



# EP JOURNAL

*A Newsletter of Ezekiel's Place Retreat Center*



Issue No. 11 – Fall 2011

Please visit [www.ezekielsplace.com](http://www.ezekielsplace.com)

## EP VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES:

**Vision:** The achievement of justice, peace, renewal and reconciliation for all.

**Mission:** Ezekiel's Place is a Christian retreat center with a mission to provide a serene environment and responsive programs promoting justice, peace, renewal and reconciliation to affirm ethnic, national, religious and economic diversity.

**Core Values:** Faith, Justice, Peace, Renewal, Reconciliation, Integrity, and Accountability

## Table of Contents

- Page 1: Greetings from the Co-Directors  
Page 2: To be Called  
Page 2 : Servant Leadership as Servanthood  
Page 3 : Forum on "Servant Leadership: An Inner Awakening"  
Page 4 : Servant Leadership Forum: Being God's Hands in the World.....  
Page 5 : Integrity Forum: Living with a Compass  
Page 6 : Bringing It Home: Reflections on the Africa Forum  
Page 7 : Zimbabwe, Roundtable Forum  
Page 7 : Global Jubilee Village Experience: Christ Living in Me.....  
Page 8 : GJV Experience: A Weekend of More and Less  
Page 9 : Reflections on GJV Experience: Identities, Relationships and Peace  
Page 10 : A GJV Experience: Enhancing My Understanding of Justice and Peace  
Page 11 : The True Diamonds of Botswana  
Page 12 : My Eye Opening Experience in Guatemala  
Page 13 : Amazing Children of Ethiopia  
Page 13 : Internalizing my Volunteer Experience in Ethiopia

## Proposed EP Programs/Events in 2012:

### January – December

- Various retreat groups

### January – March

- Planning for Placements of Student Summer Volunteers

### May – August:

- GJV Experience "graduates" perform volunteer work in various countries

### October: (early)

- 16<sup>th</sup> Global Jubilee Village Experience

### September:

- Justice and Peace Academy Forum

Dear Friends of Ezekiel's Place:

*Another exciting year at Ezekiel's Place has almost passed --- and Ezekiel's Place tenth year anniversary of joy and thanksgiving for God's grace. As you read the following reflections of participants in our various programs, you will find powerful insights on the true meaning of service and servant hood, in the spirit of God's two greatest commandments (...love God...and love thy neighbor...). We invite you to prayerfully consider where your callings and gifts may lead you next, as travelers and laborers on life's journey. We pray that in the midst of great uncertainties in today's world, you are sustained by a sense of purpose, a commitment to service, and the peace of God.*

*May God's sustaining love uphold and strengthen you.*

*Barbara and Richard/Dick Anson, Co-Directors of Ezekiel's Place*

## **End of fall, beginning of winter at Ezekiel's Place**



*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

## Highlights of Ezekiel's Place Events in 2011:

### January – December:

- Various retreat groups

### February:

- 12: Integrity Forum (held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)
- Planning for Placements of Summer Volunteers

### April:

- 2: Africa Forum (held with African Student Assoc., at West Va. University)
- 8-10: 14<sup>th</sup> Global Jubilee Village (GJV) Experience
- 30: Integrity Forum (held in San Jose, Costa Rica)

### May – August:

- "Graduates" (7) from GJV Experience performed summer volunteer work

### June:

- 18: Integrity Forum (held in Monrovia, Liberia)

### September:

- 9 and 10: Servant Leadership Forum

### October:

- 14 - 16<sup>th</sup>: 15<sup>th</sup> GJV Experience
- 30: Integrity Forum (held in Belmopan, Belize)

### November:

- 5: Zimbabwe Roundtable Forum (held with Movement for Democratic Change/MDC)

## To Be Called

*(by Barbara Anson, Co-Director of Ezekiel's Place)*

As Abraham and Ezekiel, Mary and Mary Magdalene  
Am I called by God?

To what am I called, and where and why?  
To whom am I to respond?

Listen, awaken, spirit within  
Listen to the Great I Am.

Being, and being, willing to be restful  
Being, and being, willing to listen.

In quiet moments, I hear,  
In emptying myself, I hear.

In places of pain and hurt,  
In places of helplessness and hopelessness.

We walk alongside one another, and learn.  
We reach toward each other, and know God has answered.

*"By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out not knowing where he was to go. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."*

*Hebrews 11:8*

## Theme:

## EP Forum Participant Reflections:

### Servant Leadership as Servanthood

*(by Brandon Dennison, Executive Director of Coalfield Development Corporation, southern W. Virginia)*

Servant leadership is simply a process of building relationships. God calls us to do things that do not feel natural. As servant leaders we have the power to speak life into people. These were the three takeaways I have continued reflecting upon since the Ezekiel's Place forum on "Servant Leadership: Biblical Foundations and Practices in Building Community," held on September 9-10, 2011.

Servant leadership is simply a process of building relationships. This was Vicar and West Virginia State Senator John Unger's message for us. The message was warmly received as many among us were openly uncomfortable with the idea that we are, in fact, leaders. Many of us feel entirely unequipped for leadership. But Vicar Unger was clear in his assertion that all followers of Jesus Christ are servant leaders. Understanding that this is so means rejecting the world's view of "strong leadership:" bossy, strong, tough, loud, and bearing a title such as CEO or Executive Director. It was noted that the best servant leaders in history had no title: Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Martin Luther King Jr. We are all servant leaders, even the "least of these." This simply invites us into a calling of building relationships. From Christ centered relationships come movements. From movements come lasting change. We must lead lives worthy of our calling.

God calls us to do things that do not feel natural. This was Michelle Connor's message to us. Michelle is Executive Director of Almost Heaven Habitat for Humanity based out of Franklin, West Virginia. Michelle was strikingly transparent in sharing her personal story and her unlikely path to where she is today. This led the group into a deep time of sharing. There were some tears. Indeed, our pain often becomes a part of our servant calling. It was clear, in sharing stories, that participants of this forum came willing to open up. In sharing our collective stories, and in being real with each other, the forum was truly able to open my heart and take me into a place of humility and openness to the Spirit. This portion of the forum ended with a provocative question: "Why do we doubt that God is calling us to use our gifts to help others?"

