

Interns Serve and Learn through Refugee Ministry

Carrying out a mandate of the 74th General Convention, the Episcopal Church's Young Adult Ministry cluster began the Short-term Internship Program (SIP) in August 2005. SIP helps young adults to engage their faith and learn valuable leadership skills while serving local communities through social justice work. Three SIP interns served the refugee program at EMM affiliate offices in Atlanta, Louisville, and Concord (NH) and share their experiences here.

ACTING UPON OPPORTUNITIES

Bart Smith



From time to time, I wonder how faithfully I respond to my baptismal promises to seek and serve Christ in all persons, love my neighbor,

strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being. I firmly believe that God provides people with opportunities to act upon these principles and the grace to follow through on these commitments.

Such an opportunity came my way this summer when I had the pleasure of working at Kentucky Refugee Ministries, a refugee resettlement agency in Louisville, Kentucky affiliated with Episcopal Migration Ministries and Church World Service. As one of KRM's interns, I assisted my colleagues to support refugees from different parts of the globe who were re-establishing their lives in the U.S. My work included providing transportation; accessing case files; running errands; making phone calls to sponsors, landlords, and social workers; filling in as the receptionist; processing paperwork, and many other things. During all of this I was fortunate to have regular contact with clients, and in the process, listened to their stories and concerns.

My anecdotes cannot adequately describe the depth and richness of my experience. I can only attest to the courage, endurance, character, and spirit of the many individuals and families who survived hardship and suffering so foreign to my American middle-class

world and yet have the strength to move on through the obstacles of the resettlement journey. I can only attest to the compassion, patience, and intelligence of KRM staff who work daily to make that journey easier and the prospect for improved lives a reality.

The biblical message to welcome the stranger and stand with the oppressed is put into action in refugee resettlement. I am more internationally conscious now, not indifferent to issues and problems outside North America. This internship was a unique opportunity for me to answer the call of the God in Christ to love others as God so passionately loves us.

Bart Smith is a member of St. Gregory the Great Episcopal Church in Athens, Ga. and a senior at the University of Georgia where he worships regularly at the Episcopal Center.

AN UNEXPECTED LUNCH

Caitlin Frazier



I arrived in Atlanta for my SIP Internship on June 5th, the day after Pentecost. That evening I had dinner with my mentor, Benno

Pattison, the rector at Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, and his family. The next morning I reported for work at RRISA, the Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta. I met the director, Sandra Mullins, who showed me around the office and introduced me to staff, many who are former refugees or asylees themselves.

I was taken out in “the field” to set up an apartment for a family of nine people coming from Somalia. A Meskhetian Turk neighbor, Gulishe, who was also resettled by RRISA three months earlier, invited us in from the heat. She served us traditional Turkish tea, soup and bread. Her hospitality in serving lunch to me, a stranger, on my first day was one of the most moving experiences I have had.

I was put to work on a variety of tasks. I did office work, set up apartments, greeted refugees at the airport, shopped for groceries for the clients, helped maintain the clothing closet and food pantry, and took people to apply for social security numbers.

I loved working at RRISA and my experience at the Church of the Epiphany where I sang in the choir and met regularly with Rev. Pattison and Rev. Jim Kee-Rees for theological reflection. Processing my work with refugees helped my put everything in focus and made this one of my most memorable summers.

Caitlin attends the University of Oklahoma, where she is the president of the Religious Studies Club and is involved in the Episcopal Campus Ministry.

REFLECTIONS ON A VEGETABLE GARDEN

Jamie Mills



When I envisioned what I would be doing with my summer, I did not foresee working with refugees in Concord, New Hampshire, where I served the Interfaith

Refugee Resettlement Program (IRRP), through Lutheran Social Services of Northern New England.

My primary responsibility was assisting with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes offered through IRRP, while also acquainting myself with the process of refugee resettlement with the help of program case managers.

Of many great experiences I had, one that stands out – the time I spent farming with refugees. The occasions on which I journeyed to a local

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independent school (which had donated land for refugee use) with two Somali Bantu families were remarkable. In those moments, I realized that starting life anew in another country is much like farming vegetables. Like each sown seed, each refugee is filled with the promise of development and growth in their new communities. In order to grow, each seed needs tending, water, and sunlight to grow. Likewise, each refugee needs the support of their new community, but also must acclimate themselves to a new community and take care to become self-sufficient.

This summer’s work had a tremendous impact on my spiritual life. I learned anew how life is transitory and unpredictable, and to value more deeply what I have been given. Most significantly, I solidified my faith in the Gospel message to love one another. My time with refugees has influenced my prayer for all people: that we may all embrace the command to love one another, as God has loved us.

Jamie Mills is a graduate of Clemson University in South Carolina, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Colorado, where he is involved with Episcopal Campus Ministry.