



EP JOURNAL

A Newsletter of Ezekiel's Place Retreat Center



Issue No. 12 – Fall 2012

Please visit 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

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Highlights of Ezekiel's Place Events in 2012:

January – December:

- Various retreat groups

March:

- 24: Service Forum & Job Fair (held at American University, Wash DC)
- Planning for Placements of Summer Volunteers

July - September:

- University students performed volunteer work

October:

- 13: Peacebuilding Forum

November:

- 17: Retreat: Living out Your Call

Dear Friends of Ezekiel's Place:

Another fulfilling year at Ezekiel's Place has almost passed, now completing 11 years since being established. As you read the following reflections of participants in our various programs, you will find deep and inspiring insights on the true meaning of call 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 directed and sustained by a sense of purpose and "call", a commitment to service, and the peace of God.

Blessings and God's Peace,

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

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



***"Be still, and know that I am God"
(Psalm 46:10)***

Change My Heart, O God

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.
Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.
You are the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me, this is what I Pray.
Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.
Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.

a hymn by Eddie Espinosa (Isaiah 64:8)



Service Forum and Job Fair drew leaders from major service organizations (Colman McCarthy (Center for Teaching Peace), Carolyn Woo (CRS), Idara Nickelson (Corporation for National and Community Service: Vista/AmeriCorps), Kent Hill (World Vision), Stacy Rhodes (Peace Corps), moderator (Judy Woodruff), and students from 8 universities in the Washington DC area. Visit website for podcast of presentations and panel discussion.



A life transformed...

...I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4: 1 - 4)

Forum: Transformative Leadership through Service (March 24, American University, Wash. DC)

My Vocational Service Passions

(by Christie Charles, American University)

After attending the Transformative Leadership Through Service forum, my goals of international service were solidified. I remember being in the process of applying to a Peace Corps Masters International program at my current graduate school. I was engaging in different opportunities to expose myself to my future possibilities. While attending the forum, I distinctly remember Stacy Rhodes, the Chief of

Staff of the Peace Corps. I remember his story about the impact of volunteers and one in particular who inspired a young boy who grew up to become the president of his nation. I remember the tears that Stacy shed, that felt authentic and pure and truly resonated with me. I felt like I was on the right track. My goal in life is not to change anyone's life per se, but to be of service and thus the change will come willingly. I want to serve and was surrounded by people whose aim is the same. This forum was very inspiring and was worth the trip to be motivated by wonderful panelists who reflect my future ambitions.

Preparing for the "Real World"

(by Brooke Peckins, James Madison University)

As I sat, awaiting the start of the Service Forum in American University's Kay Spiritual Life Center, my eyes began to review one of the papers that had been handed to me at the entrance. Titled "Bio Sketches of Speakers and Panel Members", it took me but a few moments to realize that I was in for a bigger treat than I had anticipated. While I expected a wide array of knowledgeable speakers, I was pleasantly surprised to find many distinguished names and positions listed. Among them, Stacey Rhodes, the Chief of Staff of the Peace Corps, Carolyn Woo, the CEO and president of the Catholic Relief Services, and Judy Woodruff herself, were of particular interest.

As each speaker came to the podium, I became captivated by the unique stories and advice that was prompted by their personal endeavors. Never overly generalized or cliché, I tried to scribble down as much information as I could before it would be replaced by

another round. We heard stories both from overseas and home that changed our perspectives on many opportunities and preconceived notions. We got a better understanding of the opportunities that awaited us, what each was like, how to get connected and what to do to get involved. Particularly of the Peace Corps, I acquired a more rounded perspective on the realities of the program; specifically, I received a more accurate picture of the challenges, benefits, and realistic effects of each volunteer's service.

Furthermore, the speakers' adventures helped us to become excited for the unique paths each of us will take and realize that even the more cumbersome experiences become good stories in the end. While each person held valuable information on available service opportunities, they also shared personal experiences that many college students seldom hear from their elders. As a soon-to-be graduate who is both excited and nervous for the future, hearing their memories and experiences at my age was more than comforting. Additionally, the speakers provided advice that was heartfelt and deeply rooted in their experiences. Having been to many superficial presentations, it was refreshing to feel that each speaker genuinely wanted to be there and believed everything they were saying.