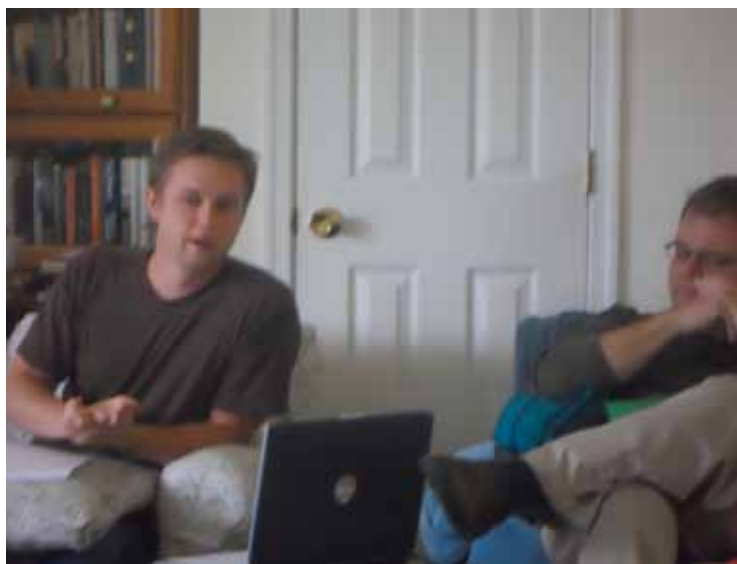
As servant leaders we have the power to speak life into people. Frankly, I was astounded by this statement made by the Reverend Joseph Deck, Director of the Servant Leadership School in Washington, D.C. No, servant leaders are not called to pursue impressive

titles or worldly power, but we nevertheless have a powerful purpose in this life. In building relationships, and in following callings even when they do not feel natural, we take on the work of kingdom building. This means taking each other from death to life. Doing such transformational work means taking part in radical acts such as forgiveness and the prophetic word. Reverend Deck stated, "When I realized that forgiveness is about giving up control, admitting that I'm not in control, that's when my life changed." What a counter cultural concept! That leadership for Jesus' followers is about giving up control, not gaining more of it! And grace is the essence of it all.

My thought is this: perhaps we can drop the word "leader" from the term "servant-leader" entirely and work instead simply to become true servants. After all, Jesus has not much to say about "leadership" in the Bible, but he has much to say about servant hood. After each group member shared, in a deep and personal way, our individual efforts at being servant leaders, the forum came to a prayerful close. We each left in a thoughtful mood, quietly inspired. Personally, I felt renewed and reaffirmed in my calling to community development work in the coalfields of West Virginia.

The work of servant leadership is, generally, a quiet and steady labor of love: love for God and love for people. "Servant leadership is doing uncomfortable things, in humility, and in full trust of the truth that God uses our gifts to help people. Through God we do help people, not simply extending our hand in charity but really, truly helping people. Often we do so in private. Servant leadership is breathing life into people. It's journeying together from death to life. This happens quietly, without fanfare, and without understanding what it is exactly we are doing.

We are all servants. God, give us the strength, wisdom, and openness to glorify you in servant hood.



*Brandon shares at SL Forum (Senator Unger on right)*

## Forum on "Servant Leadership: An Inner Awakening

*(By Mark Jones, M.Div., Forum Participant, Christian minister and Doctor of Ministry student at United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio)*

Immediately, upon arriving on the grounds of Ezekiel's Place, I noticed that my lungs had opened up and impatiently I took in the fresh air. To myself, I chuckled and questioned: "Is this organic air?"

All one has to do is visit the grounds of Ezekiel's Place once to further understand how the Psalmist in the biblical scripture can declare boldly that "the earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein... ." (Psalm 24:1). All one has to do is visit the grounds of Ezekiel's Place once to pause and refocus, and begin to get again their direction for life. And, all one has to do is visit the grounds of Ezekiel's Place to appreciate life and to have respect for Mother Earth and more closely watch as she meticulously cares for her offspring. The Christian retreat center, which is tucked away on 105 acres in the mountains of West Virginia, serves as a refuge and tranquil sanctuary for its visitors by way of spiritual retreats, the Justice and Peace Academy, and sustainable living, allowing them to exhale from the realities of their challenges, or allowing them to rest up for the journey ahead.

The retreat center was quite a juxtaposition for me, an urban city dweller from Washington, D.C., as I was awestruck because of its serenity and peacefulness, and less than a two hour drive from the hustle and bustle of Washington, D.C., the most powerful city in the world. I quickly realized that I live in a city where time moves swiftly by and many things compete for my attention, but at the retreat center, I found myself counting the seconds of the day and appreciating the natural surroundings. I also realized that while in Washington, D.C., I spend more time inside an office, and while I was at the retreat center, I wanted to spend more time outside. The expansive hills and forested areas, the cloud formations that rolled over them during the day, as well as the fog that crept over them at night, took me higher into meditation on portions of Psalm 8:

*<sup>3</sup> When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
<sup>4</sup> what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?*

The visit to the retreat center afforded me the opportunity to further see how God cares for us, and to participate in a two-day Servant Leadership workshop, offered through the Justice and Peace Academy, that enabled me to learn more about myself as a Christian minister as well as share some perspectives with the workshop's other participants. The forum included short presentations on Biblical foundations of servant leadership, secular models of leadership, challenges and good practices of leadership, and group discussions. Major presenters included a state senator and non-profit managers, all of whom serve in public capacities. One of the major takeaways for me was a deeper respect for a person's personal

story. The workshop was so powerful that it birthed the sharing of personal stories that offered assistance and solutions. It further solidified for me that everyone has a personal story, and one never truly knows what people have been through in their lives whether it has been traumatic or pleasant, which may explain why they may or may not live a certain way. This introduced a deeper sensitivity towards the experiences of God's people, that has cultivated, for me, a deeper sacredness and sanctity regarding the fragility of life. Another major takeaway for me was a deeper understanding of the biblical scripture, "Be still and know that I am God..." (Psalm 46:10). This is because the challenges in life can, sometimes, press people so low to the ground that they feel it will never get better. But, being at the center that weekend--up in the mountains--also enabled me to be more acutely aware that I was in the very presence of God, communing with God, and that my only focus at that moment should be about God and not my problems.

Indeed, I left the center encouraged, knowing that God is able to do all things, except fail. I left the center ready to serve the people of God, in all capacities, knowing that God would be by my side and would not let me fall. I left the center in peace.



