make up the Catholic Church.

His journey began in 2004 when he went on a Catholic Relief Services trip for youth ministers to Rwanda. Months later he awoke from a dream about traveling to the world's churches. His spiritual director told him to forget it, and if he could, it was only a fantasy. He couldn't forget it.

"I knew I couldn't be who I was supposed to be unless I followed this calling," Heimann says. "It sounds very glamorous, but it really wasn't."

To make his dream a reality, Heimann set up a nonprofit, Ad Sodalitatem ("toward solidarity"), to raise funds for the trip, and he made 38 contacts who would serve as guides. He set out, first across the United States, on Jan. 1, 2007, and visited at least one church a day before returning home for Christmas. Almost every day he also wrote reflections on his blog.

STUDY ABROAD: Confident and outgoing, Heimann is eager to share his stories. But he's also quick to say that it's not about him—it's about the people he met. Wherever he went, he would ask, "What's important for you to show me about your church?" he says.

In Uganda he heard, "Can you tell the Americans that we don't live in trees?" In Israel Catholic youth responded, "Just simply tell them that we are here."

The goal of his pilgrimage is to promote solidarity among Catholics around the world. While many at home learned along with Heimann by reading his blog, the spiritual bonds formed weren't just between Americans and the rest of the world.

In a blog entry titled "Concepts," Heimann writes of an elderly Mexican woman who thanked him for talking about his pilgrimage in a small village church. "I have always known that there were Christians throughout the world, but it was more of a concept than anything," she told him. "Now I truly know I have brothers and sisters all over the world."

Heimann has a simple message when he speaks to parishes and youth groups in the United States: "We're not the only ones on this planet, and we're not the only ones in this church."

Heimann stays in touch with the communities he visited. "Hopefully I'll stay true to the voices that I've heard. I get daily reminders of them in my e-mail inbox and in my heart," he says.

POLITICAL LEANINGS: Solidarity is a spiritual concept, Heimann says, but it also has political implications around the world.

In China his host was a priest in the underground church, but he also visited state churches where patriotism was interwoven with the faith. Both, he says, are authentically Catholic.

Border security in Israel and the United States gave him trouble because of his passport stamp from Malaysia, a Muslim country



*Global pilgrim, David Heimann, M.Div., former Youth Minister and Pastoral Associate at St. Ignatius Parish in Chicago and current Youth Ministry Director at St. Isidore Parish in Bloomington.*

where Catholics have to fight to practice their religion freely. At a vigil in El Salvador, he saw a man wearing a shirt with the faces of Jesus, Oscar Romero, Che Guevara, and Karl Marx. But just as solidarity can seem to promote Communism in Latin America, Heimann says, Pope John Paul II used the idea against Communism in Poland.

Spiritual solidarity promotes justice in all contexts and must inform politics, he says. But when it becomes politics, Heimann learned in Latin America, "we lose our voice to denounce injustice and announce the kingdom of heaven."

Seeing injustice also made Heimann wonder how much solidarity is a priority within the church. "How do we deal with the opulence of our church when Jesus calls us to poverty?"

His best answer is that we must give our best—building cathedrals, creating art—to God. "If we don't give that ability to the glorification of God, we have belittled the importance of God in our lives," he says.

But faith doesn't end there, Heimann adds. "We can't forget what that calls us to. It calls us to solidarity...[and] social concern."

JOURNEYING INWARD: Heimann thinks most U.S. Catholics don't understand pilgrimage. "We think we've already arrived," he says. "This is the holy land."

The physical journey of pilgrimage marks an inward journey toward heaven, Heimann says. This is a continuous struggle, a slow revealing of truth.

He learned a prayer for a pilgrim at a soup kitchen in Memphis: "Forgive me, God, for seeking you in many sanctuaries and failing to find you within, where you were all along."

Though Heimann has visited many shrines and arrived safely home, he still calls himself a pilgrim. He continues to seek the presence of Christ within his fellow Catholics, and that pilgrimage never ends. ☩

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**HIS WEBSITE:**

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**FAVORITE FOOD ON THE TRIP:**

Any barbeque in Argentina.

**WEIRDEST FOOD:**

Live squid, cow stomach, and fish stew.

Needless to say, I lost a lot of weight.

**SCARIEST MOMENT:**

Running into a poisonous snake on a dirt road in Honduras.

**FAVORITE MARIAN SHRINE:**

Kibeho, Rwanda. All the spirituality, none of the gift shops.

**FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE:**

"God looked at everything he had made, and God found it very good" (Genesis 1:31).

**PRAYER THAT SUSTAINED HIM:**

"Lord, lead me where you need me to go and show me what you need me to see."

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