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Sisters are sharing Christ's love in Cameroon

Sister Suzanne Stahl

When I made my commitment to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church through my vows with the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation, I said "yes" to following God's will in my life. That is the sole reason I was in southeast Cameroon, Africa, for three months — to follow God's will.

Sister Anne Germaine, another Sister of Mary of the Presentation, and I returned home from Cameroon on July 1 and continue to learn from all we experienced.

We lived, prayed and worked with our Sisters of Mary of the Presentation in Yaoundé, Batouri, Yokadouma, Diang, Kentzou and Salapoumbe. As we moved from Yaoundé to Salapoumbe, we went deeper into the rain forest called the Congo Belt. This led us into more remote places with greater and greater poverty.

The people we spent the most time serving were the Baka (Pygmy) tribe. They are the original people of Cameroon and, as others have moved in, they have been pushed farther into the forest. They are typically a nomadic people and are considered the lowest caste tribe by the other 250 or so tribes of people living in Cameroon.

Each day the Baka people use all of their energy to find clean water and food. Unemployment in the entire country is 49 percent and much higher in this area. Presently, most of the Baka believe in forest gods, but through years of work by the sisters, brothers, priests and catechists, a number of native people in this area have become Catholic.

We attended Masses spoken in Baka, Bangondo or French. The local people used their traditional wood xylophones, drums and songs for the celebration of the Mass. Their beautiful and harmonious voices lifted our spirits to God.

In the remote area of Salapoumbe, we were able to be of support to six of our sisters: two French and four Cameroons and Congolese. Besides praying with them at least two times a day and attending daily Mass, we were able to pray for them through Eucharistic adoration, the rosary, the Divine Chaplet and other personal prayer.

We helped teach our sisters how to use the computer (the sisters have created solar energy storage for themselves), play guitar (we left them a donated guitar), and speak some English (French is the official language of most of Cameroon).

We assisted the Catholic hospital by cleaning, painting the inside of the maternity building and teaching them to use a new machine to sterilize equipment. We were able to bring with us donated medical supplies from St. Andrew's Health Center in Bottineau and St. Margaret's Health in Spring Valley, Ill. We sisters shared our cistern water with the native people as the hospital well had gone dry.

Throughout six geographic areas in Cameroon, our 31 sisters, with 12 in formation training, are able to evangelize through instruction, education, assisting youth groups and through the witness of their lives.

Our sisters also minister in Catholic schools, clinics and hospitals. They work in the parishes; give out food, clothing, medical care and supplies besides assisting financially to help the children attend school and other essential things.

They serve in prisons, working to create more humane environments, providing medical care and food and bringing the message of Jesus Christ. They teach music and lead choral groups, assist bishops, dioceses and other religious congregations to name a few more of their ministries.

It was a wonderful experience, though very challenging at times. Seeing the poverty, illness and death, as well as the lack of sanitation, electricity, water, access to education, adequate housing, medications and health care, left our hearts breaking.

Seeing our sisters and the people living so simply and carrying on the ministry of Jesus was inspiring. Coming to know more of God's people and being a small support was truly a blessed experience of living in God's will.

Now it seems that the Holy Spirit is leading us to give presentations about the people of Cameroon and to seek support for them.

If any group would like to have a presentation of any length, contact Sister Suzanne Stahl at suzanne.stahl@smphs.org or (701) 845-2864 for North Dakota and the surrounding area or Sister Anne Germaine Picard at srannegermaine@gmail.com or (815) 915-8035 for Illinois. If you are interested in financially supporting these missions or volunteering your service, please contact us as well.