*Mark Jones summarizes key points from group discussion.*

## **Servant Leadership Forum: Being God's Hands in the World.....**

***(by Rita Caufield, retired civil rights lawyer, community activist, and EP Board Member)***

A person registering for a forum at Ezekiel's Place typically needs to briefly state his or her reason(s) for participating and their expectations for the experience. I was seeking exactly what the forum framework document suggested: an opportunity to deepen my understanding of, and commitment to, being a servant leader in whatever manner God is calling me at this point in my life. And I expected to enjoy all the things I like about gatherings in its beautiful natural setting: a very diverse group of fellow seekers, intellectual stimulation, spiritual nourishment, and challenges to my too-comfortable life.

As I expected, the variety of vocations and life experiences represented by this forum's participants was truly impressive: managers in many types of non-profit ventures, ministers, teachers, health-care and legal professionals, students, retirees, technicians, community volunteers.....All seeking to grow in their knowledge of God's will for their lives or how to serve more fully.

Every participant's perspective and contributions enriched the discussion, but there were three main resource persons. Vicar John Unger, whose "day job" is leadership of the WV state senate, opened the forum with reflections on the biblical foundations of the concept of servant leadership. Biblical servants portrayed in the Old Testament "first anchored themselves in service to God and stood ready to serve and lead others, if called." The New Testament takes the concept to new levels: Jesus' teachings are so suffused with the concepts of humility and unselfishness that "for followers of Jesus, servant leadership isn't an option; it's **the way.**" Can someone be a leader without having followers? Yes! One always has oneself as a follower of the spirit of God which impels one's actions.

The second resource person was Michelle Connor, executive director of Almost Heaven Habitat for Humanity. She chronicled her journey from desperate personal circumstances and lack of self-confidence, to family stability and eventual leadership of the most successful Habitat chapter in the state. Michelle cited the unlikelihood of her becoming the leader God has helped her become. From the gospel story of the withering of the olive tree she drew the lesson that God sometimes calls us to do things that may not "come naturally"; still we must respond in service if we indeed discern a call. The passion that Michelle and her husband John (the development director for the Habitat chapter) demonstrated toward their personal missions was amazing and instructive.

In the third plenary presentation, Rev. Joseph Deck, director of the Servant Leadership School in Washington, D.C., discussed the necessity of servant leadership to building community without borders. Prejudice and fear between different societal groups is caused by their physical separation and lack of communication. Healing and reconciliation, which is the heart of the gospel, begins when people are set free by the truth of their own, and the Other's, vulnerability and brokenness. Rev. Deck repeatedly stressed the transformative power of God's freely given grace, and the importance of prayer ("Lord, help me to see what you see." "Help me to become an 'I-can-help-you-with-that' kind of person.")

Interspersed with the resource presentations were small group discussions, plenary interchanges, and silent periods for individual reflection. Energy and insight abounded. Servant leadership is an attitude of encouragement and grace....stewardship and service, not selfishness and recognition.... Each one of us is a piece of the cosmic jigsaw puzzle, with an important role to play to make our piece fit in and help to unify the whole. There were many such lovely thoughts; and I added a great variety of new must-read books to my ongoing list.

Near the close of the conference, a few participants were invited to share their perspectives on the challenges and realities they faced in striving to be servant leaders and build community in their particular endeavors. The larger group, particularly the resource persons, then responded with encouragement and suggestions. One participant (I'll call him Chuck) seemed seriously discouraged at his circumstances; he felt unable to attain his vision but also unable to modify it, and the resource leaders urged him to re-examine his priorities to avert a tragedy. This dialogue was so wrenching that the session ended with a laying-on of hands and intense silent prayer. The final session was a brief "workshop" in which all participants were paired up and helped their partner frame an individual action plan for their servant-leadership endeavors. My partner's plan of action consisted mainly in cutting back some of her commitments so as to focus more effectively on the one toward which she had recently felt a strong calling. My plan, deeply affected as I was by Chuck's situation, was to stop badgering God to call me (I had come to the conference frustrated by a lack of certainty about whether the numerous service projects in which I'm involved are really what God wants me to be doing) and to just get on with the work in front of me. I'm not leading any projects or enterprises in the secular sense of the word. But if I stay focused on God through prayer, and seek always to be Christ's hands in the world, I am a servant leader.



*Rita Caufield absorbs insights from SL forum (front and right) and Tiffany Benitez (third on right), also a GJV volunteer in Botswana and Ethiopia.*

## **Integrity Forum: Living with a Compass**

*(by Pastor Stacey Steck, Pastor of Escazu Christian Fellowship, Costa Rica)*

Long before angry, but hopeful, citizens in New York began to Occupy Wall Street, members of Escazú Christian Fellowship in San José, Costa Rica occupied a room at the church and wrestled with many of the same

issues confronting citizens of both "nation-states."

Indeed, reviewing Costa Rica's founding document of the Partido Nacional de Transparencia y Hermandad (PNTH, or The National Transparency and Siblinghood Party) reveals our attempt at articulating a way forward in the midst of many of the same criticisms of Costa Rican life and culture raised by the Occupiers of so many places in the United States.

From the perspective of the participants in our Integrity Forum, led by Ezekiel's Place Co-Director Richard Anson, although Costa Rican life is characterized by an avowed commitment to law and order, democracy, diversity, and peace, that commitment frequently does not issue forth in policies and practices that bring the desired results for enhancing the lives of its population. Public officials are given the public trust, but frequently behave with no accountability, and often, impunity. The political parties talk about the issues, especially right before elections, but they do not "walk the talk" of public responsibility and accountability. Costa Rica is a nation with many great and progressive laws on the books that are never enforced on the street or in the halls of government.

In fact, according to the United States think-tank, the Fund For Peace, a failed state has several attributes. Common indicators include a state whose central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory; non-provision of public services; widespread corruption and criminality; refugees and involuntary movement of populations; sharp economic decline. While The Fund for Peace (US-based think tank) ranks Costa Rica in its "Moderate" category of governance (along with the US), the view from within the country is much more pessimistic. Crime and violence are increasing daily, government regulations make it very difficult to start new businesses, major public institutions are approaching bankruptcy, and so on. Costa Rica is not being classified as a failed state, but it is failing a great many of its citizens.

