

Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon Trip  
18 September to 4 October 2005

This trip, with Kathy Reeves from WMD, was intended to focus around the field training of Regional Liaisons—Jeff Boyd, Barry Almy, and Caryl Weinberg (Caryl did not come due to her illness).

We left Sunday morning and traveled through Detroit to Paris and on to Yaoundé. We were uncertain of getting there on time since there had been a break in relations between France and Cameroon concerning unsafe airplanes being refused landing in France. Cameroon reciprocated. We found and took a different flight and arrived only a couple of hours off the original schedule. We ended up traveling with the Brentwood Presbyterian Church group from California. They were a couple of days behind schedule.

We stayed in the Muemi Hotel in the Bastos area of Yaoundé and left at 7 a.m. the next morning for Bata. About 5 hours later we were at the Cameroon/Equatorial Guinea (EG) border—12 p.m. We were able to leave Ebibiyin at about 2:30 and made Bata about 7 p.m. We picked up Andres and Gloria Garcia for dinner out. It had rained all the way across EG and started up again when we went out to eat. It rained most of the next day as well.

It was good to see the Garcias, whom I had not been able to visit since their coming to Equatorial Guinea. They seem to be doing well.

We spent Wednesday morning visiting the Resurrección School, where Andres and Gloria seem to be spending a lot of their time. Not having a vehicle has kept them from being able to go out of Bata very much. The construction is going well, with the school being in place to do the required finish work. Registration for the new school year was going on with many people lining up to sign up. It is reported that this school has a good reputation in the area. We also visited the Bata church that has received support from the PC(USA) over a long period. They have finally put a roof on. We then visited their second school in Bata, which is much smaller but apparently well run. Education figures high in priority for the IRPGE (Iglesia Reformada Presbiteriana de Guinea Ecuatorial).

A scheduled meeting Thursday with the General Secretary, Juan Ebang Ela, of the IRPGE was slow in starting but did finally happen. We met with him, his Vice, and the Moderator. Juan did not have any specific agenda items and waited for our interventions. I started with a word of greetings and best wishes and then laid out our desire to talk about our mission personnel, since this was my first visit to them since they arrived, and the programs we had been collaborating on, school construction and evangelism. I raised some concerns about the environment that the Garcias are living in and about their specific jobs. The IRPGE has named Andres as head of their Christian Ed Department without any consultation with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or our mutual agreement as to what they were sent to do.

The IRPGE executive committee is going to meet to further reflect on what they want the Garcias to be doing and will come back to me to see if we need to make changes in their job descriptions. We presented the General Secretary with a large PCUSA pottery cross to commemorate our partnership.

All day on the road back to Yaoundé on Friday.

Saturday Jeff, Kathy, Barry and I met to get more focused on our Regional Liaison (RL) training. We outlined how we would go about it for the rest of the trip and began some discussions of some issues. Representatives from RELUFA–Joining Hands Against Hunger came to visit for several hours to give us a chance to get an update from them. Valery Nodem was leaving that afternoon for the United States and meetings in Louisville. We had some good discussions of the issues and challenges they face.

Sunday service was a celebration of the new partnership between Brentwood Presbyterian Church (BPC) in Los Angeles and Bastos Church in Yaoundé. Thirteen people from BPC came to further the relationship that has grown over the past year. Kathy Reeves and I steered them toward the Bastos congregation since they had indicated they wanted to partner with a congregation that was similar in size and that could be more equal in economic stature. The service went on for over three hours. The members of the Bastos congregation were very good hosts.

Sunday afternoon Jeff, Kathy and I visited with the BPC delegation. We heard of their experiences and their excitement about the partnership. We are pleased that a well-thought-out and collaborative process has brought this partnership to fruition. It has been a good example of how partnerships can begin through the facilitation of WMD personnel. Sunday evening there was a reception for the visitors as they begin their journey home.

Monday morning we continued our RL discussions. We took one of the four “Gathering for God’s Future” challenges each time and discussed its content and referred to the question “What do we see WMD looking like in five years if we are successful in meeting the challenges?” This generated some good discussions and highlighted the difficult task of imagining the future.

We visited with the CEPCA (Council for Protestant Churches in Cameroon) General Secretary, Rev. Jean Emile Ngue, at his offices, hearing about the new name (previously FEMEC, Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions) and his efforts to keep the Council going.

We had lunch with Rev. Jean Emile Ngue and Rev. Muenyi Kamuinga (scholarship grantees from the Presbyterian Community of Congo [CPC] studying at the Protestant Faculty in Yaoundé).

Our meeting with the EPC leadership was held in the afternoon. We met with the General Secretary, Rev. Massi Gams, the Moderator, Rev. Elanga Nnanga Thomas, the Assistant General Secretary, Rev. Abessolo Ze, the General Treasurer, Mr. Bitha Jacques, Mrs. Marie Nguessi, Head of the EPC Women’s Department, Rev. Bikoyi Francois, head of the Evangelism Department, and a few others who came and went as our conversation went on. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) group consisted of Rev. Kathy Reeves, Barry Almy, Jeff Boyd, and Doug Welch.

