

Cross Fire 2006-07 Journal

Date: 9/25/2006

Submitted by: Kyle Nelson

Journal Entry:

This first week on the road has been amazing. I have met so many new and interesting people. It's great to see God moving in the congregations that we meet. I think the one thing that I have been able to see the same throughout all of the different people that I have met is their hospitality and love for God. People have graciously opened their homes to us and hosted us. They have reminded me of the importance for Christians to be giving and welcoming to others. I now look at my own attitude in a new light. Have I always been a gracious and selfless host? Have I been a dependable Christian, or have I put my needs above someone else's? As I reflect, I'm disappointed that I, in fact, have pushed others to the side when I found my needs to be greater than theirs. What impact does that make for the kingdom of God? None. God asks us to serve others. I am a Christian, and I will continue to strive to serve others before I serve myself. Thank you hosts and future hosts for your example and Christian dedication!



Kyle Nelson

Date: 9/28/2006

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

When our team decided to buy board games for our Team Outing, Kyle just had to have Chutes and Ladders. It's been sitting in its wrapping for a few days, but tonight we finally opened it up and played. The box says it's technically for preschoolers, but we twenty-somethings learned quite a bit. For instance, we learned that if you do "good things," such as take out the garbage, you get to go up a ladder and end up at the top with a smile on your face. If you do "bad things," such as draw on the wall with crayons, you fall down a chute and end up at the bottom with a sad face. If we do bad things, we get punished. If we do good things, we get rewards! Simple enough, right?



Katie Trathen

Wrong! Rachel won both games we played and she seemed to be soaring up every ladder with great ease. Despite great efforts, I spent most of the game in last place, falling down chutes all over the place! I finally began to realize that I kept falling down the exact same chute over and over again! So I strategized. Maybe I could do something really good so that I could climb up the very biggest ladder and get ahead of Rachel. Sadly, the game always ended before I even got near the big ladder.

Like the game, I see myself climbing chutes and ladders in my spiritual life. I am sometimes drawn into the same sins over and over again, falling down the same "chute" every time. (You'd think I'd learn.) And then sometimes I think that if I can just do something really good, I could make up for all the bad things and come out on top again.

I'm so glad life isn't a board game.

In college, one of my professors explained it to us like this: "GRACE is getting what you don't deserve and MERCY is not getting what you do deserve." I am so thankful that we have a God who is gracious and compassionate (Psalm 86:15).

In Romans 6:23, Paul tells us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Wow... isn't death so much worse than a chute, and eternal life way better than a ladder?!)

Praise God for sending His Son so that we can stop falling down chutes and climbing up ladders, and instead rest in His saving Grace.

Date: 10/3/2006

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

Being in Cross Fire for almost two months now, I have thought how we have become quite a well-functioning machine and family. We have our team jobs that our part of the success of the whole team, and working together is part of our daily life now.

What has surprised me however, is how people are surprised or perhaps impressed by how well the four of us work and live together. This is all thanks to God, too! For it is God who shows us how to love one another, how to care for one another, and yes, even talk to one another when we are hurt or upset. (And believe us, this does happen!) Sometimes people might be surprised to find out the four of us didn't know each other only several weeks ago and now we are seeing each other almost all day every day. But what a witness it is to show how beautiful the relationships are already, and how that can perhaps have an impact in our relationships with others.



Jana Melpolder

Date: 10/4/2006

Submitted by: Kyle Nelson

Journal Entry:

Wow! God is so amazing! We are now in our sixth state! God is showing me so much through so many different people. Just recently God spoke to me through an amazing woman at a nursing home that we visited.



Kyle Nelson

We were just wrapping up our program and sharing with the residents our plans for Africa and traveling to Ghana and Nigeria. Katie said that we will be bringing their greetings to Africa when we go and one of the residents said, "Tell them we are praying for them!" This in itself is such a wonderful gift, but these are the words that she said that truly touched me. After we thanked her for her caring witness she replied, "That's our job." It's so amazing how these three simple words have given me such a great appreciation for what prayer is. This kind woman could have easily asked for prayer for herself or many other residents, but she stated very boldly that she would not only be praying for someone else, but someone else she has never met! How great a gift prayer is! Sometimes prayers are recited, memorized or are completely spontaneous based on the situation. Throughout all of these, God does hear our prayers but listens to our hearts. This woman's heart was on fire for God. She was honest, sincere and selfless. I hope I never forget this woman who touched my life with three simple words and a clear witness for God.

Date: 10/4/2006

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

Erie, PA. State #6 for us and home of the Melpolder family.

I am frequently in awe of God's creation. In the past couple months we have witnessed: hail, an almost-tornado, a rainbow, thunder, lightning, rain, meteor showers, the

changing of the leaves, fields of corn, pink sunsets, and full orange moons.

We have witnessed the beauty of God's creation in the face of a beautiful baby boy at our host home in Ohio. We've seen His beauty in the hymns that come forth from the mouths of the elderly. His beauty is in the kids who dance around like a Hippopotamus and the adults who provide us with all our basic needs day after day.

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?... O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

- Psalm 8:3-4, 9



Katie Trathen

Date: 10/4/2006

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

The other day we went to a nursing home and rehabilitation center in Green Springs, Ohio. Before we started our program, I was talking with one of the residents. She was telling me about her love for Harley-Davidson motorcycles. We discussed the bikes in general, the logo, and of course Sturgis. After speaking with this joyful woman for about seven minutes, I told her that I had to go get ready to sing. She looked at me and smiled and said, "Thanks for listening."

I smiled and said, "You're welcome."

I was thinking about this woman and how that conversation with a willing ear and a smile made probably her whole week. She made me think about how lucky I am to have Jesus to always listen to me, whether it is a joyous thought or a needy thought. When I talk to Him, he listens and it can make my entire day better.