In a role playing dialogue/activity, the forum participants articulated a vision and strategic plan of an integrity-focused political party that we believe resonates with the Biblical vision of Shalom, and that could be practiced at both the institutional and personal levels.

We are all too aware that the work we did was simply an intellectual exercise done by people who can afford such luxuries, but we remain hopeful that the vision and strategies which we crafted together can guide each one of us, and our church community, as we try to live out citizen-servants of both the Kingdom of God, and the Republic of Costa Rica.

## Bringing It Home: Reflections on the Africa Forum

*(by Kombe Kapatomoyo, from Zambia, and currently a PH.D. student at West Virginia U., was the main organizer of the Africa Forum (held on April 2, 2011, on the campus of WVU).*

One cold Spring day in 2009, a group of 10 students from West Virginia University embarked on a three hour drive to Shenandoah University in Virginia to attend that year's Africa Forum hosted by Ezekiel's Place. I was part of this eclectic group of students comprised of countries as far as Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, just to mention a few. I did not know then that I had started another journey in my Christian life.

Today, I am serving my second term as the president for the WVU African Students' Association. The 2009 forum awakened in me a desire to actively work towards my passion of serving the people of my continent wherever I can. I believe that this was a direct result of the motivation and encouragement I saw from the people who were speakers at the forum.

This past spring, on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011, the African Students' Association had the privilege and honor to host this year's Africa Forum entitled "African Governance, Security and Development". As part of the organizing team, I came to realize just how much is required of one as a Christian to be a leader in all ways. We had to find speakers who shared the same passion as the organizing team had. God blessed by partnering with Richard Anson, Co-Director of Ezekiel's Place, who not only guided us in the forum process, but Ezekiel's Place also provided financial help to those students who came from out of town.



*During 2011, Ezekiel's Place (via R. Anson and his "tent making" trips, together with local partner organizations) held off-site Integrity Forums in Ethiopia, Liberia, Costa Rica and Belize. The photo refers to the participants in Liberia (with local co-sponsor Sam Gotomo, on the far right).*

The forum brought students from all walks of life to participate and hear from speakers who are experts in fields. The most memorable of the panels for me was the one that explored how NGOs and Faith Based Organizations fit into the development of Africa. I feel the challenge that Christians face, when serving in whatever capacity, is to reconcile how to work with organizations of other faiths. This was evident when students who are not Christians questioned Dr. John Polis, Co-Pastor and Co-Founder of Faith Church International and the work they do in Kenya and Liberia. The basic contention was that Christian organizations do not work well with organizations of other faiths. I do believe that it's our duty as Christians as we serve to spread God's word. Dr John's response was very encouraging. We live in a world where we are brought into contact with people of different faiths, and wherever we are we need to put Christ first, as we seek to work well with others.



*Kombe Kapatomoyo, center, enjoys the aftermath of a successful Africa forum. Fatima Muhammad and Kidist Keferi, who attended the forum and volunteered in Ethiopia, are on right)*

As a young African woman, I feel we are called to serve in whatever capacity we can. The Africa Forum highlighted this. A lot of people came to me after the forum and shared with me how encouraged they were by the various speakers. Dr. Emira Woods, Co-Director of Global Studies Program at the Institute for Policy Studies brought the message home for a lot of people. Her presentation on the role that young people play in the development of the African continent really resounded with the audience. Historically, young people have never been given a chance to take up the mantle and rise up to the occasion in Africa's development.

From a bigger perspective, platforms like the Africa Forum always remind me of what more I could be doing with my life. Serving as the ASA president and helping organize the forum has not only given me a renewal in the call I feel I have to serve, but also developed my organizational skills as

well as how to work with a large and diverse student population. Ultimately, the Africa Forum resounded with me because it called me to what I really want to dedicate my life work towards, serving the continent of Africa and fulfilling the potential with which God blessed me.

## **Zimbabwe Roundtable Forum: Moving Forward Together and Peacefully**

*(by Jona Masiya, Zimbabwean, on the Executive Committee of the MDC/Wash. DC area, teacher, musician, and Board member of Ezekiel's Place)*

In a spectacular show of solidarity, Zimbabweans and non-Zimbabweans across political divides, students and professionals gathered at Ezekiel's Place on November 05, 2011 for a Zimbabwe Roundtable Forum. Delegates came from as far as Michigan, Cincinnati, University of West Virginia, Maryland and Virginia. The Forum aimed to network Zimbabweans living in the United States and individuals concerned about the Zimbabwean situation to discuss current and future challenges of Zimbabwe.

The Forum began with the sharing of a reflection of two Biblical scriptures which highlighted the need for hope and perseverance: Jeremiah 29:11-20 and Hebrews 12: 1-3.

This forum was born out of the idea that Zimbabweans living in the Diasporas have a key role to play in the social, economic and political development of Zimbabwe. Jona Masiya took the initiative to put together this forum in close discussion with, Ezekiel's Place and Movement for Democratic Change-USA Washington District executive.

A pool of talented speakers presented the following topics; Zimbabwe road map to good governance, past, present and future lessons; Constitution, free and fair elections; Domestic & Foreign policy: International Sanctions vs. Zimbabwe's look East policy; Inclusive government, is this a viable model for Zimbabwe?, and Ways of working or networking for change in Zimbabwe.

Participants brought up questions such as whether International targeted sanctions on Zimbabwe are still effective given that Zimbabwe has been cleared by the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme to sell its rough diamonds. Is there room for military intervention in Zimbabwe? It was reiterated that the MDC



*Zimbabwe Roundtable brings together Zimbabwean leaders to explore the way forward*

constitution stresses political change by non-violent means hence it is unlikely for MDC to wage a war against Zanu PF. It was also noted that change in Zimbabwe comes by the people through non-violent means when the people are ripe for change, and groundwork needs to be laid to empower Zimbabweans both at home and abroad. Powerful key messages emerged from the forum to work together.

I was personally encouraged by the forum's constructive dialogue of substantive issues, re-affirming the relevance of my Christian faith to be "salt and light"; I and others were further motivated to continue to work together for Zimbabwe's transformation. There is hope through steadfast and God-driven perseverance.

