

From Sister Fatima Nkuo TSSF

Greetings and God's blessings to you for the New Year 2013! Before saying anything I want to thank you for the help given to me so that the program could run smoothly. For this I am very grateful.

The program started on August 29th and went on till December 20th. There were altogether 12 persons who took part in facilitating the program either in the way of lectures or workshops. Our Sisters of the Common Venture did a lot of work with the sisters. As I saw, they came out well prepared to share with the sisters. Visual aids were used, materials and language used were simple down to the participants level of understanding. The participants were helped to share their life experiences and from the depths. They very much appreciated it for it was a new experience for some of them which touched them to the heart. They took a lot of pictures as they worked with the sisters. They will certainly send them to you. I can only say that the sisters went home feeling very grateful, renewed and transformed, ready to begin the second half of their lives with a renewed spirit.

I sincerely thank the common venture for this help given to our sisters.
Peace and all good!

REFLECTIONS ON MY TRIP TO CAMEROON

by

Karen Lueck, FSPA

YOU ARE WELCOME!! YOU ARE WELCOME!! I heard this greeting at least a hundred times in my short stay in Cameroon. I am still basking in this special Cameroonian embrace a month after returning home to the U.S. I loved my 2 ½ week visit to Cameroon! I believe that my experience there was truly the best of what the Franciscan Common Venture can be, an experience of true mutuality and sisterhood.

Sister Ann Kelley, OSF, and I became sisters as we shared all aspects of our Cameroonian experience. Ann and I were also able to bring some of our experience, expertise, and insight to the nine sisters in the renewal program at La Verna Spiritual Centre in Bamenda. While Ann taught in the morning such topics as Franciscan themes, prayer, spiritual guidance, and mid-life transition, I provided pastoral counseling in the afternoons. In addition, I taught a few classes on personal growth issues, like shame and guilt, and expressing anger in a healthy manner.

While we brought our gifts to share, the TSSF sisters shared their gifts with us in abundance. First of all, the sisters I met in the pastoral counseling space brought themselves. They shared openly with me their joys, their struggles, their pain, and their hope, as together we listened each other into deeper life.

I don't know what Ann and I would have done without Sister Fatima! She arranged everything so that the transition between cultures flowed seamlessly. From making sure we had

food we could eat, to arranging our transportation to various TSSF missions, to facilitating the program, S. Fatima gave herself endlessly to us and to the participants. We laughed, we teased, we shared our questions -- we experienced true sisterhood.

The hospitality was extraordinary at all the TSSF places we visited. And, I was impressed by the wonderful selfless work that the sisters are doing in their hospitals, clinics, schools, orphanages, pastoral centers, diocesan centers, and all the other places they minister.

I learned so much from my sisters in Cameroon. The thing that stood out the most for me was their deep faith and trust in God. Even in very difficult situations, they believe strongly that their beloved God will bring them through. It was very inspiring! Also inspiring was the joy the sisters express in so many ways: their beautiful smiles; the dancing, singing and drumming; their simple delight in jokes; sharing the eating of grasshoppers; even "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" (including a monkey) sung by the sisters at our going-away party. In addition, the simple lifestyle of the sisters was something I emulated in Cameroon and want to continue to embrace. I learned more from the sisters than I ever could have taught them, and I am grateful.

While I also experienced challenging things in Cameroon, somehow I found myself open, flexible, and actually welcoming of the new culture and different environment. The deeply rutted roads brought amazement; the loss of electricity and water at times taught me to do basic things differently; the early morning prayers brought a new appreciation of the beauty of the morning. I was blessed by the prayers of my sisters at home, and cared for by my sisters in Cameroon.

Thanks to all my sisters of the Franciscan Common Venture, here at home and in Cameroon, who made my visit there a wonderfully life-changing experience.

REFLECTIONS ON MY COMMON VENTURE EXPERIENCE

Sr. Ann Kelley, osf

My recent experience of participating in the Common Venture in Cameroon was primarily an experience of felt sisterhood with the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis. I felt a deep bondedness with these Franciscan women and a oneness with all those who have ever participated in the Common Venture. I am deeply indebted to all the women and men who preceded us in sharing their life-giving presence and individual gifts with the Tertiary Sisters. It was as if Sr. Karen Lueck, my Common Venture partner, and I were in the flow of a great river of living water, while we both received constant and gave of our treasures.