Rachel Arends

Date: 10/12/2006

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

I feel as though God has been working through our team in so many different ways the past few days. We were able to have a staff member, Cassie, from Youth Encounter meet with us at one of our stops. She encouraged us that God is present and working at all times including team meetings, difficult conversations, rain storms, spontaneous invitations, fabulous cups of chai, and a large cup of French coffee which looked more like a bowl. We talked through many things as a team, and we all realize that any difficult times we have experienced so far that God was still present and guiding us.



Rachel Arends

I saw God working on Wednesday, when we were at the church eating lunch and a woman named Eve came in and asked us to come to her house for dessert that evening. It was very spontaneous, but God showed me that sometimes that is the best way to do ministry. We went to her house, met her family, and talked for about an hour. We were able to learn about her and her family, and we were able to tell them about our ministry and how God is working in our lives. I even got to teach Eve about playing the bass guitar, which I learned myself only a month ago. Afterwards, we were able to meet with another team, New Dawn, at McDonald's and share with each other the great and fun times we have experienced. Most importantly of all, we were able to hear of all the great things God is doing with their team.

God has shown himself to me in various ways this past week. These are only a small example of the great things God is doing not only with me but also with my team.

Date: 10/18/2006

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder
Journal Entry:

This has been something I've been chewing on for awhile. Katie and I were discussing it this past week, too. It is the idea of the "good Christian." You might be wondering what that actually is. My interpretation would be someone who is a Christian and who live what could be considered the "proper" life; for example, a person who doesn't do "bad" stuff, a person who doesn't get into trouble, and one who could be considered by the general population as good.



Jana Melpolder

But the truth is, none of us are good people, or good Christians. Hidden or not, the stuff we do that is sinful and can hurt ourselves and other people can happen on even a daily basis. If we were "good" enough to begin with, what would be the reason for Christ to come? If we could save ourselves by our own actions, would we need a Savior? In all actuality, Christians are the ones who realize how *bad* they are, not how good. They see their own sinful and bad nature, and recognize they need outside help (Christ) to put them back together.

I grow a lot from hearing how people were messed up and Christ put them back to a healed and put-together person, because I can see myself in that. Hearing our own stories of that could help others. It is showing our true selves, but how honest and freeing that could be, too.

Date: 10/20/2006
Submitted by: Katie Trathen
Journal Entry:

This week, Pastor Van Dyke from Davidsville, PA took us to the Johnstown Incline Plane (the steepest in the world!), then to the site of the Flight 93 crash and memorial, and then to Coney Island for hotdogs and "sundowners." (Sundowners are burgers with cheese, mustard, chili, onions and a fried egg on top. Wow.)



Katie Trathen

The Flight 93 memorial was somber, moving and thought-provoking. Seeing the site made September 11 all the more real to me—especially seeing pictures of some of the victims at the memorial. I don't know what else to say about it at this point—I am still digesting the experience.

Earlier in the day, we visited a retirement village. I met a beautiful lady named Edith, and she and I had a great conversation. Afterward, I learned that she is 101 years old. I would have guessed 70.

During the program, I shared about God's grace pouring down on us like rain. Afterward, Cross Fire sang "Amazing Grace" in three-part harmony with all the residents. I saw the song in a new light.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...

Date: 10/27/2006
Submitted by: Katie Trathen
Journal Entry:

As I write this, we just crossed into our tenth state—New Jersey. We're en route to New York, which will be our eleventh state. Very exciting.



Katie Trathen

This week was Factory Week for Cross Fire in Easton, PA. We toured the Martin Guitar Factory, where we got complimentary "sound holes" engraved with the Martin logo at the end of our tour. Today we went to the PEZ museum, and viewed PEZ dispensers that were rare and/or retired...one was on sale for \$125! Lastly, we went to the Crayola Factory. The best part: we met a man named Emerson Moser, who volunteers at the

museum now, after a 35-year career of crayon-making. He personally made more than 1,400,000,000 crayons. (That's one billion four-hundred million crayons!) Kyle had him autograph his box of crayons and we took a team picture with him. (Coming soon to our online photo album!)

At Faith Lutheran in Easton, we met a lady named Bukky, who is originally from Lagos, Nigeria. Yesterday we sat by the fireplace and asked her questions about home. As it turns out, she will be visiting Nigeria during the months that we will be there. So we got her contact information and will try to meet up with her in her hometown.

As we were going through the factories, I was thinking about how God makes us. Some things are similar: the care and precision that goes into making a perfect product. But what's different is that there are no mistakes, and instead of being made all exactly the same, we are all unique.

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." – Psalm 139:13-14

Date: 11/4/2006

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

Today we are staying with a couple in Avon, CT. This morning they pulled us all into the living room and basically told us this:

"We have been discouraged in leading our youth group, and feeling as though our work isn't making much difference. But you have inspired us. Today I remembered that we are all just waterers. We just water seeds, and most of the time we don't get to see the fruit of our work. But if I can water everyday, then that's what I'll do."



Katie Trathen

Being on team, sometimes it's difficult to see the fruit of the work that we have done. We meet people one day and then leave them the next, praying that our relationships and conversations have made some sort of difference. And even though we might never know how we've made a difference, we go ahead and do the work anyway, trusting that God will use us in His plan. And someday, we will all sit around the banquet table in Heaven, see all kinds of familiar faces, and finally know that our work has indeed been fruitful.

Date: 11/15/2006

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

So there I was, doing my team duties and I decided I was going to use the team printer to print something for the team. I set it up and everything was running smoothly. The printer printed my document; however, the ink had failed to move from the ink cartridge to the paper. I tried a new ink cartridge, wiggled the ink, checked to see if ink was coming out (which it was), and nothing changed. Our team printer was going through all of the correct motions to print the document, but the end result was not what I wanted it to be.