The Eglise Presbyterienne Camerounaise (EPC) presented a picture to us of some positive change having happened over the past year or so. While they readily acknowledge that there are still some problems within the church, they are working to not allow these problems to keep the church from moving forward as it seeks ways and means to resolve them. They pointed to the following points as indicators of progress within the EPC:

1. Constitutional reform—they have translated most of their constitution and have it in the congregations for review. They have a committee in place to receive recommended changes that will go before the next General Assembly.

2. They have received help in establishing a new printing operation that is presently under construction. This is seen as an important tool for evangelism.
3. They have restarted agricultural work in the EPC with the introduction of a broiler operation.
4. They are repairing 32 classrooms in their schools with an HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) grant from the World Bank
5. They held a training for Presbytery Secretaries in management and pastoral ethics. The first time this has ever happened in the EPC.
6. They are working to update all EPC staff records in an effort to trim the staff and make sure the appropriate people are in the appropriate places.
7. A scholarship fund for their students was opened to help EPC students at the Protestant Faculty.

They presented some requests for concrete ways in which the PC(USA) can be of help to various ministries. Monday evening we were hosted in the General Secretary's home. This is always a delight, experiencing some local foods, including Gabon viper, porcupine, and palm grubs, along with other more commonly known foods.

#### Tuesday

The EPC again hosted us and served a wonderful breakfast. Visiting around the meals provided a good chance to renew friendships and explore things informally. After breakfast we visited around campus. We saw the Presbyterienne, a project of the women of the church for a conference center and for income generation for the church. They are in a dispute with the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF), who gave them a loan for the construction but since they have not paid on time has taken their title deed. They claim that ECLOF managed the construction and were the reason for the building not being finished and therefore unable to generate income to repay the loan. We also visited the new print house that is made possible through funding from Europe that was found by one EPC pastor.

We hosted the EPC for lunch at a local restaurant. We also presented the General Secretary and Moderator with a large pottery cross from the PC(USA) to mark our partnership.

We were able to get free in the late afternoon to watch Matthias Boyd's basketball game on this his birthday. In the evening we took the Boyds out for dinner to celebrate Matthias' birthday.

#### Wednesday

With an early start to fulfill our day's commitments, we drove to Bamenda and checked in at the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon (PCC) guesthouse. Once there we continued our journey to Mbengwi to see Leisa Wagstaff, who is teaching at the Presbyterian Teachers Training College (PTTC). She has been there for just over a year and seems to be settling in well. The PTTC has some new competition in the area and has lower enrollment than needed to be self-sufficient. They have started a secondary school as well in an effort to get more income for the school. We had a good tour of the PTTC facility and met with the principal of the PTTC. Jeff, Kathy and Barry met with the local Mbengwi Town Church about the possibility of a partnership with Brown Memorial Church in Baltimore. They want to focus on an education-related partnership. We are concerned that the Mbengwi people will be more focused on building their church than extending their efforts for the education programs of the church.

#### Thursday

We did further work on *Gathering for God's Future* and the Regional Liaison training in the morning before driving to Kumba to start the PCC/PC(USA) Consultation.

Friday

In Kumba for the Consultation. This was the first-ever consultation between the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We have been working together over the years in an on-and-off sort of way, with the past several years seeing more activity. We all agreed that we are committed to furthering this partnership. The PCC evidently has very strong links with Basel Mission, which continues to send mission personnel for mainly health-related posts. They do have someone in the accounts department managing the PCC accounts and in the printing operation. The PC(USA) has Leisa Wagstaff at the PTTC, and we are about to send Shirley Hill to work in the HIV/AIDS program. Jeff Boyd works closely with them as Regional Liaison.

Saturday October 1

We finished the consultation in the morning and presented the PCC with a PC(USA) large pottery cross to commemorate our partnership. In the afternoon we headed for Limbe, where we would spend the remaining days of our trip.

Sunday

We celebrated World Communion Sunday and followed some devotions from the WARC (World Alliance of Reformed Churches) Assembly worship book. After traveling together for two weeks it was good to share the bread and wine together in this way. We spent the rest of the day finishing our RL training discussions.

Monday

We packed up and went to visit the Presbyterian Girls Secondary School, which has received some help from the PC(USA). The school has almost 800 girls in a boarding facility and is managing to slowly grow itself. Our assistance was well utilized and more assistance would be welcome. We drove to Douala after the visit to check in for our departure. Barry and Jeff would spend the night in Douala and return to Yaoundé the next day.

Tuesday

After 31 hours of travel we arrived back in Louisville.

—Doug Welch