From Juliana Rowe, NBS Director of International Missions:

In preparing for this mission we anticipated a language challenge with French speakers, and the 250 “country talk” dialects in Cameroon. We were poised to conduct classes in English, as we were told mostly English-speaking pastors, Christian educators and laity would register for the Institutes and that members of the Cameroon team could act as translators. On the first day when we gathered for the Institute in Ndop in the Anglophone North West Region, little did we anticipate having unlettered delegates show up! They came because, as they said, they also wanted to hear and learn to tell “the Gospel as story.” They want to be useful to their congregations and minister to other oral learners.

Naturally all the oral learners ended up with me when the team discovered that I could communicate with them all in my Sierra Leone Krio dialect, which is similar to the Cameroon lingua franca pidgin. These oral learners were quick learners and they were bold enough to stand before the whole group in a plenary to tell the story they had just learned in pidgin. Some told stories in country talk during our break-out class. During my plenary, I used both English and pidgin in discussing the Shema (the great Hebrew prayer) to make the session meaningful for them. Afterwards, a woman told me that she was going to use what she had learned about the Shema to talk again with her grandmother about getting rid of her idol gods. What a great moment that was for me!

Thank you to all the NBS members who supported this mission with their monetary gifts, their time and their prayers!

Reflections from team member
Richard Rice

The van, supplied by the United Methodist Church, with its cross and flame significantly displayed, was loaded down with ten occupants squeezed in together and luggage in every available place. It was a two-day trip to the village of Ndop from the airport in Douala. Our young French-speaking driver, Giles, guided us past the pot holes and barriers and over the speed bumps with great skill. Without air conditioning, windows had to be open and dust and smoke, from the burning off of the fields in preparation for planting, filled the van. Eventually almost all of us were wearing our masks. It prompted one soldier at a checkpoint to laugh and question why we all had white masks on. Also, at the checkpoints, vendors would surround the van on all sides offering their grilled corn, fried plantain, nuts, bananas, bread and even some cold citrus soda drinks. We traveled past huge plantations of bananas, pineapples, rubber trees and rich vegetation.
We also saw the people of Cameroon. They were at the markets, working in the fields, walking along the road. The women dressed in colorful clothing, the children and youth in their school uniforms, and the men, some in suits, and others in beautiful African dress. Occasionally, we would pass a herd of cattle being led to market.

The first week my workshop group of ten at the Institute in Ndop had two students in it. One, Cosmas, was only eight. The other, John Claude, was 20. He would carry my books and materials for me after each workshop. They both were excellent learners and excelled in the telling of the stories they had learned.

The second week, when we were in Mutengene, there were some missionaries who had self-evacuated from the Central African Republic who attended the Institute. After I led a plenary on Bartimaeus where I used the repetition method for the learning of the story, one of the missionaries wondered why this was an exercise that was only for literate learners when they were working with mostly oral learners. At that point, Juliana asked the person she was paired with to get up and tell Bartimaeus. Mary, an older woman who was an oral learner, got up and told the whole story. It was a special moment for all of us as we realized that our mission was being accomplished in a way we had not experienced before.

Being an agricultural country, their diet is mainly vegetarian. Most homes had vegetables growing, even if their land area was small, and some also had chickens and goats. Many women and some men wear the traditional style of clothing. The colorful fabrics often indicate the area where they are from and it is practical clothing for their climate and style of life. And, yes, women and some men continue the practice of carrying large parcels on their heads. Most people travel by foot, bus, taxi or motorcycle.

“What a great opportunity this is for us” was my thought as our team began our mission in Cameroon. With their long history of storytelling, learning scripture by heart came easily for them. They often adapted the “story” to their own experiences while retaining the message of the gospel. The rhythm of their life came through in the music as our singing was accompanied by drums, other percussion instruments and guitar—with great enthusiasm!

Reflections from team member Nancy Rice

“Churches provide much of the education, and each day one can see the children in their uniforms walking to school.”

Nancy Rice

Photos by NBS President Ron Coughlin

The 2013 Cameroon Mission Team
with biblical storytelling workshop participants in Mutengene
Education is important but hard to come by. The government is to provide schools, but often it is one or two rooms for perhaps 300 children and no books. Churches provide much of the education, and each day one can see the children in their uniforms walking to and from school.

I was privileged to attend a “mission” church, held in the home of a woman named Emelia and her brothers. One room is set aside for adults, and the children meet on a covered porch. They share their home and resources with the people, growing fruits and vegetables. The day I visited the men were boiling palm nuts to make palm oil to sell. Emelia hopes to restore a building on the property to create a safe place for young people to gather and learn.

One special experience for me was a visit to a home for abandoned children (our son in the U.S. is writing materials for this home). How much they do with so little! I realize anew how blessed I am.

