

Greetings friends and family at Forest Hills!

I hope the New Year has started out great for everyone. The stresses of the Holiday season have finally ceased here in Nashville, and things have started to settle back down. I have been working hard from seven to four every Monday through Thursday at The Campus For Human Development, also known as Room In The Inn. As most of you may or may not know, I am at the half way point in my year of mission work, and I have become an expert at things such as folding laundry, alphabetizing and handing out mail, serving lunch, and cleaning showers. But this is only a small window of the amazing things going on at our day center. Helping find jobs and housing, handing out bus passes, filling out papers and checks for IDs and birth certificates, and lifting people up out of the places they are in at this time in their lives are some of the more difficult things I do on a day to day basis. In the meantime, I also have started a band with members from my church, Second Presbyterian, here in Nashville. We have played for a few fundraisers at church and for the youth, and it's been a really great experience.

There have been just as many difficulties, obstacles and stresses in my year as well. Time after time I find myself struggling to really grasp how I can be a positive and inspirational person through my faith. Seeing people in a real state of survival day in and day out makes me feel so blessed to have such a strong support group in my life. Building relationships is a key part of my time at RITI, and most people have either very few relationships, or very negative ones. Without the relationships I have had with my church family and with my friends here and in North Carolina, I might not be where I am today.

I am a firm believer that actions speak louder than words. Giving selflessly has been a hard goal to obtain as well. Recently, I have found myself going out of my way to help people without even realizing what an impact I have made. This hasn't been the case my whole time here, though. My four housemates and I all were filled with this idea that we were such great people because we gave up a year of our lives to give ourselves more fully to others. After being, or rather living compassionately, I have been able to drown out those thoughts. Instead of doing for some greater good, I have been able to just "do".

My faith as well as me as a person have been affected this year. The Young Adult Volunteer slogan, "A year of service for a lifetime of change" is about as accurate as it gets. I will never forget this year, and I have not and will not take it for granted. Everyday is another day of growth for me, and I hope that in return my year long, life changing experience reflects back on others. I thank all of you for your prayers, support, and love.

God bless,  
*Jay Hankins*

Akwaaba! Welcome, as they say here in Ghana. We have been warmly welcomed everywhere we've gone in Ghana, even if the markets are full of people selling things and running around. We have been learning a lot about Christianity in Ghana and the Presbyterian church here. I think we could learn a lot from the church here. They are all so excited about worship and doing work for their church. Faith is embedded in life here. We pray before every journey in the van, before every meal, at the beginning and end of each meeting with a group of professors or ministers. It is awesome! I loved going to church yesterday! Most of it was in Twi, one of the main languages here. We got to dance and clap and give glory to God with our whole beings. I am learning a lot and gaining a lot of excitement from being here in Ghana for ministry. I hope to bring some of that home! I also have a lot of beautiful hand woven/hand dyed and hand tailored clothes- to show off! Hope all of you are well.

Love,  
*Ally*

Greetings from Ghana! We all are now bathed, clothed, and in our right minds - and continuing to have a remarkable learning experience in West Africa. We've spent the last several days in Kumasi, the center of Asante history and culture, where we have visited museums, kente cloth and wood-carving artisans, the largest market and the largest natural lake in West Africa. The highlight was worship with Presbyterian friends on Sunday morning - a lively 3 hours! - we did not embarrass the school too badly with our dance moves. In fact, later that afternoon, while watching a professional dance ensemble perform stunning traditional African dances, the Genches watched in amazement as every one of our seminarians joined in when invited to dance with them! Allysen dazzled with unbelievable gymnastic feats of dance prowess, Ben even went airborne in a dance-off with the leader, and all our seminarians were so impressive in their performance that they drew a huge astonished crowd to the spot to witness and cheer them on! Roger and Frances have the pictures to prove it. They are also dazzling crowds everywhere we go with frisbee-throwing exhibitions. We are now en route to Ho to spend several days with Richard Nimo's colleagues in ministry in the EPC. Our digestive systems are doing remarkably well - not a single one of us has gotten sick. We are falling in love with Ghana and our Presbyterian brothers and sisters who are extending such extraordinary friendship and hospitality to us! Jordan and Mimi have had marriage proposals and may not come home.

The Ghana Travel Seminar