Rachel Arends

Sometimes I feel as if life is exactly this way. I do all the right things and try so hard, but I don't get the result I would like. However, I have come to find out that it doesn't matter what I do or how I get there. God has it all figured out and lets me know when the time is right. My "printing" motion could be perfect in my eyes, but God sees a different vision and idea for the end result.

"I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him." – Ecclesiastes 3:14

Date: 11/19/2006

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

Last week we returned to our friends in Westminster, Maryland, where I had the pleasure of staying with one family for a second and third time. On our last day with them, all of Cross Fire and our respective host families went out to dinner to celebrate my host dad's birthday. We really felt like they were our family away from home! (Thank you so much Harrys, Sawyers, and Fritzs!)



Katie Trathen

During our time in MD, we did a family night program at a church in Eldersburg. The pastor and his wife spent some time in Ghana and Nigeria before, and it was encouraging to see them singing along with us. Then in the middle of our program, the pastor came up to me and said, "Can I do something really quick?" So I said, "Sure!" And he began to inform the congregation about how the offering is received in West Africa. He placed the offering baskets in the center aisle, and asked the people to dig in their purses for more money and then dance up to the basket for a second offering. To our surprise, people did! As Cross Fire played a Ghanaian song, people of all ages danced up to the altar and gave more money. I would estimate that about 90% of the audience participated. AND... they were smiling!

We are blessed daily as we witness the generosity of strangers and how they give to the Lord with a joyful heart. (Not just in Eldersburg, but everywhere!)

Date: 1/15/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Quite a busy day, though only to realise that it is American holiday after hurriedly boarding a taxi to the American embassy. On arrival at the embassy, we found no business going on there, only the security men who were doing their security work. Although I was embarrassed, I was motivated instantly when I remembered that we were hungry and that we needed to look for a nearby restaurant to have lunch.



Matthew Abudulai

At the lunch at a restaurant named Pizza Inn, something strange happened. After ordering for our drinks and food, we waited for some time, and everyone's food had arrived except mine. My team leader asked, "Matthew, is your food coming?" I found out from the counter and I was told to order from the next kitchen. I went there to order, and here was this European man who was standing just beside me. He grumbled in a deep voice, "Did you not see the queue?" I responded, "Oh! I am sorry." That really brought some cheer on the man's face. I later realised that after all, there was no queue at all, but rather people standing against the counter. Another thought came into my head. "Is the queue horizontal or vertical?" Well, it was just a thought, not a word. I realise that the power of the Holy Ghost really demonstrated itself in me that released the phrase "I am sorry" to glorify God, instead of what I was thinking. I realise the power of God manifesting itself in the team at that time, and I was so grateful.

My teammates did not hesitate to declare interest in Ghanaian fabrics. Thus, we all sat in a "tootoo," a name given to a passenger bus, sort of, in Ghana. At the central market, popularly called the Tema station, we had our fabric bought. In fact, it was all fun.

There was a shortage of currency. Obviously, we needed to get more Ghanaian money. We then rushed to the biggest Internet café in West Africa, "Busy Internet," and it was also fun to have the five of us using one computer. How do you think we did that? Figure it out yourself.

Our day darkened when we were at supper at a Chinese restaurant. After a busy schedule, we stood along the roadside, close to the restaurant to look for a tootoo to Anya, where our host home is. No tootoo. We therefore boarded a taxi and got to our home very tired. There was a hard day's experience. We were grateful for how the Lord guided and sustained every step we took. Having failed to achieve the most important schedule for the day, the trip to the embassy to regularise the stay of my teammates, it was still quite a successful day. Thank God for such a day.

Date: 1/16/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

After my fourth day in Ghana, I already feel comfortable. Yesterday, I started playing with my two host brothers; one is two years old and the other is three-and-a-half. We were playing with bubbles that my teammate brought along with us. The two little boys and I went outside, and I blew some bubbles and showed them how the bubbles pop when you touch them. The three of us, with an occasional visitor, chased bubbles for over an hour. It was great fun! Tonight, the boys and I started to play with the beach ball I brought with me. We played our own version of futbol while laughing and making fun sounds. The older boy even said my name tonight! These things may not seem like big accomplishments, but these boys do not know any English. All of our communication was through actions. I love that these boys can teach me about acceptance of other people. They have no idea what I am doing here or what I am trying to say to them, but they know I like to have fun, so I am okay. If they only knew how similar to Jesus they are...



Rachel Arends

Date: 1/17/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

As tradition demands in Ghana, any time foreigners visit us, we need to introduce them to our parents, family heads, brothers, and sisters. The team could not, and for that matter, must not overlook this important tradition. Three days after the team arrived in Ghana, we decided to pay a courtesy call, if you like, a visit, to the President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, Right Rev. Doctor Paul Kofi Fynn, as well as his administrative staff. Before we set off from our host home, we had to demonstrate how a chicken is killed and prepared for food in Ghana.



Matthew Abudulai

I was the main killer/slaughterer of the chicken for the day, assisted by Kyle, videoed by Jana, and photographed by Rachel while Katie was enjoying the whole scene. Indeed, it was really fun to see a chicken being slaughtered in Ghana for food. I wish you were there to have a feel of it. After killing the chicken, we sent it to the kitchen to be used to prepare food. Interestingly enough, we had named the chicken. Its name was "Dinner" because we slaughtered it for our dinner for the day. A few minutes after this exercise, we left to see the president.

At the headquarters, the team met the seminarians, the finance and administrative director, the secretary to the President, as well as the first Vice President. Soon after saying hello to these important people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, the President arrived from a Christian Council of Ghana meeting, where he chaired the preparation and organisation of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of Ghana.

