

The Experience

"Cameroon doesn't really feel real, you know."

"What do you mean," asked Erin as she finished lacing up her boot. (It takes a lot more randomness these days to phase her.)

"Well," I said as I opened the door, holding it for her as I tried to wrap words around my emotions. "We've spent so much time and effort these last seven months building our life and routine here in Concordia that it's almost hard to remember that this isn't the point. My call isn't to visit a new church every Sunday and make many new friends. Your call isn't to shake hands at church and coo at babies at Immanuel Community Outreach Association (ICOA). That we're busy building all this only to live a different life somewhere else."

Erin stopped, looked at me, then put her hand on mine. I smiled at the sweet gesture of comfort, then quickly realized she was making sure the handle lock was flipped. "I guess it's good that we're going for a visit in March then," she said, smiling. "It's hard to get any more real than that."



Bible Translation Sunday presentation at Salem Lutheran Church, Blackjack MO

The Story

Every time I've visited a church in the last few months, I've had the opportunity to share about the work of Lutheran Bible Translators around the world; how they are sharing the light of God's word in communities experiencing the darkness of its absence.

My favorite way to share this work with the people I meet is by telling them stories. Stories about projects and plans but most importantly, stories about people. I've told these stories so many times that I sometimes forget that I've never actually met many of the characters in them. Like the ghosts of well-worn memories, they've flitted through my mind so many times that they feel familiar.

Stories are powerful tools for constructing meaning, sharing the Gospel, or casting a vision. But the weakness of most stories is that they aren't real; they're just an attempt at capturing what is. The people in my stories fall to the ground in the mud to say a prayer of thanksgiving for God's providence. The people in the real world wonder how they're ever going to get that mud out of their clothes.

The Cameroon of my stories feels mysterious and far off, an exciting place full of exciting people I like to think about while I'm washing dishes in the real world. The Cameroon of our actual ministry is a lot more complicated - which is precisely why this trip that Erin and I will make in a few weeks is so important. Erin is exactly right. You can't get any more "realer" than a people and a place that doesn't fit the contours of the story you've been telling yourself. Stories fill pages, people fill worlds with their messy, muddled, inconvenient "realness." Stories serve us, but Christ died for people, and it's precisely amid all our "realness" that God chooses to meet the world. Meets it in the words of the only story more real than our messiness - His own.

So when Erin, David, his brother Paul, and I step off that plane in Yaoundé, we will do so because our stories have all been changed by His story. Changed so that we no longer



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just tell stories that make us look or feel good, but we also go meet messy people to learn who they really are.

The Visit

So what's the plan? Who are these people we are going to meet in an effort to learn the "real" story? First and foremost, we will be introduced to Rev. Mike and Kara Kuhn and their children. They are missionaries serving with LBT Canada who represent both of our organizations in Cameroon. Mike has been on the ground since 2013. His real-world experience and insights will be invaluable as Erin and I orientate ourselves to the country, its people, their language, and culture.

From there, we hope to meet with the director of the Lutheran Church in Cameroon's (EELC) Department of Bible Translation (DTA). (If the acronyms don't make sense, know we're often translating from French to English.) The DTA coordinates communications, capacity building, follow-up, and decision-making for Bible translation, literacy, and Scripture engagement programs across twelve language communities. We also hope to connect with the Biblical Alliance of Cameroon, created in 1959, SIL – Cameroon, founded in 1969, and the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL), incorporated in 1987. These faith-based

organizations serve all Cameroonian churches by working to disseminate the Bible as widely as possible, effectively, and wisely. Partnerships with their directors and staff will ensure the Subula project avoids potential barriers manifested by our initial ignorance and unfamiliarity.

Once our time in Yaoundé is complete, we will travel north to Ngaoundéré, where the EELC is headquartered. We hope to meet the national bishop and visit the DTA's bible house, where we will eventually undergo a year-long French language course with local instructors.

Finally, moving ever northward, we will head to the region of the Subula. Our time here might include a visit to our potential home site, a meeting with Subula Bible Translation Committee (SBTC) members, and visits to Subula communities to observe first-hand their lives and all their joys and challenges.

For the moment, Cameroon, the Subula, our work, and even this trip are still just a story, which is why Erin and I are so excited to go. Stories are great, especially His story, but our God took on real flesh to meet messy people. He did it to change their story, and ours. So its high time we let Him lead us to messy moments that blow out the lines around our safe stories so we can share Him with the Subula.



The Kuhn family

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Pray for peace for Erin and me as we prepare for this trip, her first ever to Africa.
- Pray for safe travels for David, Paul, Erin, and myself.
- Pray that all the planned connections and meetings occur successfully and that Erin and I begin to develop meaningful and fruitful relationships.
- Pray for Mike and Kara Kuhn and their family as they continue to serve the people of Cameroon.
- Pray for Erin's and my work here in Concordia and across the country as we continue to invite people to partner with us in God's story of Bible translation amongst the Subula.

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The EELC's cathedral in Ngaoundéré



Laying of the SBTC cornerstone ceremony