## **Theme: Global Jubilee Village Experience Reflections**

### **Global Jubilee Village Experience: Christ Living in Me...**

*by Samantha Martin, a junior at Shenandoah University (Va.), majoring in Nursing and Religion/Just Faith Program, participated in the April 2011 session of GJV experience)*

After having traveled outside of the country, and having lived in extreme conditions while I was there, I thought I would be ready for anything Global Jubilee Village threw at me. I was wrong. Though my previous life experiences provided me with some skills to survive simulated poverty, nothing had prepared me for the spiritual and mental stretches GJV caused.

The whole point of the GJV experience is to have a taste of what poverty is like for different people around the world. Obviously one aspect of poverty is hunger; so naturally part of the GJV experience is to be hungry and to share in the same suffering that so many people around the world experience each day. I was not prepared for this. It was bad enough to know that each time I ate a meal I was still going to be hungry afterwards as if I had never eaten at all, but to feel the exhaustion caused by hunger was something I had never experienced before. During GJV my brief



***Samantha Martin, by the Afghan family hut, participates in role-playing activity.***

experience of hunger helped me understand what it must feel like to be a person living in poverty stricken Afghanistan. The deeper experience happened once I was home. The day I got back I went to Mass, and as I knelt in prayer before Mass started, I realized that the physical hunger I experienced is the same as the spiritual hunger that is perpetually in my life, and the only way for me to truly satisfy that hunger is to receive the living bread of Christ, the Eucharist. When I was physically hungry I tried everything to make the hunger pains go away, and eventually I learned that the only way those pains were going to go away was if I ate a substantial meal. Similarly, throughout my life I have tried everything to make my spiritual hunger pains go away; as I knelt in prayer I learned that the only way to substantially feed my spiritual hunger was to receive and digest the body of Christ made real in the Blessed Sacrament. The communion song for that day had a verse in it that, for me, spoke of what I had discovered: "I am the Bread of Life, He who comes to me shall not hunger, and who believes in me shall not thirst. No one can come to me unless the Father draw him."

Another part of GJV is to experience community within a global context. Once again my encounter with hunger provided me with a superficial feeling of living in community with the people around the world who live with hunger, but my encounter with Eucharist gave me a deeper feeling of global community. As I received the Bread of Christ I felt connected to the millions of people around the world who, at that same moment, were also celebrating the same meal. Along with that I also felt spiritually connected to all of those who turn to Christ in order to be filled. But, I have always felt and understood that connection. This time when I received Christ in the Eucharist I felt a different connection, a connection to those who are poor and suffering. The GJV experience, by making me more aware of the global community and the poverty in that community, inspired me to focus more of my energy, if not a

portion of my life, to serving those who are suffering. When I received communion I realized that the same Christ I see in the Eucharist is also the same Christ who is living inside the poor, and that when I serve them I am serving him. Mother Teresa spoke of this tandem by saying, "Unless we believe and see Jesus in appearance of bread on the altar, we will not be able to see him in the distressing disguise of the poor."

The whole reason why I decided to become a nurse was because I felt a special calling to serve people in the way Christ has called me to serve. Being a religion minor just strengthens this calling even more. During my GJV experience, in the most unlikely of situations, I realized again what my career calling is all about. While at GJV I learned about the pain and suffering that is endured by people around the world; this made me realize that there are not just people all around the world suffering, but people in my own country and in my own community. The GJV experience opened my eyes again to what my job is as a Christian and a global citizen, and that is to love and serve everyone whom I encounter. Since the GJV experience I have initiated a food program at my school that serves the needs of the local Salvation Army shelter and I am working on opening a local food pantry. Part of my motivation to join the battle against hunger came from my experience at GJV. Who knew, that a cold and rainy weekend in the middle of West Virginia would change completely the way I live my life and would open my eyes to Christ's presence.

## **GJV Experience: A Weekend of More and Less**

***(by Becca Martin, a freshman at Eastern Mennonite U., History major, & participant in the GJV experience, Oct. 2011)***

It's hard to describe how I felt coming into my Global Jubilee Village experience. I was unsure of what to expect and very curious to see how the weekend's activities would unfold. I will also admit that I was somewhat critical, having already experienced living in Bolivia. I soon learned, however, that regardless of how primitive that previous experience had been, I had still been living in a protective bubble. The GJV experience stripped these protective bubbles of creature comforts away and humbled me to live at the sub-poverty levels of my assigned region. But the weekend did not prove to be an experience where I lived only with less; in many ways I was also living with more.

My assigned country was Afghanistan. Three others and myself molded into an Afghani family and joined forces for the weekend. The food rations we received the first evening reflected the fact that Afghanistan is a war-torn, poverty stricken nation. I can clearly remember my feeling of disbelief and the growl of my stomach as I opened our rations bag for the next 24 hours and saw a small bunch of a grapes, a cup of yoghurt, a handful of spinach, a half cup of rice and two tortillas. That was little; divided by four, it was practically nonexistent.

Our dwelling was an entirely different situation altogether. On the outside, the small goat shack didn't seem so bad. From the inside, however, stinkbugs owned the place. Before we even started a fire, we set ourselves to the task of ridding our shack of all creepy crawlies. Unfortunately (or fortunately,

depending on how you look at the situation) we uncovered a family of wasps. Dick announced that our goat shack had been bombed, and that we were to be offered asylum in the United States. We were then upgraded to a trailer. Just about everything in that tiny little run-down trailer was broken, but to us it was a five star hotel. I had been there but a few hours and my perspective was already beginning to change.



*Becca Martin (far left) and other afghan. Family members, enjoy a moment of rest during wage labor activity.*

The weekend was not just about living with less. In many ways I lived with much much more. My group bonded as an Afghani family under the facilitation of our authentic Afghani leader. It was such a rich opportunity to hear Reza speak of his personal experiences in Afghanistan and to ask questions of someone who has true insights into the culture. What a rare opportunity! The families collectively also bonded as a small, global community. I particularly enjoyed our in-depth discussions on current events. Coming from a variety of faith and culture backgrounds, we each provided something unique to the discussion. It opened my eyes to speak with one of the facilitators who practiced Judaism, for she was just as intrigued by my Mennonite customs as I was by her Jewish customs!

This was also a weekend of more knowledge. As I became inundated with information on the represented countries, I was shaken out of my comfortable state of naïveté. Unwittingly, I had allowed college to become a safe bubble and had become oblivious to global happenings. This weekend provided me and my peers with a ‘culture crash course,’ which encouraged us to look far beyond our own comfortable cultural context. I walked away from this weekend with the challenge of allowing these newly acquired insights to inspire me as I strive to become a servant leader in aid and development, whether it be in my community or across the globe.