The warmth and gracious care of the Tertiary Sisters for us was truly moving. They did not spare themselves in making us feel comfortable, remain healthy, and appreciated for who we are and for our ministry. Many of the sisters asked Karen and me to thank our communities for sending us to them. It would be an understatement to say the Tertiary Sisters are extremely grateful for contributions that we, American Sisters and our associates, have made on their behalf. "I really don't know where we would be without the Common Venture," one former TSSF leader offered. This statement came from a profoundly truthful and grateful heart.

It was amazing to see first-hand the dedication, joy and hard work of the sisters, and what they are able to accomplish with such meager resources. This was evident at their hospitals, schools, orphanages, novitiate, postulancy, and retreat center. They know what their mission is and carry it out with the deepest faith, lively hope and tenderest love. And despite the lack of comforts, an easy lifestyle or dependable infrastructure, they do not spare themselves and are able to accomplish so much good in building the Beloved Community. The sisters are greatly dedicated to enhance the lives of anyone they meet on their path.

I want to express my personal gratitude for all our sisters and lay partners who held us in love and prayer while we ministered to the sisters in the renewal program at Bamenda. My ministry involved offering presentations on Franciscan and Advent themes, faith-sharing, spiritual direction, directed retreats, mid-life transition and ageing gracefully. In addition I offered workshops for Healing Empowerment and Transformation for a wider group of sisters on four occasions. I believe it was because of your prayers for Karen and me that we remained healthy and could share so freely at La Verna.

I also want to thank the leadership of the Common Venture for their wisdom in sending two of us first-timers together to Cameroon. We were able to process many new experiences with each other, which certainly was grace-filled.

The final Sunday I was in Cameroon I was privileged to celebrate with the sisters and other guests at Shisong the 50th anniversary of the founding of their novitiate in Cameroon. The occasion was very festive, beginning with the Eucharist which featured several native dances done by the novices. A wonderful banquet followed at which the present and former novice directors were honored. Entertainment concluded the celebration with much laughter and more dancing with village costumes. The entire experience was permeated with a profound gratitude for the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the sisters. Their vibrancy is a witness to an on-going Pentecost in their midst.

Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist

September 10 – 26, 2012

Sister Sarah Doser and Sister M. Timothy Prokes of the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist offered interactive spirituality and theology classes at the Renewal Program of the Tertiary Sisters in their LaVerna Spiritual Centre, Bamenda, Cameroon, from September 10 – 26, 2012. Nine members of the Tertiary Sisters participated wholeheartedly in the 48 sessions given during our segment of the Renewal Program.

It was a privilege to be part of this Renewal for Sisters who have had extensive experience in the fields of midwifery, social work and teaching. In the context of this Year of Faith and New Evangelization, we explored together selected materials from the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict's post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation following the Synod for the African Nations. There was an emphasis on Prayer, *Lectio Divina*, and personal spiritual growth, relating these to the Sisters' daily lives on their missions. "Naming" one another in various dimensions of their gifts was a vital part of our time together.

We were delighted with the response of the Sisters in a Program prepared by Sister Fatima of the Tertiaries. Our days there coincided with the rainy season, and torrential rains arrived on cue each early afternoon. We could watch their approach as they moved into Bamenda from the low mountains which surround the city.

There remain vivid memories of the rooster who crowed repeatedly outside the classroom window, and the young men whose rhythmic axe strokes provided fuel for the Centre's kitchen stove. On our return to Douala, we visited the Tertiary House of Studies in Buea and spoke with the Sisters who are being prepared within their own country for a variety of professional services.

Reflection by Marcia Lunz OSF

Returning to Cameroon this year was like going home. The Sisters in the Renewal Program were new to me but very quickly we connected at the heart level during our formal and informal times together. The mutuality that we work for in the Common Venture is most evident in the "heart space" with each other. It is there that the deepest learning takes place for all of us.

Nature and Nurture in Cameroon

(Dedicated to the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis)

There is no shaking off the red dust
That seeps and soaks and spreads
Around and into and through every external pore of one's being.
Rising from bronzed red clay,
Pulverized by the wind,
My vision is filtered through
Eye-level clouds of red dust.
There is no shaking off a Tertiary heart
That embraces and enfolds and enlivens,
Seeping into and soaking through and saturating
The depths of one's soul.
Beginning from the first encounter
Initiated by the Spirit of Love,
My vision is heightened through
Graced homecoming in Tertiary hearts.

(3-10-12 Marcia Lunz, OSF)