The President assured us of our safety and promised my teammates, with myself and our friend Elvis, they are in absolutely safe hands and therefore there should not be any cause for alarm. The passports and other valuable documents of my American teammates were placed in an envelope,

sealed, signed by all the teamers, and handed over to the President for safe keeping. In order to remember the visit to the President, we never hesitated to have a group photograph with him. We and he together were very excited, and he wished us happy stay and a very fruitful and successful tour.

Some few minutes past 2 p.m., without food at noon, what do you expect? Obviously, lunch. The team entered a nearby restaurant with Elvis and George to eat together and share fellowship. The team boarded a taxi, and off we drove towards our host home. On the way, I told the taxi driver that I would like to get treated mosquito net in a nearby pharmaceutical shop. Unfortunately, the driver forgot to pass through the shop to get the net; however, we were able to buy a recharge card for our teammate Katie to be used to call her mother, who was fifty years today.

Before we realized, here we were at the house to do justice to the chicken that we slaughtered for our dinner. "Sofo Mame," the Ghanaian name for the pastor's wife, prepared rice balls and ground nut soup with the chicken for us. We all really enjoyed the handiworks of Sofo Mame. Rachel could not help but play with Paa Kroesi and Abeku, all being the sons of the pastor after dinner. This day was very exciting, with the power of the Holy Spirit at work throughout every step we took.

Date: 1/18/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

Akwabaa! What joy there is in Ghana and in Africa! I came to this unknown-to-me land, trying to be open and not have expectations, but today the children in Accra have shown me so much more than I could have hoped for!



Jana Melpolder

We went to a school to sing several songs for the children, and while introducing ourselves (in the language of Twi) and singing, they had exuded so much enthusiasm. It was such a blessing to me from the Lord to see these young people have so much happiness for Him and for life.

I come away from the program today feeling a sense of joy and anticipation myself. These next few months, I feel, will be filled with moments of such enjoyment of all God has made, and what God has for Cross Fire, as well as the people in Ghana, too! May we all feel the joy and amazement the Lord brings to our lives!

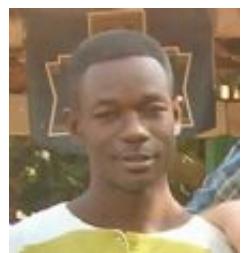
"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.'—Jeremiah 29:11

Date: 1/19/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

It may be described as a very busy day, only because our team leader Rachel was not quite well. Due to this she was unable to go through this day. A day to the beginning of the scheduled ministry tour from Ashanti region forwards, enough of the team needed to put certain preparational touches together to spiritually and physically start the word given to us by our Lord through Youth Encounter and all our sponsors.



Matthew Abudulai

Just before being set to take off to Tema, the city that I grew up in, I sent one of the youth members in Anya to get us a taxi. He came back only to inform us that it is very unlikely to have a taxi that will go straight to Tema. That was a headache to hear. To begin the day with this information was quite discouraging, since the time we were to meet the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana's second Vice President was almost being constrained by our delay.

At a vigorous move, the four of us hurriedly got to the taxi rank, and the Lord knowing the divine plan he had for the team, we were offered a taxi that would travel to Tema and back! Instead of meeting our host at his residence, we met him in town briefly, and he was so happy to see the team, he welcomed the team and recognized the weather the team is going through, to which we said our schedule shows that we shall be coming to the Greater Accra region in March to celebrate with him the country's fiftieth anniversary. He wished us a successful tour amidst fun-making.

Going to Tema without passing through Trinity School would not augur well for me, so the team was at the school to say hello to the headmaster and his staff, not forgetting the school kids. We did perform two songs for the kids, and they were more than excited to have Christian brothers and sisters from afar to share the Gospel with them through music.

The hello spree continued when we stopped by the Trinity congregation's mission house to say hello to the pastor and his family. Unfortunately, we only met one daughter of his while we continued to Mr. George Lampley's house, the office assistant of the congregation. He did not hesitate to offer us warm Ghanaian hospitality.

Team members were yearning to share the thrilling moments they have enjoyed with their families in the United States, so we found ourselves in an Internet café to do that communication. It was fun! Fun!! Fun!!! Before we could say Jack, we were found in the restaurant having our lunch. With us was George Lampley, who has been so helpful to the team.

Now came the moment we experienced the hand of God in our day's activity. Here we entered three banks to exchange travelers' cheques for cash. The first two banks were not successful, so we tried a third. Even in the third, we had a narrow escape. Members were not having their passports with them because they were given to Bishop Fynn to keep in a safe for us. We only had the photocopies. The bank would not accept it, but we did not know whether it was divine favour, divine intervention, or divine consideration. All three teamers were able to exchange money anyway. In fact, on leaving the home in the morning, in our devotion we asked the Lord to lead us fully throughout the day's activities, and we did see His manifestation in the above event. Thanks be to God for such wonderful favour.

Almost rounding up the day's activities saw us in the oldest teenager's residence to say hi. She was lovely and full of humour, according to my teammates. While they were there, I excused and got my big backpack and other team stuff to get ready for team ministry.

We ended our activities by saying goodbye to George when he saw us off to Anyaa, our host home where we live. Fun as it was, it was indeed a tiring day. We finally convened home to meet our sister and teammate Rachel, who rested the whole day. By the grace of God, we saw her very cheerful and a bit stronger. What a day! What a day!! What a day!!! I said to myself.

Submitted by: Kyle Nelson
Journal Entry:

Today was a travel day. What does that mean? Six or so hours in a bus! It truly was a good experience, though. One, it's time to get serious about our tour across an entire country, and two, putting all of our faith in God is very important if we are going to be able to manage. Accra is such a large city, it is hard to not find the food or items you need. As we travel to less populated areas, I'm assuming the number of street vendors will go down. So I am praying that just as in Accra, God will place the people in our path to help us. God is amazing, and I know his power is still there for us during every stop!



