



## For Slaves and Kings

*Phil and June Nelson, ELCA missionaries, walk alongside members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in their ministry. Phil reflects on the richness and diversity of Cameroonian culture.*

As a pilot, I learned the words of another anonymous pilot: “Slip the surly bonds of earth and touch the face of God.” These words sent shivers down my spine. As a missionary, I get to touch the face of God both in slaves and in kings.

In Cameroon, having family is everything. It defines who, and what, you are and can be. Tobi Pauline was born into slavery and, because her owner abused her as a young girl, she is barren. At about the age of 13, as Tobi doesn’t really know her exact age, she fled and found refuge at the Lutheran mission in Ngaoundéré. She worked, first, for the hospital cleaning soiled laundry and, later, as cook and washer woman for Norwegian and American missionaries. The many missionary children she took care of became her family. Some of them support her in her old age. I have touched the face of God in Tobi, the daughter of a slave.

Aboubakari’s family owned many slaves like Tobi. Aboubakari was born into royalty. His father, one of the most powerful kings in northern Cameroon, believed that royalty must not be corrupted by western influences such as education. Despite this, Lutheran missionaries living in his father’s kingdom assisted him in obtaining an education. With Aboubakari’s education, he rose to the ministerial level in Cameroonian government. After his older brother became sick, and died, Aboubakari was chosen to be the Lamiido of Rey Bouba. He is bringing his kingdom into the modern age. For his subjects, this is a new day with many possibilities.

We humans are created in the image of God; both slaves and kings are God’s children. We touch the face of God when we touch our neighbor.

*ELCA missionaries, Phil and June Nelson, serve in Cameroon. Phil assists the church in business administration; June works as a nurse.*



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