Overall, the Service Forum was helpful and eye opening, but it was also fun. Following each presentation, I felt more and more connected to the presenters and realized that everyone is (or was) all in the same boat. The speakers tailored their lectures to the audience and had a very good understanding of what it was we needed to hear most. The following question and answer session and job/ internship fair only rounded out an already information-rich morning, and I left feeling ready to enter the real world.



Students obtained valuable information and contacts on service volunteer and job opportunities at the Forum's Job Fair.

Some quotes from two speakers/panelists and an institutional partner.....

"Thanks very much for the invitation including me in the extraordinary panel and event on Transformative Service and Leadership. I greatly enjoyed it (as you could probably tell) and hope I was able to affect a few of those there and maybe even get Peace Corps a couple of really good recruits!..... Thinking back just quickly, I was so impressed by the setting, the extraordinarily high quality of the panelists (it was an honor to be up there with people like Colman McCarthy, Kent Hill and the others), the moderator (Judy Woodruff), and especially by the absolute importance of the subject matter."

Stacy Rhodes, Chief of Staff (and currently Acting Director), Peace Corps (one of the speakers at the forum)

"It was my pleasure to participate in the forum; I learned a great deal by listening to the wonderful service leaders you had enlisted to speak."

Judy Woodruff (Anchor, for the PBS NewsHour), and moderator for the Service Forum

"I think it (the service forum) turned out to be a great event and I am glad that Georgetown University students had the chance to take part. I feel like the endeavor was a worthwhile effort."

Tara Duprey, Assistant Director, Career Education Center, Georgetown University

Summer Volunteer Service Program

Serving the Little Hands and Big Hearts of Casa Jackson

(by Eleni Richmond, James Madison University)

The purpose of my travel to Guatemala centered on my volunteer experience at Casa Jackson. The umbrella organization, Nuestros Ahijados, provides a range of services for the children of Antigua, Guatemala and surrounding villages. Volunteers typically work within the organization's private education systems, the Scheel and Dreamer Center and the clinic for malnourished infants, Casa Jackson. My energy and focus remained diligent toward the infants of Casa Jackson.

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of malnutrition in Latin America. This unfortunate statistic is backed by the country's state of impoverishment and lack of health care education. Commonly mothers will provide their infants with coffee-filled bottles or flour tortillas in lieu of proper nutritious meals such as milk and formula.

Casa Jackson is a free clinic that provides long-term health care for infants and nutritional education to parents. The children remain in overnight care for generally three months until deemed healthy and vital.

During my experience, I was able to witness one child successfully complete his care in Casa Jackson. This was one of the more monumental rewards; however on a daily basis, little surprises kept me on my toes.

Volunteers were expected to perform cleaning duties first, including sanitizing cribs and floors. The children would often need to be bathed and clothed. These initial chores were essential for setting the standard for the rest of the day. With help from volunteers, the nurses had a less stressful environment, promoting a positive workspace. Some of the older children would pitch in and help us sweep or mop. They knew that the quicker the chores were completed, the more time to play!

I recognized the fluctuation of my emotions during my volunteering shifts; especially times when I was holding the tiniest survivor in the clinic, who weighed nearly 3-4 lbs and approaching 7+ weeks of life, also diagnosed with cerebral palsy. As I was trying to soothe his constant discomfort, I would come close to shedding some tears myself. It doesn't seem fair to have such a beautiful, little person dealt such harsh realities with no cognition of what exactly is happening.

Casa Jackson provided an eye-opening experience for me, exposing me to the suffering of individuals during their beginning stages of life. My experience has mainly focused on adults in a state of impoverishment. I never tried empathizing from an infant's point of view.



Baby Pam looks very content with Eleni's care and companionship (and so does Eleni!)

It wasn't difficult to recognize that each of these babies had one common human denominator- their desire for love and affection. Besides providing practical services for the staff and clinic, the main purpose for volunteers was to provide love and stimulation to the little "soldiers". And in giving love, I was receiving love. I was rewarded with the infants' reciprocal love to soak up attention, but also a deep sense of personal empowerment.