Kyle Nelson

Date: 1/21/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen
Journal Entry:

This week, we are in Kumasi, which is a large city somewhere in the middle of Ghana. We are staying at a training center for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana (ELCG). The center is currently being used to train deaf people to work in the Church. It's been fun for Cross Fire to learn some sign language and learn more about their ministry. We have also enjoyed getting to know Karen, Sandy, and Pastor Reinke, teachers from the U.S. (They even found bacon and allowed us to share!)



Katie Trathen

For me, it is totally a "God-thing" that Pastor Reinke is here. Three years ago, I went to visit a friend of mine who was on the last Cross Fire team to Ghana. It just so happened that Pastor Reinke was in the area and agreed to do a presentation for them on Ghana. I was invited to join. Pastor made Ghanaian food, showed slides, and told stories. Now, three years later, we both happen to be staying at the same training center during the same week. What are the chances? I know God has me here for a reason.

On a completely different note...I've been thinking a lot about being content because that is something I struggle with in life. I found it interesting to see a Ghanaian ad for a make-up product called "So White," which people can use to temporarily lighten their skin color. Mrs. Boatin, a lady we met in Accra, said she heard that many white people spend time and money sunbathing to get their skin darker. They say you always want what you don't have.

Today our team did a devotion on Philippians 4:11-13, where Paul talks about being content. He says he's learned to be content in abundance and need—in all circumstances. I pray God would help our team to do the same. For me, at least, it is a daily struggle to be content and to not be anxious for what's to come. But we are only in this place with these people for a very short time. So I'm praying for focus, contentment, and strength. Like Paul says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Love!

Katie

Date: 1/22/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai
Journal Entry:

This is the day that the Lord has made, and we are very glad while rejoicing in it. Afia

and Adumtumwaa, both of whom are youth members of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, very good friends of ours who promised to be with us on this day, were waiting for us outside while we were having our team meeting. Soon after we completed our team meeting, we joined our two friends who escorted us to the cultural centre to see and listen to things for ourselves.



Matthew Abudulai

Any time we are traveling as the team, we do use one taxi. My four American teammates would be at the back while I will be at the front, in all, six of us including the driver. Today, due to our two new friends, we had no choice than to hire two taxis to send us. I said to myself, today my teammates have had the opportunity to sit flexible in a taxi since they arrived in Ghana, due to the presence of our two new friends.

At the cultural centre, there was lots and lots of renovation going on because of Ghana's fiftieth birthday. We were first send round by an attendant to the craft shop where we saw the beautiful handiworks of Ghanaians. These hand crafts were made from metals, leather, and wood. We did appreciate and admire these beautiful works, but unfortunately, we did not plan to buy anything from there. Having completed with the shop, we were sent to the museum, where we saw many things concerning the Ashanti kingdom. We saw the images of the chiefs since the kingdom was established and the stools they sat on. The kind of food they ate, prepared by only men as tradition demands, the reason being that the men were considered very clean since they do not go through anything like a menstrual cycle to make them unclean. We saw the photographs of the present chief, who is called Otumfuo Osei Tutu the Second, a cousin to the immediate late chief. We also saw the image of the golden school which the priest Okomfo Anokye conjured from the skies. We were told that the one we saw was not the original but it was the duplicate the British returned to the Ashantis after realizing that it was not the original when they requested for it in the 18th century.

Since the day was to see handiworks of Ghana's craftsmen, we again found ourselves in the town where all the big stools and carved works are done in Ghana. Here we were very much amazed with the amazing things we saw. I ask myself how mighty is the Lord, distributing talents across humanity all over the earth to serve the needs of one another. May his name be praised forever. Amen.

Date: 1/24/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

The earliest programme I have ever attended team ministry began was this day. The team had the opportunity to minister to over three hundred children from class one to J.S.S. three (first grade to ninth grade).



Matthew Abudulai

Having found ourselves on the school premises as early as 6:35 a.m., we only saw very few students on the compound. Lo and behold, we had to communicate to the pastor in charge of the school, Reverend John Amoch, of our arrival. He was really amazed to hear that we have gotten there that early. He quickly left all that he was doing and ran to the school premises to welcome us. He did very well by helping us with the format that he wanted the programme to take. It was fast. While myself and Kyle were with the pastor, Jana, Rachel, and Katie were setting up the puppets and tuning the guitars for a great performance. As soon as we were done, we joined the three ladies, who were surrounded by many kids while the team was setting up. These kids would never leave, and cleaned up the surroundings while we waited for them.

All too soon, the time for them to gather was up. When they heard the school bell being rung, they were very enthused to get to where we were to perform and have divine fun with us. The chaplain of the school, Mr. Alfred, was very, very happy to see us, especially a bunch of Americans traveling all the way over and across the big ocean to minister to people in Ghana. Before we performed, there were a couple of worship songs ministered by the praise team of the school, after which the opening prayers of the day were said. Interestingly, the message from the team was from Luke 19:1-10, which was read by one of the students. In fact, it was lovely read; I really enjoyed that passage.

The praise team ushered the Cross Fire team into the worship proper. The content of our performance was close to one hour. It was songs, local and English, a puppet show, a sermon, and an introduction of the team and what Youth Encounter does. There could not be a complete worship service without an offering. Here the praise team of the school took it up again once more for us to have the offering. Katie was overwhelmed when she saw the instrumentalists use instruments from the U.S. and the Cross Fire team using the jimbe in Africa. It was a joyous moment to see school children singing and their teachers also singing and praise God for the wonderful guests God had given them this day to rejoice with. The chaplain thanked the Cross Fire team so much for having blessed them greatly, for the package that was presented.

