



By Peter Newburn
COUNTRY COORDINATOR
for CAMEROON

Peter has served in full-time ministry for over thirty years. Recently, Peter and his family spent three years as missionaries in Cameroon, where Peter was a theology teacher at the major seminary. He also worked for almost nine years as a parish life coordinator in the Diocese of San Bernardino, California, where he was responsible for overseeing all aspects of pastoral ministry and the administration of a large parish.



Spreading the GOSPEL in Cameroon

FAR MORE THAN WE ASK OR IMAGINE

I have served the Catholic Church in full-time ministry for over thirty years, in various positions of leadership and in various parts of the country. I am so grateful for my affiliation with Renewal Ministries, which has provided tremendous inspiration to my faith and an outlet for my passion for evangelization. My first mission with Renewal Ministries was to Tanzania in 2009. In subsequent years, I went to China and Papua New Guinea. Each time I'd come home fired up, with renewed zeal for my ministerial work.

My wife Joy and I considered being full-time missionaries, but thought we'd have to wait until the kids were grown. Then we discovered an organization called Lay Mission Helpers, based in Los Angeles, which sends lay people and families to various countries as missionaries. After five months of formation, Joy and I and our three young children were sent to Cameroon in West Africa, where I had been asked to serve as the first lay person to teach theology at the major seminary. We literally left everything—our home, possessions, family, and friends—to be full-time missionaries for three years, from 2012-2015. Though challenging at times, it was truly a wonderful experience for our family—to live a simple lifestyle, to experience African culture, to gain a broader understanding of the Body of Christ, and to be witnesses to our Catholic faith. Joy and I believe that our overseas missionary experience was one of the best things we have done for our children!

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While in Cameroon, I was appointed country coordinator for Renewal Ministries. I made contacts with numerous bishops and the national leadership team for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) to let them know of our vision and our work. We now have a special relationship with Bishop Sosthène Bayemi, the National CCR Coordinator for the Episcopal Conference in Cameroon. He is a visionary and pastoral leader, the first clergy in the country to credit his vocation to the Charismatic Renewal. We are being invited by various bishops to lead the annual clergy retreat in their dioceses and to provide training to lay leaders in the Renewal. Our fifth mission in Cameroon was last month.



Bishop Sosthène Bayemi is the first clergy in the country to credit his vocation to the Charismatic Renewal.

Pictured left to right: Peter Newburn, Bishop Sosthène Bayemi, and Renewal Ministries' Canadian Board member Bishop Scott McCaig.

It is a tremendous privilege to facilitate personal and ministerial renewal for priests. In most cases, it is the first experience for these priests to have lay people give them formation and lead them in prayer. We have found that teaching the Unbound approach to healing and deliverance is especially helpful in the African context. Clergy and lay leaders alike have found it to be pastorally effective, personally empowering, and solidly grounded in Catholic teaching.

At the clergy retreat in the Diocese of Obala, some of the priests, who had been negative toward the Renewal, commented that their perception of Charismatics had changed. They now felt much more personally open to the Holy Spirit, and discovered a new sense of fraternity amongst themselves as priests. Bishop Sosthène commented:

“We were not a family before; now we are. It is a new beginning for us!”

In the Diocese of Mamfe, where we were first invited to lead the diocesan priests' retreat, one elder priest shared how he had been harboring resentment and unforgiveness in his heart for years against many of his fellow diocesan priests. He experienced God speaking clearly to him that not only did he need to forgive, but that he needed to ask forgiveness. When he expressed, “I am now forgiven, and I forgive all of you!” the room erupted in shouts of jubilation. He and the chancellor and the vicar general locked arms and began to jump up and down amidst joyful celebration.

There were other testimonies from the priests, that they had found a “new power” and “new freedom” in their priestly life. Others expressed a powerful sense of unity in the Spirit of Christ. The vicar general proclaimed: “There has been a mighty break-through in this diocese!” The bishop commented: “Fifteen years ago, the Holy Father created the Diocese of Mamfe. But today, it was born!” The tears were rolling down my cheeks as I witnessed the divine power and mercy exhibited amongst the priests that day.



Michelle Kazanjian praying through the [Unbound] Five Keys with priests.

We were given the special privilege to lead the annual national gathering of lay leaders in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in June. There were about 150 leaders present for the entire three days, representing seventeen out of twenty-two dioceses in Cameroon. We provided training in the Five Keys to Living in Freedom (Unbound), led prayer over the whole group each day, addressed questions and heard testimonies, and met with individual leaders. Each evening, we had Mass, praise and adoration. Oh, how those Cameroonians praise the Lord!



We have also had the opportunity to meet with youth leaders and to present St John Paul II's teaching on how our God-given desire for relationships and sexual love are intended to lead us to spousal union with God (Theology of the Body). We have found that young people of every culture are hungry to learn the truths that undergird the Church's teaching.

Three years ago, I had the opportunity to meet Sister Miriam Osee, a Cameroonian and friend of Renewal Ministries, who served for years on the executive board for International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS). She was so excited about the potential impact our ministry would have in Cameroon. From her prayer with me, the Lord put on my heart to pray the passage from Ephesians 3:20-21 for the country—“*Now to Him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen!*” God is answering that prayer in Cameroon in a big way!

I am so very grateful to those who invest in this effort, for your prayers and financial gifts, which make our missions possible. I am genuinely excited for future mission opportunities in Cameroon. I am continually amazed at how God always seems to bless our work and how the Holy Spirit works in such powerful ways. God's anointing is truly on Renewal Ministries! ✠

ADORATION & PRAISE AT THE LAY LEADERS' CONFERENCE

