

November 7, 2013

We love to get letters and emails from friends, family, and parishioners. It is a joy to receive communications, and truly awesome that letters, digital or analog, arrive in Africa all the way from Los Alamos. We have been blessed with regular, if not constant, access to the internet. It is uplifting to hear kind words from home, and to answer questions people have. Please, ask us more questions! I'm sure we're not telling everything about our experience... so help by sending your questions! One I'm sure some people have is, what exactly does a missionary do, anyway?

Well, that's a fair question... There is already a Church in Africa, well-established and growing. It is sending down roots and branching out into more lives. But there are bishops and priests and religious sisters and lay evangelists, why do they need us? From other missionaries and aid workers we sometimes hear that their work seems to be fruitless after all the time and effort they spent abroad... the place still has the same problems, and it seems like all the work was for naught.

Why do what we are doing? Well, the short answer is that we are members of the mystical Body of Christ. We are here to help and to learn, to teach and be helped, by other members of the Body of Christ. We are here to witness to the faith that we have been given, and to witness to the faith of the ones who sent us here, all of our benefactors at home. We are here to bear witness to the truth. What we bring is our selves, a gift of our time, a sacrifice of some of the comforts and securities and familiarities of our country, in order to serve the people here.

In short, our mission is to evangelize by word and deed, to spread the good news of the Gospel, to serve others, to see Christ in every person, rich or poor. Of course, that could go for anyone living out their faith at home, and to be frank some of what we do here is pretty mundane. But what motivates me is the joy of seeing Christ in the other. The people here are just people, though they are very different. Our faith calls me to see each person as Christ, from the beggar to the drunk to the snot-faced baby to the well-dressed businessman to the bishop. I remember learning a lesson about seeing Christ in all people while I was a college student on a service trip into inner-city Baltimore. The sister who was leading the trip told us that she sees Christ in the poor, homeless, addicted people that came to the soup kitchen, and sometimes it is uncomfortable, because sometimes Christ is ugly, or smells terrible, or acts rude and belligerent toward you. The same is true here... Get into a taxi with seven other

people, and you find out just how bad Christ can smell.

Sure, teaching math isn't exactly spreading the faith like Francis Xavier... or is it? I have an opportunity to love these students, these particular ones God has brought to me, that I never would have by staying home. I can witness to the unity of the Church and its universality, by showing that our faith is one. I teach math, but we start each class with the Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola: "Take Lord, receive, all my liberty, my memory, my entire will, all that I have and possess..." The students are starting to memorize it. They see me at daily Mass, at Sunday Mass, they see my family (some are amazed that Westerners have more than two children). They see us take an interest in their language, and really there is no reason to learn Lamnso' except to talk to the few on Earth who speak it. In addition to teaching, I have been engaged in diocesan youth ministry speaking on the radio and giving talks.

What about the total effect? Missionaries and aid workers upon re-entry sometimes feel discouraged when the place they leave doesn't seem visibly changed by their presence. I'll admit to feeling frustrated here when it seems my students don't show that they want to learn or make an effort to get anything but a mere passing grade. It was pointed out to me by a missionary doctor in our organization that the work we do is incremental, like laying bricks when building a wall. Our work builds on the work of those before us and others will in turn build on ours. The example she used was the Catholic hospital here in Kumbo, St. Elizabeth's in the village of Shisong. It started as a maternity hospital, gradually expanding its services, until it became what it is today: one of the best hospitals in the country, with the only Cardiac Center in West Africa. And so our work here, both humanitarian and evangelical, continues, and we need to trust that God brought us here for a reason, and God will use us as He sees fit, and by cooperation with Grace we'll be able to do what He brought us for. Worrying about results and change is pointless if we're not giving God the reins.

As always, we are praying for IHM and Los Alamos, and please keep praying for us! We work together, together or apart. Thank you for the opportunity to do God's work in Cameroon.

In Christ,

Eric and Logan, et al.