We also really enjoyed being with the kids. The Ashanti Region Lutheran Youth Vice President, who is a computer teacher in the school, was very excited to see the Cross Fire team for the first time ever since they appeared in Kumasi. Cross Fire had the opportunity to have a photograph with the resident pastor and said hello to the headmaster and the manageress of the school, respectively. They both wished the team happy stay in Ghana for the rest of our ministry tour. It was really the first day we presented the puppet show and also a full programme since the team landed in Ghana. We quickly came to the guest house and had our lunch.

The team was privileged to have a dinner time with Pastor Reinke, who is the instructor of the Deaf Institute of Theology in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, and his students. I did call this gathering a banquet for it was so good. We were served with Ghanaian delicacies, fufu and rice balls together with light soup and goat meat. It was really, really good.

Just after we were done with the banquet, we again had the opportunity to perform to the children staying around the leadership training centre in Ahodwo. As soon as Pastor Reinke rang the bell to assemble them, they were at the premises in their numbers.

The team enthusiastically performed to these young kids, of whom Jesus said in Luke 18:16, "Let the little children come to me; don't keep them away. God's kingdom belongs to people like them." Guess what? The presentation was done in three different languages. It was done originally in English and translated simultaneously in sign language and the Twi language. This was another good performance to witness. All the deaf people and the non-deaf people really enjoyed the package.

It was really, really a fun day, exclaimed by all my teammates.

Thank you.

Submitted by: Rachel Arends
Journal Entry:

Of all the programs we've done, my favorite one happened today. We were asked if we would do a spontaneous program for the children in the area of the mission house in which we are staying. Of course, we agreed. The bell was rung and kids came running into the compound around us. We sang, and they clapped, laughed, and cheered. The program was going smoothly when I realized something was happening. There were three languages being spoken all at once. We were speaking in English, which was being translated into Twi (the local language) and sign language.



Rachel Arends

God worked through us and our interpreters today. He showed me that language doesn't matter. He will always find a way to let His words get through to the people who need to hear it. I thank God for the opportunity to be a part of it.

Date: 1/25/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder
Journal Entry:

This week has been an unexpected and certainly welcomed blessing. Cross Fire stayed in a guest house in a suburb of Kumasi called Ahodwo, where we met students and teachers of the signing community in the Lutheran Church in Ghana. It was such an experience to pray with my brothers and sisters using signs instead of voices, and I truly enjoyed spending time with my new friends, learning sign language (in English) while learning who they are.



Jana Melpolder

We had a program for the local neighborhood children last night, and as our teammate Matthew was preaching in English, he would stop as our contact translated into Twi and a teacher signed for people. It was such a cool experience to be part of the community that was gathered. Afterwards, so many people stayed and had fellowship. We were all attempting to communicate, and it was just plain fun to learn to sign and play with the children. This, for me, has been one the best experiences I've had in my faith journey, to have such a global community gathered together in Christ.

Date: 1/26/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai
Journal Entry:

I have had the opportunity of meeting many missionaries in my life, and also vicars who have come to Ghana to do mission work. For over twenty years in my life, I have never had the opportunity to meet a missionary as hard working, energetic, and selfless as this missionary I met in Kumasi. I have met him once when I had the opportunity to be on Cross Fire 2003-2004. This missionary is by name Reverend John Reinke, and he is the director for the Theology Institute of the Deaf. He was assigned in Ghana by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

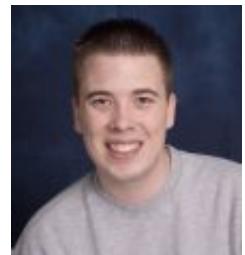


Matthew Abudulai

Pastor Reinke was so nice to our team for the one week period we stayed in Kumasi. He is a very good sign language teacher; he had ample time for his students; he had patience for them; he demonstrated so much love and care for his students. He does not hesitate to do any work available or any work his eyes see. I see him going to the market or the shop to buy stuff. I see him at the kitchen preparing food. I see him even washing the bowls and plates after meals. He is so entertaining and very friendly. In fact, I really admired his attitude and love for God's work. I pray that the Lord continues to use him mightily for his work here Ghana and other parts of the world.

Date: 1/27/2007
Submitted by: Kyle Nelson
Journal Entry:

"Life is like a box of chocolates," Forrest Gump famously said. "You never know what you're goin' ta get!" That would pretty much sum up my life in Ghana right now. It seems to me that life in the U.S. is pretty predictable. I can usually know how things will work well ahead of time. Life here in Ghana seems to currently lack that predictability I've become accustomed to these last 22 years of my life. Let me explain. Today, we arrived at a guest house and had no running water or electricity—two things I tend to take for granted in the U.S. My mind was thrown, trying to accept the fact that the beautiful white ceiling fan would not be a blur of sweet coolness, but rather the heat's ally, there to taunt me. Please don't read this and assume life is terrible for me—it's not! It's a bit like camping! Also, I was able to spend about an hour entertaining kids with stories about God. So much fun! Well, that's all for now!



Kyle Nelson

Kyle

Date: 1/28/2007
Submitted by: Katie Trathen
Journal Entry:

We arrived in Becham, Brong-Ahfo Region on Saturday, January 27. We've been staying in a guest house. It's kind of like camping—we go out back to fetch water and use lanterns at night. Many cities around here cut the power every once in a while because the drought isn't good for the hydroelectric power supply.



Katie Trathen

Upon our arrival in Becham, our contact took us to a church meeting to meet the people there. From there, we went to meet the chief of the village. He wasn't home, but his American house guests were! They were three young people from Maine, and they gave us tips on what to do when you meet a chief. One of the tips surprised me: don't cross your legs! Apparently that is too relaxed, and even though we're wearing skirts, we should sit with both feet flat on the ground. I never would have guessed.

