

Happenings in the Life of Iris

November 2008



Life at the Jubilee House

My life in the past six months has been full of interesting and exciting experiences. In August, I moved into the Jubilee House (a.k.a. The Gainesville Catholic Worker House) a house of hospitality. This semester I am participating in the "Metanoina Semester." You may wonder what this means and what this looks like for my life. First, I am committed to living with seven other people (three children, a couple, a single mother and another young adult) in intentional community. As an in-house community we commit to working together to serve our community, showing all who come to our home dignity and respect, sharing meals and house responsibilities, praying together weekly, seeking God and His kingdom, and supporting one another in our daily lives.

I am still a full time student at the University of Florida and also living at the house. My schedule at the house involves about 11 hours of house duty, which entails being in charge of hospitality hours at the house: greeting and helping guests who come to our home and doing lots of chores. Also, every Wednesday morning I help with Breakfast Brigade. We wake up early in the morning and bake cinnamon raisin bread, boil about 13 dozen eggs and put together baskets of fresh, local fruit. We then take this nutritious breakfast to three local labor pools, where many men and women go each morning to try to obtain work for the day. I also help with Dorothy's Café which happens about six times per month and is a large meal of homemade soup, fresh bread, and honey butter served to approximately 75-100 people. Every Tuesday evening we, the in-house community and others, study scripture. This semester we have been studying the book of Acts. It is really neat to study scripture with a diverse group of people who want to know and understand God and His Word. I say a diverse group because we usually have people who are young and old, black and white, and people who come from varying socioeconomic levels - homeless people and others who come from comfortable middle or upper class families and people in between. On Thursday evenings we have what we call Roundtable Discussion, which is a potluck style meal with a guest speaker who shares about a specific topic and then we discuss the topic as a group. I led a Roundtable on my experience in Tanzania and other Roundtables have been on topics from food security to addressing poverty and educational equality.



Some of the community of the Jubilee House, including the 8 of us who live at the house.

Although it has been a very busy semester, it has also been a meaningful one. There were times throughout the semester that I was just struck again by the beauty of what we do at the Jubilee House. One day I heard some people talking outside our house and one person was asking about the house and the response was "This is the house that helps people". Other times it is people at café who are really thankful for a peaceful place to eat a good, warm meal and be able to rest for a little while. And more recently, with the cold nights here in Gainesville, the beauty of being able to offer people we know and trust a place to sleep inside, an alternative to sleeping outside in the bitter cold. So, I am thankful for my time at the Jubilee House and the opportunities to serve people in need in our community, build relationships with people who come from different backgrounds in life, and live with wonderful people.

Three Months in Tanzania, East Africa

As many of you know, I spent three months in Tanzania over the summer. I traveled to Tanzania with six other UF students and we spent about eight weeks doing research on sustainability with respect to architecture, construction, and housing. My specific research focus was knowledge networks in low income housing in Dar es Salaam, the largest city in Tanzania. I worked with Tanzanian and Kenyan professors and was able to meet with people who are involved at many different levels in helping people obtain housing. I talked with people from local community development groups, heads of programs funded by large international NGOs, firmly established local NGO leaders, government officials and many others. I learned a lot and met many wonderful people. In general the people of Tanzania are very welcoming and hospitable. Many Tanzanians welcomed me into their homes and I really enjoyed experiencing and learning more about their culture. The Swahili I learned in my classes at UF served me well and I also became more proficient in my Swahili. After the research project was finished, I was able to stay in Tanzania for an additional month and work with Hananasif Orphanage Centre.



Why I Love Hananasif Orphanage Centre

It did not take me long to fall in love with the children of Hananasif Orphanage Centre (HOCET), and I not only fell in love with the children, I also came to really believe in the vision of HOCET. There are many things that struck me as I lived and worked at Hananasif Orphanage. I want to share a couple of those things with you. First, this orphanage meets the physical and immediate needs of these children, but they do so much more than that. They are providing these children with hope. Hope for a different life and hope that comes from a new identity. The children are taught their identity is not in being an orphan or in poverty, but they are children of God. They are a part of a new family and they have a Father who cares for them.

Something else I noticed was how much the students of Hananasif Academy value their education. The students of Hananasif Academy (the orphanage's secondary school) are children who would be unable to attend school if it was not for this Hananasif Academy. Some of these children told me how they used to dream of going to secondary school, but they honestly thought that would never be possible for them. So, although school is difficult for many of the students, they take it very seriously and study hard and are so grateful for this opportunity. I believe it is the combination of the new hope they have and these opportunities they never thought possible, that has allowed these children to have hope and dreams for a different future. Many of the students want to go to college, to become doctors, accountants, engineers, teachers, etc. Others have desires to follow in the footsteps of Hezekia Mwalugaja, the founder and director of Hananasif Orphanage, in caring for orphaned and vulnerable children. They want to do for other children what HOCET has done for them.

Hananasif Orphanage Centre is a truly wonderful place and since I have returned to the US, I have thought about these children and this place every day.

Some of the children of Hananasif Orphanage are pictured above (from left to right): Lucy, Hussein, Peter, Dafloza, Karim, Kassim, Mecky, Mwajuma, Omary, Happiness, Jestina, Msekwa, and Jovin.

"They needed to first find the hope. They needed to first know that the loss of their parents or their life on the streets no longer defines them. It is not the streets or the poverty that has given them their name. They have been given a new name. They don't call themselves orphans, no. They call themselves 'Watoto wa Mungu.' Children of God."

Hezekia Mwalugaja
Founder and Director of
Hananasif Orphanage

Current, Pressing Needs of HOCET

Currently HOCET's greatest need is to obtain official government registration for Hananasif Academy. The school has been growing as funds have become available, originally starting with just one building. Recently the Tanzanian government notified Hananasif Academy that they must complete the official government registration process before the school can be re-opened next year. The students have finished the current school year and are on holiday until early 2009. In order for the school to obtain registration and re-open, at least three more buildings must be built: a kitchen/dining hall and both girls and boys dormitories. Although the network of Tanzanians involved in supporting the orphanage is growing, Hananasif Academy can also greatly benefit from support from friends here in the US as well. I would ask you to please consider how you might be able to help in supporting Hananasif Orphanage Centre.

I also want to thank all who have already made donations to help HOCET. Every dollar makes a difference.



Check out www.hananasif.org to learn more about HOCET.

What Comes Next in My Life...

I will be moving on from the Jubilee House in the Spring. Although, I will not be living at the house I plan to continue actively participating in the activities and community of the house. I will be finishing up the last few classes I need to graduate and will also be doing a part time internship for a company called Infinite Energy, here in Gainesville. I will be working with their IT department. In May 2009 I will graduate from the University of Florida. I am still considering various paths for myself post-graduation. My heart desires to return to Tanzania to work with Hananasif Orphanage Centre and to love the children and partner with HOCET in helping to care for the children, instilling in them hope and an identity in the Lord, and providing the children with the tools they need to accomplish some of their dreams and become agents of change in their communities and their country. I will keep you updated on my plans and where I am headed next in life. Thank you for your friendship, prayer and support. Mungu akubariki — May God bless you.

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