It's rewarding to experience the world at different levels, learn and integrate oneself into the "not-so-middle-class" places of the world. Sometimes when you give love and hope into the world, it beams back at you in the cooing giggles of a precious little person.

My Learning and Transformative Experience at a Mother Teresa Home

(by Selamawit Mathewos, Trinity Washington University)

My experience at Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity home for children, located in a suburb of Ethiopia's capital city (Addis Ababa), was more than I expected it to be. At first it was overwhelming seeing all the kids with many needs, outside playing, and the place was just beautiful. I was excited going into a place where I didn't know the people I would meet, and was somewhat nervous. Soon after I got a chance to meet my roommate (another volunteer), also the people I would be living with for a month. They were nice right from the start. I knew I was going to get along with them and looked forward to sharing a dorm and to work with them.

When I first met the kids, some of them were a little shy at first. Once they got a chance to sit down outside and ask me questions, they realized that I wasn't that bad at all. Some of the kids, mostly the girls were wondering why I was volunteering at the orphanage, because I am Ethiopian. After I told them the reason why, they started opening up to me and were happy that they had an Ethiopian volunteer who spoke their language (Amharic) and can somewhat understand what they are going through. One of the girls said to me, "You're like my sister". That was very emotional for me at that time. I was happy to have that kind of connection with the kids. Whenever they would talk or play with me, they would treat me like I was their sister and that was comforting for me. I knew that they were going to change my life.

Even though the ability to speak the same language as the kids was a bounce, the experience impacted me more than some of the others. I

loved that they could come and talk to me whenever they wanted and tell me things that have happened to them. Emotionally I wasn't ready to see the things the kids were going through, and knowing how they felt about certain things at the orphanage. Ever though I did not agree with some of the things that were going on at the clinic, I understood that they were doing their best to provide help for the community. For a while I was lost and kind of depressed, knowing that I couldn't change or make things a little different. I was very thankful to the sisters and the employees. The orphanage is just one part of things that the kids experience every day, things I wanted to change. The people in that campus were very humble and wanted to help the kids in any way they could. For me it was a very emotional experience, but most of all, a learning, uplifting and transformative experience. The kids changed my point of view of life; they helped me realize what is important, and to appreciate the people in my life and the things I have. I felt as if I went to Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity to learn more from the kids. They helped me more than I was able to help. They have changed my life.

The experience has inspired me to focus more on my studies, and to change my major to Social Work, so that I can go back and help the kids. I already have a plan on going back this coming up summer with my family and help in whatever way I can. I would like to change their lives, like they changed mine. I was very pleased for the opportunity of a lifetime. I am thankful for the uplifting experience.



Selamawit captures the enthusiastic attention of some of her young Ethiopian friends at the Mother Teresa's school.

Peace Building Forum (October 13, Ezekiel's Place)

"Vast Floods Cannot Quench Love, Nor Rivers Drown It" The Song of Songs 8:7

(by Eyelet Hemerling, Israeli, and forum participant)

Like most things in life, my participation in a weekend retreat at Ezekiel's Place happened by chance or, as it is also known, fate. I had just moved to Washington DC for graduate school when I received a Facebook message from a college friend, urging me to get in touch with a professor

she met in a conflict resolution seminar in Bosnia the year before. So, we did, and that's when she suggested I come for a retreat being held the next weekend in West Virginia. Even then, I wasn't sure about going. I had been out of college for two years, and though I was now back to studying the Middle East again in graduate school, the past two years have managed to significantly blow the wind out of my sails when it came to the field of Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution.