Since the chief wasn't home, we went to meet the sub-chief. He offered us Coca-Cola as we told him about our mission in Ghana. Not much later, his cat walked in the room. It took everything in me to not meow at the cat or get up out of my seat to pet him. All of us were getting excited about the cat, so I said to the sub-chief, "I really like your cat." He smiled at me, but I was later reminded by someone to never speak to the chief without permission from the mediator. Oops!

Sunday, we went to church in Becham. I noticed as we were driving in that Cross Fire's promo picture was on the door. It was also taped to the cloth on the altar, which was a little strange to some of us. One of my favorite parts of the service is when they sing Ghanaian songs and dance around the church with the ladies swinging around their handkerchiefs. There is such joy in their faces during those times. This Sunday we did a full program in the middle of the service. We tried out "The Hippo Song," and it was a big hit!

During our fall tour, we sang a Ghanaian song called "It Is Raining." We finally understood the song last night! Ghana is currently in the dry season. The air is so extremely dusty, the sun is hot, the

water is low. But it rained last night! For the first time in two weeks, we felt cool. Now we know why the Ghanaians really praise God for the rain!

I think that's all for now...keep e-mailing, writing, and praying!

Love,

Katie

Date: 1/29/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

The first stop in the Brong-Ahfo region is Bechem. Bechem is not as busy as Kumasi, where the team stayed in the Lutheran Training Centre for one week. At Bechem, the Lutherans there really demonstrated the love of God, which I do not think I will really forget. On our arrival at Bechem, where the church is organised in school classrooms, the members' service in terms of transportation and feeding was very fantastic. The time they promised to bring food never passed over a minute. They were just on time. My teammates, because they are not Ghanaians, were not able to eat as much as I did, but they really tried their best to eat as much as they could any time they were served with food. We also had the opportunity to visit one of the oldest Lutheran churches in Ghana in a town called Kwasu, about fifteen minutes drive from Bechem. At Kwasu, we were able to meet the chairman, his other council members, and elders of the church. Here, we did not have our instruments with us; however, we never hesitated in sharing "Danase," a popular Ghanaian song, with them. They were really filled with divine joy. The team promised to give more of these songs in the region's Easter Convention in April. As part of our ministry work, the team together with the elders and the council went round the town of Kwasu to say hello to church members who have been seen for a long time and also those who have one way or the other backslidden. We met an American Peace Corps lady who has been in Ghana for over a year. To my surprise, I heard her speaking in Twi very well, and that was amazing. This lady was there with her husband and her younger sister, and they were living in the chief's palace. In the absence of the chief, we were led to the sub-chief's house, who we met in the house. He was very glad to receive us in the town. He welcomed us warmly by giving us a very good soft drink treat. Soon after, we found ourselves in the chairman's house where we had our supper. In the Ghanaian culture, it is called "Ampesi." My teammates really liked it. This, Katie confirmed to me when I asked her to grade the food on a scale of 1 to 10. She gave it a 9. The people were very welcoming.



Matthew Abudulai

Date: 1/30/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Lately, I've been thinking about things I take for granted when I am at home in the States. For instance, today I washed my clothes. This is usually a mindless task for me with the help of a lovely machine. Today, the machine was my hands and arms. I've never appreciated a washing machine as much as I do right now. Also, I take for granted the ability to just "be" when I am at home. There is no way for me to blend in, not be stared at, or walk without someone saying things to me. Sometimes it is nice to blend in with the other brothers and sisters in Christ, to simply be family with everyone around me. A final thing I have realized I take for granted in the States is communication. We speak the same language and understand, usually, very quickly. Although English is spoken almost globally, it isn't the same everywhere. I have become very thankful for common communication.



Rachel Arends

Through all of these thoughts, God has been teaching me. Although it seems simple, I have been learning how blessed I really am and how God blesses me with even little things. A common song or phrase brings me great joy, all from our great Lord. It amazes me how little joys can build together throughout time, showing us God's love for us, undying and consistent. Praise the Lord for the little thing: a washing machine, a brother or sister, and commonalities!

Date: 1/31/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

At long last, our long awaited van for the team arrived from Accra to Bechem in the Brong-Ahafo region. What a great sigh of relief, I said to myself. My heart was full with joy and total mental peace.



Matthew Abudulai

The presence of the van made our programmes for today very smooth. For the first time this year, we have been able to do four programmes today. Three school programmes and one at a church. Indeed, I must confess that our school programmes get more and more exciting as the days go by. Children and pupils are touched and blessed by the local songs we minister to them; they feel very belonging and part of our presentation. As for the teachers, they really enjoy being friends with Rachel because she is also a professional teacher. They yearn to become friends with her even after team ministry. At our last school performance, the headmaster of the school was so moved that he was pleading for the team to pass by again after our northern region tour. We promise we will, if the Lord permits.

At the church programme, we were not to sure that we will perform because there was lights off at the vicinity in which the church is situated, including our guest house. At the church, we never thought that we could perform; however, as soldiers of the Lord, we prepared fully with all our instruments, although our programmes manager Kyle was not too well. The van did the trick. We went for our instruments as soon as Pastor Samson Klutse informed us that we were going to perform, although there was no light. We did perform to the gathering, most of whom were kids. They were moved with joy. I have never regretted for allowing myself for God to use me tremendously in this year's Cross Fire team in Ghana. My love for the Lord's work increases every morning. I pray that the Lord himself will continue to equip us and renew and refresh us every morning to share his Good News. Amen.

Date: 2/1/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

I have learned so much being here in only the few short weeks we have been in Ghana, and I'd like to share some of these ideas. The notion of being poor or rich is many times described by people as the idea of having material possessions or not. I'm curious about why this is prevalent, no matter what culture one belongs to. Whether one has two cars or one hundred cattle, an abundance of "stuff" is how wealth is defined, but here in Ghana, I have been thinking of how that is not an accurate measurement of how rich a person is.



