

From Maine to Gabon: My Journey Continues in Africa

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July 2, 2002: “So you want live in a hut in Africa and practice medicine?” the woman in the seat next to me asked. “Well, yes, I thought” - not really thinking that this was a strange answer to the question, “What are you in school for?”

It is by the grace of God that 17 years later my wife Josie and I are now realizing the vision we both shared at that time. In September 2020 our family will be moving to France for nine months of language school before we settle in Gabon, on the western coast of Africa, at Bongolo Mission Hospital. There, I will be one of three general surgeons along with four surgery residents from the Pan African Academy of Christian Surgeons who serve approximately one-third of that country’s population. My wife will be looking after our four children and intends to work with local midwives.

The hospital itself is a 158-bed hospital in southeastern Gabon. There will be a variety of general surgery cases including hernias, gallbladders, bowel obstructions, traumas and obstetric emergencies. The operating theaters do have laparoscopic capability and we will be performing endoscopies. For the first three years we will be supported by Samaritan’s Purse, an international Christian organization which works in everything from microfinance to disaster relief.

I attended undergrad at Seattle Pacific University, a small liberal arts school in Seattle, Washington. It was here that I knew I was called to a medical career and the same environment helped me understand how my Christian faith would deeply inform what I did with that career. I began looking for opportunities to serve those in need, first volunteering at a homeless youth clinic in Seattle. My graduate work took me to Philadelphia where I worked in tuberculosis control. In medical school, my wife and I were able to spend a month in Kenya, learning and serving at a small mission hospital. Finally, during my residency at MMC, I had the privilege of traveling to Rwanda with Michael Curci and working alongside Rwandan surgical residents at the primary teaching hospital in the country’s capital.

I strongly believe all these experiences have prepared me for the work I will be joining in Gabon. The training I received during my surgical residency at MMC has laid a strong foundation for the rest of my career, and I am deeply indebted to all of my mentors there. It is my hope to continue the relationship with MMC and when I am established in Africa, we will have residents join us for elective rotations. This type of relationship has strong benefits for both parties. Residents who gain exposure in environments with limited resources learn to solve problems in ways that haven’t seen before. Those same residents can bring with them knowledge of current techniques and surgical management that may be overlooked in a resource-limited setting.

Have a personal story you’d like to share? Email thescope@mmc.org.