



Did you know?



Waiting in line...do good things come to those who wait?

What have you had to wait for in line? If you're a kid waiting for the bus or school lunch, it's quick. No big deal. You probably have friends there to help pass the time. If you go to an amusement park like Valleyfair, waiting for a favorite ride will be a lot longer (unless you've paid \$175 extra for a season "fast lane pass"), but your friends will help the time pass quickly. Lots of tourist spots offer similar passes these days. I even saw one for the Vatican Museums for \$31.67...apparently the lines at the Vatican are quite long and the price worth it.

When I left Minnesota for Venezuela, I had to wait in line more than 45 minutes for the security check at the airport. For a few flights in the past, my ticket was marked pre-check, and I whizzed through. If I were to make frequent visits back to Minnesota during my stay at the mission in Venezuela it would probably be worth the \$85 cost and ten-minute interview with background check for a five-year TSA Pre-check pass to avoid those long lines.



People often wait in line a long time for things they want but don't absolutely need, like waiting overnight for Black Friday specials, waiting for tickets to concerts and sporting events, waiting to buy a newly-released iPhone or console for Playstation 3 (in 2006 people waited in line for three days), the latest Star Wars movie, a seat at a favorite restaurant, and so on. Have you ever waited a long time in one of those lines? In May of 2017 people in Moscow waited up to 20 hours in a line that snaked for two miles to see relics of St. Nicholas. Although I don't think I would have waited, I'm impressed by the faith of people, especially people in Russia, who would wait in line so long, so fervently.

People wait in lines a lot here in Venezuela as well, but the list of things they wait for is different from those I mentioned above...things more basic, more essential. The local Rotary Club sponsored a free diabetes clinic with check-ups and free medications at our church a few months ago. More than 160 people showed up. Some of them waited for four hours to see a doctor. When the local government office for legal documents (ID's, birth certificates, passports, visas) opens the door on any given morning, there may be well over 100 people in line who have waited for hours. I went with a fellow from the parish to a food warehouse one day to buy whole wheat flour. We waited over a half hour just to be admitted into the store. I saw a line of people four blocks long waiting to fill canisters of natural gas for their stoves. The National Guard and police periodically do inspections of vehicles at various checkpoints along the highways as well as the three bridges crossings the Caroni River between Puerto Ordaz and San Felix. Having to wait up to an hour, many drivers just turn around and return to where they came from, figuring that whatever they were after wasn't worth the wait.



The main thing people wait for, however, is gasoline. It may seem strange since Venezuela has greater proven oil reserves than any other country in the world (even more than Saudi Arabia), but almost all the gasoline here is imported. Venezuela's refineries are badly in need of repair and functioning at around 15% of previous output. The plants that produce the additives needed to refine crude oil into gasoline have fallen into disrepair and are not functioning. The US placed sanctions on exports to Venezuela and won't allow the sale of the needed additives to Venezuela. Mexico and other counties don't have extra to spare. So for the past couple months, people in this part of Venezuela have waited in lines up to two days with the hope that, when they finally get up to the pump, there will still be some gasoline left.

Points to ponder

Make a list of the things you have waited for in line. What did you wait for the longest? Was it worth it? Did you have friends and family helping pass the time? There are services where you can hire someone to wait in line for you. What would you charge to wait in line for someone else? What would you pay?

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@churchofst dominic.org or 651-368-7324.