Before I continue, let me introduce myself. I was born and raised in Israel, living there until two years ago, when I graduated from college. Some of my most vivid childhood and teenage memories revolve around the hopes of the Oslo agreements, signed when I was 8, and the later collapse of the peace process and the consequential escalation of violence. Prime Minister Rabin's assassination and my parents' face when they woke me up the next morning and told me about it - even at 10, I recognized the look of worry and concern on their face; a teacher at my high school being murdered when a terrorist broke into her house and stabbed her and her two babies; frantic telephone calls between my family members every time the news announced another bus bombing; a friend and neighbor being killed in the war in Lebanon. When I went to college, Middle East studies were my natural choice. I felt like the conflict defined so much of our lives and of who I have grown up to be, that I couldn't help but want to learn more about the people on the other side. Everything happens by chance - didn't I say so? On my first day in college, in my first class, I made my first college friend. As luck would have it, Yael, my friend, was active in an interfaith encounter association. I've never been much of a religious person, but was very interested in engaging with Palestinians in a meaningful way - especially since I had just realized that college was the first time in our lives as Israelis where we actually share life experiences with Palestinians, despite them being 20% of Israel's citizens. So, I went to the meeting. Three years later, at the end of my college experience, I was coordinating my own interfaith dialogue group together with a Palestinian friend from Hebron I had met in one of the organization's retreats. One of the biggest lessons I drew from my three year involvement with the Interfaith Encounter Association was that faith is something we all need, whether we define ourselves as religious or not.

When we feel most hopeless, when we have lost the energy and motivation to continue and fight the windmills of hatred, prejudice and intolerance, the universe sends us signs or messengers to put us back on track and reenergize us. And that's exactly what happened during my retreat at Ezekiel's Place. Sharing my experience with others and hearing

about their own challenges managed to remind me of why I got into this field in the first place, to inspire me, and most importantly, to remind me that this is never a path we walk by ourselves.



Eyelet engages in peacebuilding dialogue.

A Fruitful Peace Building Forum

**(by Jeff Thindwa,
Participant and Forum Resource Person)**

I welcomed the invitation to participate in the Peace Building Forum at Ezekiel's Place with much excitement and anticipation. First, I have a profound interest in what ordinary citizens can contribute to peace efforts. Second, there is nothing like connecting with peace activists at a personal level, to talk about real experiences, and to learn from their analysis and experience. Third, the World Bank, where I work, invests significantly in fragile and conflict affected countries, and we have an understandable interest in conflict prevention, peace building, and indeed reconstruction and long-term development. In all of the above, we have a growing interest in the role of citizens and civil society organizations, be it in service delivery or 'social accountability' – which is about how citizens and their organizations can, through civic engagement, bring about more accountability to those who govern, hopefully helping them to maintain peace and improve their performance.

The forum, it turned out, was as much about my own need to learn, as it was to share perspectives from the work I do. As we shared experiences in intimate small groups I was moved by the commitment of our friends from Zimbabwe, Den Moyo and Jona Masiya. They and other Zimbabweans in the diaspora are working to highlight, to constituencies in the US (and beyond), the challenges confronting the Global Political Agreement – the political settlement reached in 2008 between Zimbabwe's political parties (ZANU-PF, MDC and MDC-T) that paved the way for the Government of National

Unity – which by all accounts has become dysfunctional. They talked about the problems of raising funds and organizing fellow Zimbabweans; of communications strategies to keep the issues visible and to garner support from the US Congress, and of finding champions for their cause – in order to help remove the obstacles to unity and create a better environment for development and peace.

In these small groups we brainstormed what role, if any, 'social accountability' as an approach to promoting effective governance, had in peace building. We talked about how, in the realm of human rights and political settlements, social accountability was about citizens holding the leaders accountable to follow through on their commitments to peace agreements, and to refrain from conduct that would undermine them. From independent analysis and direct petitioning of leaders to peaceful protest, the agency of citizens and peace advocates has been shown to help move peace processes along, to bring leaders to the table to find solutions to seemingly intractable challenges – from major political settlements like Mozambique and South Africa, to lower level stand-offs between citizens and government such as happened in Malawi in recent years.

Participants also learned a lot from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the many, many citizen efforts that go unnoticed by international media, to help bring attention to the issues and to keep hope alive in the face of one of the most daunting peace processes in modern history. Dr. Adina Friedman, who has facilitated many a dialogue of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis, both to deepen mutual understanding and to collectively explore options for citizen engagement, highlighted some of the tools and approaches for healing divided communities – some of them 'experiential' – that draw directly from the experiences of real actors in real situations of conflict or division.