This was a weekend of living with significantly less on a material basis, but significantly more on a relational

and intellectual basis. This experience was perspective changing for me, and I look forward to building on the knowledge and insight I have gained in those 48 hours.

## **Reflections on Global Jubilee Village : Identities, Relationships and Peace**

*(by Jennifer Nath, Graduate student at Johns Hopkins U. (Int’al Studies), and peacebuilder activist)*

For one of the first times as a graduate student, I found myself on the “teacher” side of the student-teacher relationship. I was tasked with teaching the emotional resonances and political complexities of Israeli identity to a group of college students spending the weekend living in huts at Ezekiel’s Place. By the end of the weekend, students who had never met one another had formed friendships, and facilitators who came from countries around the world, some of whom are currently in a state of war, learned from each other as we shared the roles of leader and guide to our students.

My co-facilitator Yael Shapira (from Israel), and I, assigned each student in our Israel group individual roles in a “family.” Their characters as father, mother, daughter, etc. were crafted to reflect the diversity of Israeli citizenry as much as possible. We explained, in human terms, what each identity meant to the student who would be assuming it for the weekend. I noticed that the students absorbed the emotions of their “identities” before they absorbed the political facts supporting those emotions. Later on, role-playing exercises between the Israeli and Palestinian “families” (mimicking the conflict between the two peoples) elicited true and strong emotions from members of each group. The anger, confusion, and sadness of members of my student “family” reflected some of what I have seen during my own experiences in Israel during moments of political tension.

In addition to guiding my group of students, the role of facilitator afforded me opportunities to learn from the other facilitators, whose journeys to the U.S. from all over the world were often the kind of stories of which movies are made. In one weekend, I learned more about Mexico, Zimbabwe and Saudi Arabia than I ever did reading the newspaper on a daily basis. I also was able to apply some of the skills and theories I have been learning as a masters student earning my degree in International Conflict Management. Taking my lessons from the classroom to the field (literally) taught me that facilitating a group debate or discussion requires significant self-control and awareness of how what comes out of your mouth will be perceived by those with no background knowledge. On one occasion, while acting as a UN fund distributor, I had to step outside my role as the “Israel group facilitator” and ask hard questions of all the students, including those in my own group. On another occasion, during the Israeli-Palestinian mock peace conference, my co-facilitator and I had to remind ourselves to refrain from overwhelming our students with too many facts and historical lessons.

Experiences such as Global Jubilee Village (GJV) heighten my appreciation of the role of grass-roots, person to person activities, especially since my current studies focus more on diplomacy and negotiation, and less on grass roots “peace-building.” On the one hand, it is always important to maintain a humanitarian perspective on a conflict – after all, conflict is perpetuated by human beings, with all the emotional and social tendencies inherent in human identity. On the other hand, the feelings of individuals do not necessarily always constitute a basis for sound policy. This is why programs like

GJV are important – far away from the city, in the middle of the West Virginia countryside, GJV focuses on human interaction within and between members of societies in conflict. Programs like GJV awaken awareness of how individuals and families are affected by their governments' decisions without necessarily attempting to make decisions for their governments.

Given the limitations of the weekend, it was difficult to educate the students with all the facts of this amazingly complex situation in which Israelis and Palestinians find themselves. However, the emotional and social successes of GJV illustrate the potential of such experiences. While politicians and security officials are engaged in the bargaining and negotiations that are a necessary part of constructing a sustainable post-conflict relationship, all those involved, whether living in the region or outside, should remember that peace is made not only between governments but also between peoples. Therefore, programs like GJV, while they may seem like a drop of water in the bucket, can be extremely powerful. Relationships formed during such experiences truly do change people's lives, and the success of these programs, and the people who have participated in them, prove their worth.



*Jen Nath, representing the UN, allocates foreign aid to participating countries.*

## **A GJV Experience: Enhancing My Understanding of Justice and Peace**

*(by **Tompson Makahamadze, from Zimbabwe, Ph.D. student at George Mason U. (conflict resolution), and GJV Experience Zimbabwean co-facilitator**)*

Global Jubilee Village weekend was a unique experience for me. For the first time since I came over to the USA, I “returned” to my country, thanks to the Global Jubilee Village. It was an honor going to that ‘solitary’ place and spending quality time with people from various diverse backgrounds. Before I proceed, allow me to make a confession. When my colleague told me about Ezekiel’s Place, the question that came to my mind was, “What good can come from that place?” I thought that we would spend the whole weekend attending church

services, preaching and sharing Bible verses. I was kind of skeptical about the ability of the program to promote peace and justice. I was wrong! Although the village is rooted in Judeo-Christian faith, the program encouraged interfaith dialogue. Additionally, those who did not belong to any faith were free to express their views with regard to issues of justice and peace. Justice and peace cut across ethnic, cultural and religious divides. Clearly, Ezekiel’s Place understands this very well.



***Tompson (and Jona Masiya to left) are in sync while sharing African drum music.***

The program that was organized by Ezekiel’s Place removed students from their comfort zones to experience the joys and sorrows of the countries to which they were assigned. I was greatly humbled by the perseverance and zeal manifested by the students. I expected half of the group to return to the comfort of their dormitories and apartments. However, they all endured; they wanted to get the most out of the experience.

I benefited immensely from the GJV weekend. The issues that were discussed during different sessions coincided with my studies in Conflict Analysis and Resolution. I benefited from the contributions of students coming from different peace and justice programs. Yet the program was not exclusively academic; it had a practical component, which in my view was the most important part of the experience. Each of the five families from five countries, where issues of injustice and conflict are arguably in chronic condition, had to ‘go to their countries’ to experience the culture, economic and political challenges of those countries. I was impressed by the brilliance of the Zimbabwean family. The members asked very good questions regarding the situation in that country.

The Global Jubilee Village weekend provided me with the opportunity to present my country. Through interacting with students and facilitators from other countries, I learned to appreciate the hardships they face in their respective countries. Moreover, the program not only discussed problems in different countries, but also suggested how they could be resolved peacefully. Thus, GJV experience enhanced my understanding of how justice and peace gradually transform those open to the process.

