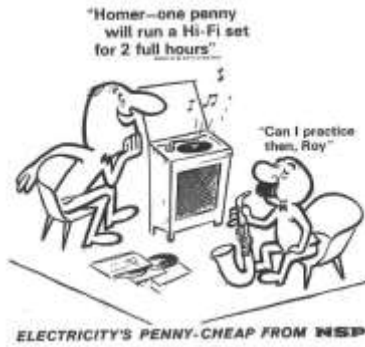




## The Blessings of Water and Electricity

"Electricity is penny cheap!" That was the phrase Northern States Power Company (Now Xcel Energy), used in its ad campaigns from 1959 to 1973 promoting use of electricity. Nevertheless, my dad, who believed that saving pennies results in saving dollars, was constantly after us to turn off lights when we weren't using them.



Electricity is even cheaper here in Venezuela...water as well. Houses don't have meters, so each house is charged the equivalent of around 10 cents a month for electricity and even less for water...a far cry from the average \$90 Minnesota households pay Excel each month for electricity. Many folks avoid that cost altogether, connecting their own cables directly to the power lines. Businesses and churches like ours pay around \$25 per month. You might think, "How lucky!" In a way, that's true, but there are a couple problems with this. First of all, people tend to not be careful about how much water and electricity My dad would be aghast to see lights left on in the middle of the day with no one around, air conditioners running full blast with little or no insulation or windows wide open, water just running and running.

The second problem is that it is expensive to develop and maintain the infrastructure needed to produce and transmit electricity and to purify and pump water to hundreds of thousands of homes. Someone has to pay. Excel is able to keep electricity coming to your homes because they receive over \$3 billion a year from customers like yourselves to do so. Venezuela produces nearly 70% of its energy from hydroelectric power, thus saving considerably on production costs, but with so little money generated from consumers, it is left to the government to finance the major portion.

Given the economic woes of Venezuela over the past several years, most of the funds needed to maintain and update the electrical and water infrastructure have been spent elsewhere, leaving transmission lines and water pumps and everything else in the system in poor repair and constantly breaking down.

The picture to the right shows a fire caused by an explosion in a substation here in our city last year. Regional power outages are common. In early 2019 the entire country was without power for three days. As far as water is concerned, most barrios like the one where we live only receive water at night, and it's rare to go an entire week without water being shut off for an entire day or more. In some parts of our parish people have to carry buckets down to the river and get their water there.



With water shortages and electrical outages happening with such regularity, people adjust and take things in stride. Everyone keeps a few buckets or tubs of water to tide them over. If there is not enough pressure to get to their houses, they open up the fire hydrants and wait in line with buckets and bowls. On evenings without electricity, people bring their chairs out in front on the sidewalk and street and turn it into a neighborhood block party. When the lights come back on and the water flows, everyone applauds and cheers...and life goes on.

### Points to ponder

We often take our blessings for granted. Have you ever thought of water and electricity as a special blessing? Have you ever lost power or water for an extended time or had a furnace shut down with no heat on a cold winter night? Were you ever snowed in and couldn't get out? If so, how did you and your family get through the experience? What would you do if it was a regular occurrence?

When there are shortages here in Venezuela, neighbors often help one another. Something positive can come from the difficulties and challenges we face together. Have you ever experienced that in your life?

*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 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at [ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org](mailto:ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org) or 651-368-7324.*