

A Faith that Sustains: Exploring Church and Community in Rural Ghana

WCHR 605 (BC)

Prof. Beth Nordbeck and the Rev. Jim Christensen

Dates (including travel time): January 5-17, 2012

Course Description

In Ghana, community relationship, not productivity and accomplishment, is a dominant cultural value. This Border-Crossing Immersion will introduce participants to community life in rural Kpenoe (“Penway”), offering first-hand experience of the way in which Christian faith sustains, informs, and offers hope to many impoverished and pre-literate residents. The group will converse with traditional chiefs and elders; participate in worship; interact with seminarians, professors, and residents of a “cured lepers’ village; and experience the rich but unhurried pace of rural village life. Participants will stay for one or two nights in a family home, participating with their hosts in cooking, shopping and other chores; there will also be opportunity for worship leadership. A day trip to a coastal “slave castle”—the last African stop before shipping slaves to the west in the 19th century—will allow participants to consider slavery and its effects on community from the perspective of the place of origin.

Our primary conversation partners will be members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana—a partner denomination of the United Church of Christ. The class will be co-led by the Rev. James Christensen, an Andover Newton graduate with more than a decade’s intimate work with, and experience of, the people and culture of Kpenoe.

Topics to be covered on the trip and pre-session:

- Life in a non-Europeanized African nation
- Ghanaian traditions and their effect on contemporary practices
- Ritual religious practices (including burial) in contemporary Ghanaian culture
- Syncretism
- Slavery and the slave trade from an African perspective
- Different experiences of family in the Ewe community
- The challenges of contemporary family life in Ghana
- Tribal politics
- The challenges of leadership (chieftancy) in a transforming society
- Everyday economics of village life (the change from subsistence farming to a cash society)

Required text:

Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (2004). A general history that will acquaint readers with aspects of the African experience.

Recommended texts for additional reading:

(All of the following are available for various prices on Amazon.com.)

Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (1996). Social and cultural history of the group with which we will be interacting.

Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (1999). Traditional religion, missionary activity, and (especially) the rise of Pentecostalism in Ghana.

G.K. Nukunya, *Kinship and Marriage Among the Anlo-Ewe* (1969). An older academic book that offers basic cultural history.

Kwei Quartey, *Wife of the Gods: A Novel* (2009). Basic detective fiction, but it presents a very helpful and accurate picture of contemporary Ghanaian culture and traditions. A good choice for the tourist!