I was also delighted to learn about the way the UN distributes resources to countries that are in need. One of my study interests is the work of the UN in promoting justice and peace. Finally, I was touched by the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Although many students including those who participated did not seem to understand the issues well, the exercise is a reflection of negotiations in real life. When parties to a conflict enter negotiations, they aim at getting

the most out of it for themselves. They are not keen to compromise with their adversaries. This is why tempers sometimes flare up during negotiations. That situation is very normal and permissible. That is why people negotiate. To sum up, the weekend truly enhanced my understanding of justice and peace involving a range of countries, including deeper insights on my own country of Zimbabwe.

### **Theme: GJV Experience Summer Volunteer Program:**

*(arrangements facilitated by Ezekiel's Place)*

### **The True Diamonds of Botswana**

*(by Tiffany Noel Benitez, a senior at Trinity Washington U. (Wash. DC), major in International Affairs, volunteered in 2 countries (St. Peter's Day Care Center in Gaborone, Botswana, and Missionaries of Charity Children's Home, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)*

**My journey began in May  
I wish I were still in Africa today  
I eagerly became a resident  
And luckily met the president  
But the true diamonds of Botswana,  
Are her remarkable children  
St. Peter's Day Care Centre  
Wholeheartedly allowed me to enter  
The children shared their love and energy  
with me  
It was such an intriguing place to be  
The desert, the free-range chicken, the  
children's beaming faces  
The Mudereri Family, the incomparable  
beauty, the winter of Southern Africa  
Are all experiences that I must re-live  
My journey was over in six weeks  
But I still remember the softness of the  
diamond's cheeks  
O how I love Botswana**



*Tiffany with the true diamonds of Botswana*

### **My Eye Opening Experience in Guatemala**

*(by Brooke Peckins, a Junior at James Madison U. (Va.), majoring in Spanish & Global Justice, volunteered at Nuestros Ajidos (in Antigua, Guatemala, as part of God's Child Program).*

When I arrived in Guatemala I was nervous. I did not know how well my Spanish skills would fare, what the host family would be like, and I kept second-guessing the cultural research I did on the area. It was the first time I would be away from home so long on my own, especially in an area so different from anything I was used to. After getting settled in, becoming more familiar with the culture, God's Child Organization and Spanish classes, however, my worries faded and I quickly began to take in the experience I had in front of me.

I quickly formed a relationship with my family, who supported me and enhanced my learning experience. They gave me a first hand account of family life in Guatemala, showed me around the town and shared traditions and histories that they held in such high regard. Without the help of my host family, I would not have felt so connected to the people of Guatemala as I did.

My time volunteering for God's Child was also an enlightening and fulfilling one. I learned on a basic level how the organization worked to promote welfare and basic core values, which gave me a hands on account of how different non-profits around the world operate. Although I had read about them in articles and textbooks, I had never truly experienced them and understood the importance of each individual decision made. One example of something I learned from working with God's Child was the idea of maintaining a sustainable organization run by the people. While, as of now, the organization recruits people from around the world, they plan to make God's Child a fully Guatemalan-run organization. In this way, there is an increased sense of community and community support (although this was already a large part of their culture) and people are more willing to come to God's Child because they see the people as



*Brooke enjoys one child at a time at God's Child Project in Guatemala.*

having similar values. Because of my time working in the school, I have started teaching English in a local school for low socioeconomic students who know almost no English. I felt like, after my experience in Guatemala, I have a valuable understanding of the hardships of not knowing a language in another country, where the skill is necessary. I learned different ways to work with people and teach them new things in a more effective and efficient way and wanted to carry my newfound skills back to the United States.

Additionally, I experienced the poverty that plagues much of Guatemala and was able to make a real, tangible connection with developing countries' dilemmas and the traps that keep them in such positions. I was able to talk to the people and hear first hand accounts of corruption and violence, which for me, brought their grievances and hardships much closer to home. During my time in Guatemala, interacting with the local people helped me to become aware of a different world-view not focused on work, competition and success. I began to see evidence of the fact that money does not necessarily create happiness, and that a slower paced society can be calming and content. After better assimilating into the culture, I found that it was relatively easy to fit in with their lifestyle and truly enjoy it. When I initially returned home, it was a shock to return to my fast paced, work oriented society, and I questioned much of the way we often do things. I especially questioned traditional family life in the United States, where long work hours, geographically separated family members and weaker connections can be common.

While in Guatemala, I also took Spanish classes with a woman named Pati. My time with her was probably

one of the most fulfilling of my trip because we spent four hours a day, five days a week discussing the United States and Guatemalan relations and local perceptions of the US. She showed me around the city and gave me a local insight on events, places and people. Especially because we are about the same age, we became good friends and I could ask her almost anything- it was a true insiders look into the Guatemalan culture. My Spanish skills dramatically improved and my confidence was bolstered as well. When I returned to my Spanish classes at James Madison University, I came with a confidence and knowledge that has helped tremendously my ability to learn.

My experience in Antigua was one of the most eye-opening ones I have experienced. I regularly refer to it in my Global Justice classes, and it has changed how I think about and view other areas of the world. I have made real connections with such amazing people, both volunteers and locals, who helped me to grow into a more well rounded person. I can only hope that I made half the impression on them as they did on me.

## Amazing Children of Ethiopia

***(by Fatima Muhammad, a Senior at Trinity Washington U. (Wash. DC), majoring in International Affairs, volunteered at Missionaries of Charity Children's Home, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)***

Walking out of Bole international airport of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia was a breathtaking experience. Before I exited the airport something told me that I may just feel right at home, with little to no culture shock at all. To my surprise I was right. Seeing the streets, buildings, and people as they carried out their daily business, reminded me of my childhood as I was raised in Saudi Arabia. The only difficulty I had was the language barrier, which wasn't bad at all due to the fact that Amharic is very similar to Arabic.



***Children being served by Missionaries of Charity home in Ethiopia (with help from 4 volunteers sponsored by Ezekiel's Place, and other helpers)***

When I arrived to the missionaries of charity I was greeted by Sister Papitra who was at the time in charge of the volunteers. I was led to the volunteer headquarters, given my room, and I was introduced to how things ran, by other volunteers. It was like a Jubilee Village indeed because everyone was from a different part of the world. As I walked around the compound the first child I met was a young lady named Baiti. She looked at me smiling from ear to ear, she said hi, what is your name, and where are you from, I answered her questions and smiled back. From that moment I knew I was going to have an amazing experience in Addis Ababa, and I indeed loved every moment of it.