Another area of great interest was how new media was transforming social mobilization and civic engagement, and therefore had potential to engage citizens in peace initiatives. We took a glimpse into the so called 'Arab Spring' and discussed how social media had helped to amplify the voices of citizens and to energize those leading change. Protest, whether peaceful or not, was disruptive, but sometimes it is the only choice available to disenfranchised citizens who have to use the most extreme means to call attention to their concerns. A strong message from our deliberations was that building peaceful societies requires both an engaged citizenry, and accessible, open governments. This does not happen automatically; leaders and citizens alike have to apply themselves.

I shared two stories. In a country in east Asia that had gone through intense conflict, a woman replied 'at least they don't kill us', when she was asked to be more actively engaged in calling her local government to be more accountable. In another war-torn country in Africa that is now on a slow but steady recovery, young people replied 'not again' when I asked them why they were fighting corruption so fiercely and rattling government leaders. They said they would not allow the country to go back to conflict, and saw clean, accountable

government as essential to that vision. We discussed anecdotal stories like these – and more - in our small group, to look for leads and lessons, to explore the determinants of civic engagement: why do some citizens become engaged, and others remain apathetic and disinterested? As we found out, there are many explanations, and citizen attitudes are shaped by history and context, among other things.

The challenge for peace advocates is to work on multiple fronts, recognizing the complex nature of the peace building enterprise and the need for participation by diverse actors and at different levels. It is important to mobilize ordinary citizens to active engagement toward peacemaking. It should be an encouragement to be reminded that those who invest in making peace are 'blessed', for the scriptures say 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Matthew 5:9, from the Sermon on the Mount). Making peace is everyone's responsibility. The environment created for this kind of dialogue at Ezekiel's Place is very special.



Jeff Thindwa (front, middle) in dialogue with other forum participants.



Forum brings together Israelis, Arabs, Zimbabweans and Americans to reflect on and share peace building strategies.

God's Call on Our Lives

*(by Brandon Dennison,
retreat resource person)*

Much of the "Living out Your Call" retreat at Ezekiel's Place was focused on first convincing everyone there IS a call from God to be lived out in their life, but also that a call doesn't have to be grandiose and adventurous. In other words, retreat leader Kayla McClurg and myself were taking the pressure off of many participants who perhaps came feeling "down" because of "disappointing God" in somehow not following a certain call. Keep it simple, I said: Be like Jesus, don't be like the rich young ruler, and trust that grace always wins. Kayla expressed a similar formula for simple living in accordance with God's will: Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly With God (Micah 6:8). In adhering to simple Godly principles in our everyday lives, we become open to the Spirit, able to discover what God has planned for us.

A highlight of this peaceful, conversationally-toned retreat was an activity in which everyone shared a meaningful memory from kindergarten. This emotional remembering process established great trust and openness for our day together. More than that, though, this activity helped us get back in touch with our identity, with who we really are at our core.

I shared with the group that for me, living out my calling is very much tied to my identity as a West Virginian and a Christian. So I formed a community development corporation aimed at creating quality homes, quality jobs, and quality lives in southern West Virginia. God shaped this calling for me over many years through reminding me of my identity, through visions, and through unexpected opportunities. I was able to make my vision reality through persistence, focus, and with strong and sure support from Christian communities like Ezekiel's Place.

While I've been blessed in turning a vision into reality, I'm nevertheless just a normal person. And callings are often very normal and humble. Kayla gave us a wonderful gift by de-mythicizing "the call," by taking the pressure off, and by convincing us that if we're simply doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly, then God will bless us with a sense of calling in God's mysterious ways. And when we follow our calling, we honor God. "A saint," Kayla said, "is someone so in touch with their humanness, they're willing

to share it with all." Don't shy away from being a saint, was the message here, because you're meant to be one. And in not shying away, don't be so fearful of failure: "God feels you're failing about as much as you think a two year old is failing when they try to walk and keep falling on their bottom."



Brandon (on left) and Dan listen to Kayla's sharing.

Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40: 30 - 31



Ezekiel's Place is also a refuge for diverse wildlife.

EZEKIEL'S PLACE

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