**Reflections from team member**

**Tim Coombs**

I am truly blessed to have been a member of the NBS Cameroon Mission team. Here in the U.S. biblical storytelling is sometimes viewed as an entertaining way to present the Scriptures in worship. In Cameroon, however, biblical storytelling is becoming the heart and soul of the outreach to the country’s “oral learners,” that is, those who cannot read or write, which make up about 60 percent of the country. Churches are eager to know more about the oral nature of the Bible and view it as “Good News of a Great Joy.”

Aside from leading story-learning workshops, each member of our team had a particular role and emphasis on our mission to Cameroon. My role was as the team’s song leader. Cameroonians love to sing, and sing loudly. Since hymnbooks and songbooks are rarities, they prefer music with repeating lines, which are easy for oral learning. The hit song that I brought with me was Nick and Anita Haigh’s “Kyrie Eleison,” which was taught to the Festival Gathering in 2001 when the Northumbria team served as our keynoters. We sang this nearly everyday and I imagine the song will become a standard in many church services from now on.

By chance or the work of the Spirit, I ended up leading story-learning workshops that consisted mostly of pastors. Not only did we learn the stories, but we were able to discuss how the learning of stories influences the way one preaches and goes about the whole of ministry. Nearly every church we encountered in Cameroon is growing and is in the process of expanding their sanctuaries. Just imagine what will happen to those churches that embrace biblical storytelling!

**Reflections from team member**

**Amelia Boomershine**

If you want to improve your biblical storytelling teaching skills, sign up for the next NBS mission trip! One of the many blessings of the Cameroon mission trip was having the opportunity to get lots of teaching experience in a short period of time with oral learners.

Children attended the Festival Gathering in Ndop. To my delight, they were assigned to my mission partner, Nancy Rice, and me for a story learning workshop on Mark 1:16-20. We used the foolproof storyboard exercise and Godly Play figures for deeper learning and telling. The basket lid made a fine boat. The story materials helped the children enter the story world and get beyond rote recitation (which they do amazingly well). It was captivating to watch the young people think through the story, arrange the figures, and tell. Everyone paid close attention while they did so. Better yet, everyone wanted a turn! I repeated the exercise in the afternoon workshop on Biblical Storytelling with Children. The adults were just as eager to tell with the figures as the children. The hands-on materials really helped people visualize the story!
Reflections from team member
Ron Coughlin

I found the traditional wedding customs interesting, as they were explained to me. A wedding is called a “knock door.” The groom’s family goes to the home of the potential bride to speak on behalf of the son. The bride’s family questions the suitability of the groom, and if they agree, sets a date for the “knock door.” On the set day, the groom’s family arrives, knocks on the door and then enters and negotiates a price for the bride. The negotiation involves passing a bundle of sticks back and forth until the price is agreed; each stick is worth 10,000 CFA (about $20.00). Then the bride is brought out with a veil over her face. One part of the game is to bring out a woman different from the bride first and ask the groom if this is the bride; they may do this several times to much laughter and joy. When the groom identifies the bride, she is given a cup and told to find her husband and give him the cup to drink; again there is much game playing as different men try to get the cup. After these ceremonies, the wedding party and banquet begins. Later the wedding is made legal before a judge. And for Christians, a third wedding celebration takes place in the church, after eight months of marriage counseling with the pastor. After the church wedding, then the couple can live together!

One of the interesting features of worship in the local churches was the pattern of communal praying. It sounds like a babel of speaking in tongues, but all the congregation members are praying in their own language. Each individual member of the congregation prays out loud following the instructions of the worship leader, who encourages the praying and brings it up to a crescendo and then brings it down to a soft whisper, only to get the praying loud again through encouragement. This went on for about 10 minutes in the middle of the worship service. It was very moving.

New missions are calling!
Is God calling you to be a member of an international biblical storytelling team?
Email Juliana Rowe, NBS Director of International Relations
boodydede@aol.com

Post-Mission Updates
From George Vimensi Minang
NBSC Coordinator:

The Cameroon mission work is already multiplying!

Susan Smith, one of the NBS Institute delegates from Central Africa Republic (CAR) has already translated all her notes into French. She is also translating the notes into Sango, the local language of the people in CAR.

Pastor Shey George held his first biblical storytelling workshop on March 29, 2013 in Magba with 52 people in attendance.

Pastor Atong Divine and Eric Atemkoh, two participants from the Ndop institute did a workshop in Babanki on April 6.

Gile (our driver) told a story in French on Palm Sunday in the church he attends in Yaoundé.

Pastor Divine conducted a workshop in a church in Babessi village on April 27.

In May I visited Barry Abbott’s to see his work among the Baka Pigmies.