My task at the orphanage was to teach a group of 8<sup>th</sup> graders English. My best student by the end of the summer was named Filimon. He was punctual, and attended every class meeting we had. He spoke well, in English, and said that he wanted to become a scientist one day so



*A sign of God's Promise at the end of autumn at Ezekiel's Place*

that he could help find a cure for HIV. I encouraged him every day, and told him how special he was and that he could change the world if he wanted to. The babies in the orphanage stole my heart every time I saw them. They would run to me for hugs, and kisses. I became friends with the workers and helped them serve lunch to the children during my break time. Each and every child was so beautiful in his or her own way. Their smiles glowed and their spirits always seemed to be lifted, until one day one of the children got severely burned by falling into a pot of boiling water. He suffered 2<sup>nd</sup> degree burns that covered his back, private area, and inner thigh.

I went to the clinic to see him every day, and that is when I discovered that many of the children are truly sick. It did not phase me on a daily basis but when I visited the children in the clinic I saw all kinds of things, the saddest was when a mother cried holding her son because he was very sick, and there was nothing she could do about it. Never in my life had I seen a mother crying, holding her child. For me this was a heart wrenching experience. Another child had an infection so bad it made his head swell, but the saddest of all was seeing little babies who I thought had parents, end up in the orphanage after being treated in the clinic. It broke my heart each time.

I spent time with the children every day, and I enjoyed every second of it. I wrote in my journal every day, and not only did I learn a lot working at the

orphanage, I also got a chance to learn a lot about the culture. I was invited to many people's homes; I was taught how to make Ethiopian coffee, I also attended a wedding ceremony. I learned tribal dances, and ate different cultural foods. All together it was an amazing experience. Before my departure one of the children grew quite fond of me. She would ask for me all times of the day, and write me love letters. I embraced the feelings she had toward me. Before I left she asked me to take her back home with me. She asked me if I was ever going to return. I told her if God wills me to return I shall, so I cannot say yes, nor can I say no. She smiled and said: Never forget me, you are my sister, and I love you very much. I promised her I would never forget, and I gave her a big hug.

Overall, going to Ethiopia was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. Seeing people smile no matter what their living conditions were, made me very happy and content on the inside. It made me realize that although they have little, they are happy, and blessed. This trip made me realize how good God truly is, because no matter what a person's circumstance, God continues to bless in abundance. I was blessed to be able to go to Ethiopia, and work with children who have HIV. Seeing the children have faith in God, filling the rows of their church every Sunday, to love him, worship him, and give praise to him, after all they go through, was an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life.

### **Internalizing my Volunteer Experience in Ethiopia**

*(by Samantha Noble, a Junior at James Madison U. (Va.), majoring in Social Work and Public Policy, volunteered at Missionaries of Charity Children's Home, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

It's taken a while to write this reflection- longer than it should have taken me. I can blame this on being too busy, being completely immersed in my schoolwork, or having too many commitments. This is true- but not the main reason.

I've sat down to reflect multiple times; but I just don't know what to write. Words truly can't describe my two months spent working at a Mother Theresa mission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As much as I want to convey my feelings, words fall short; I've tried to describe the children I spent so much time with, and I end up frustrated over not letting the kids' stories speak for themselves. So instead of writing about a truly "you *have* to be there to understand" experience, I'll let you know what life has been like since Ethiopia.

Every morning since August 17, when I returned to the United States, I wake up not quite sure where I am. Opening my eyes, I go through the daily routine of remembering waking up in Ethiopia; always at too early an hour, always because some child ran shouting by our room, and always so cold I'd stay huddled under my blankets until the last moment possible. Snapping back out of my daydreams about my trip, which happen frequently, I go throughout my normal day. There are so many things that remind me of Ethiopia though; my bedroom, which is decorated with all of the small gifts the older children gave me for my birthday on August 6. These bracelets, wallets, necklaces, hand-drawn notes, and other presents are some of my most precious valuables; and even as the faces of the individual students who gave them to me slowly begin to fade, I look at these items and am able to relive, albeit briefly, the feelings of Christmas-



*Sami Noble proudly displays the mural she painted at Missionaries of Charity home in Ethiopia.*

level joy I had. In addition, all that's needed is one simple stimulus to trigger a memory; coffee shops touting "Ethiopian coffee" remind me of my time spent exploring the bakeries in the city with the volunteers, and of the precious coffee ceremonies honoring special occasions that I was able to participate in. The same thing happens when I go to my beloved downtown area in my college town, for there's a Habesha restaurant there. And as I walk past the Blue Nile and can smell the pungent scents of Injera baking, lentils roasting- I'm transported back to meals in Ethiopia at the compound. Sometimes we'd get Ethiopian food for dinner; sometimes it'd be an odd attempt at western cuisine; several times there wouldn't be anything. But no matter what, the end results were always the same- twenty people huddled around a table in a tiny room, known as our "kitchen" purely because this was where the single hot plate was stowed.

All of these memories demonstrate what's so hard for me to articulate; while I'm not sure I'll ever fully know how to describe my time at the mission, it's clear to me that my current way of living has been irretrievably altered. Was it an intense experience? Absolutely. Does an intense experience translate as a positive experience? Not always; there were days that I wanted more than anything to be home in the United States, blissfully unaware of these incredible children in Ethiopia and the challenges they face. If I had to do it over, would I change my experience? Not at all. This I know and can write with certainty- from Ethiopia, I was called to serve, I was challenged, and I was truly, completely changed.

*".....whoever would be great among you must be your servant...as the Son of man (Jesus) came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."  
(Matthew 20:26,28)*

## **EZEKIEL'S PLACE**

P.O. Box 1385  
Hedgesville, WV 25427

**Phone: 304-754-6563**

E-mail: [ezekielspl@aol.com](mailto:ezekielspl@aol.com)  
[ranson\\_wv@yahoo.com](mailto:ranson_wv@yahoo.com)

On the web at [www.ezekielsplace.com](http://www.ezekielsplace.com)



Ezekiel's Place is a 501(c)(3) IRS approved non-profit organization for tax-exempt contributions.