

SUMMARY OF DR. ALBERT DOMM'S MISSION TRIP TO CAMEROON

Father asked me to write a synopsis of my December trip to a hospital in Cameroon. This is my third visit to Mbingo Baptist Hospital. I stand in for the regular Pathologist so that he and his wife can return to the USA.

Before I tell about the hospital, perhaps a little background. Cameroon is a country in Western Equatorial Africa. In the late nineteenth century it was a German colony. After World War One, Cameroon was split with the bulk becoming a French colony and a small part of the western part of the country became British. In 1960 Cameroon became independent. Most of the English speaking west united as a federal republic with the much larger French speaking part. There are 24 million Cameroonians, 40% Catholic, 30% Protestant and 18% Muslim. This is a poor country ranking 153 out of 188 in the UN Human development indicators. The average wage is \$70 a month.

The hospital is in the Western English speaking part. The setting is in the highlands about one mile up surrounded by mountains. During the rainy season you can see multiple waterfalls. I think of it as Hawaii but without the ocean. The afternoons are hot, but the evenings are cool. Through many decades, this hospital has evolved from the leprosy hospital it was at the start to the teaching and referral hospital it is now. There are residents in medicine and surgery, and plans to bring in more programs. These doctors then go to many African countries to deliver good health care and witness to God's love. I heard some talk of very difficult countries, one for example had ten surgeons in the entire country. Cameroon has doctors but with varying skill and background. Often the sick person will go first to a traditional healer, then to the local hospital. If still sick, the patient travels here. That can be a long arduous journey for the roads are bad and the buses stuffed with passengers. The legal load limit is nineteen in a minivan. The family or some helper comes because the hospital doesn't serve meals or provide many amenities outside of a bed in a ward filled with other patients. The family camps out on the hospital grounds or perhaps sleeps under the sick ones bed.

Each time I return I see progress. This time there was a new Pathology department with a nice sized office for me, a CT scanner, and a Pediatric intensive care unit. The Cameroonians run the hospital, and that can be interesting at times since their view of life can be different. There is a more communal identity and less individualism. This is also a land of strong faith. I visited Saint Thomas Aquinas seminary in Bambui, about 20 miles distant. There are about 180 seminarians for the four English speaking dioceses.



The Pathology Department Staff



St. Bernard's Parish Church in Kedjom Keku near the hospital



Hillside view of the hospital. The hospital consists of many separate buildings.