Jana Melpolder

Meeting people these past three weeks that have shelter, clothes, and enough food for their families has made me realize more fully that they have all they need. Even when I see a house of perhaps four rooms, I am trying to focus my already judgmental eyes on discovering how some people (not

all) may not be too poor, but some people (not all) may just be too rich. I understand better now how I can try to change my own lifestyle of having just what I need instead of all that I want, to help alleviate "poverty" in the world.

Going back, however, to the idea of possessions equaling wealth. We can all, myself included, look at a person's happiness or family to see how rich they are. Food, shelter, and other necessities are certainly vital, but they are not the only things in life that really count.

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Matthew 19:21)

Date: 2/2/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

The last day in this part of the world was quite exciting. The team had the opportunity to visit a Catholic hospital called the Holy Family Hospital. It was indeed quite interesting and fun.



Matthew Abudulai

At the hospital, I realised and was very sensitive how the Lord cared for me and my teammates. Children were crying and weeping around their mothers in pain. Adults who were also sick in different ways were also there. Accident victims were also carried on wheels here and there. With all this in sight, the team managed to entertain the children's ward with some Ghanaian local songs to show how God loves them. The matron of the hospital was very happy for the team's performance.

We also had the opportunity to visit a monastery, where we saw very interesting natural things like big rocks like mountains, a hundred acre cashew plantation, piggery, rabbits, guinea pigs, coops, and even instruments for playing music which were very Ghanaian and African. In all these, I saw how God says in his word that he is the creator of heaven and earth and everything that it contains. The splendor of the maker was very great.

Date: 2/5/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

A team outing day I must describe today. It was a fun day and also a team business day. It was a fun day because went sightseeing, and business because we went out to buy some team stuff and to the post office for some transactions.



Matthew Abudulai

David, our contact for today's schedule, was so overwhelmed to be with us. We were privileged to visit two waterfalls and a very important point in Ghana that is the "CENTRE OF GHANA." Traveling from the southern, northern, eastern, and western parts of the country where the middle is, is where we visited. It was indeed historic.

At the Fuller waterfalls, we also had some fun. The water, we were told by our guide has been there for ages past undeveloped. One day, a Catholic priest visited the place and realised its potential and made frantic effort to develop there into a prayer site and a tourist centre. According to our guide, it

is a really a place that attracts both local and foreign visitors. It is a cool place to be. We had the opportunity to walk through the water, which is about one hundred metres long and is naturally stepped with different sizes of rocks in it and around it. There are a lot of big trees around, with some designed rocky seats under, where some of us sat to see the wonderful handiwork of our Lord. In fact, I asked myself, can this natural creation be made by man? No! I said. What an awesome God I have. My faith in Him deepened.

At Kintampo waterfalls, the fall was quite different. It is a fall with a height of about 80 metres tall, with the water gushing from the top to the bottom with greater force. Though the weather at the Fuller falls was cooler, here was more cooler. All my teammates could not help but get under the fall to bathe to their satisfaction, except for Rachel, the team leader, who was not very well, and I, who decided to be the security men while they enjoyed themselves.

David our contact confessed to me that he has been to the two falls once each, but this time he had really enjoyed himself at both to the fullest. To him, it is a day he will never forget in his lifetime. Everyone else was filled with joy for this day's team outing. I really admired nature the more. How great my Lord has placed all these wonderful creations on the surface of the earth for people like us to enjoy. What a mighty God we serve.

Date: 2/5/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

This Sunday, we attended a very tiny church in Kintampo. Honestly, it was probably about ten feet wide and twenty feet long. I think it's really great that even though they don't have much space or many people, they still gather together each Sunday for worship. I do have to admit, though, that Sunday is the hardest day of the week for me. It is really isolating to sit through a worship service and not understand what is being said for two or three hours. I've been thinking about how services used to be in Latin in the old days when Luther started doing them in the language his congregation knew, German. What a blessing to the church!



Katie Trathen

Today we went to three touring sites: Fuller Falls, Kintampo Falls, and the very center point of Ghana. Fuller Falls is serene and quiet and beautiful. Kintampo Falls is tall and powerful. At Kintampo Falls, some of us climbed up partway and sat on a ledge underneath the falls. It was so beautiful and exhilarating. And it was a nice break from the heat! So that we didn't slip on the way down, we slid down on our butts, like a water slide. It was hilarious, and we will post pictures when we are able.

Keep praying for safety and joy and strength!

Love!

Katie

Date: 2/6/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Today we had a busy day, at least this morning. We sang at a school called Presby Primary and Junior Secondary School. When we arrived, the students were told to go to the chapel for an assembly with Americans. The students were very excited and sprinted to the chapel. There were more than 500 students there worshiping with us. It was a bit overwhelming for me, but a good opportunity for that many people to hear our songs and stories.



Rachel Arends

After the Presby school, we went to another school. We were rushed under a mango tree, where we would have our program. The students were plentiful as they surrounded us. We started our program singing praise to God. I noticed the students in front of me looking up and pointing behind us. First, I wondered if there were mangos falling on us, or some sort of animal perched behind us with no escape. I soon found out that in the mango tree were students trying to catch a glimpse of the singers from the U.S. I smiled at them as I was reminded of a Bible story. Zacchaeus also was too short to see, so he climbed up in a tree with hopes of catching a glimpse of the one bringing Good News.

In the case of Zacchaeus, he was lucky because Jesus was able to stop and remind him that he was still claimed and loved. Jesus was able to remind Zacchaeus that he was part of the family and he could never be so lost that Jesus would not know him. Unfortunately, I was not able to talk to the students in the tree directly, but my hope is that our songs brought them the hope that Jesus is. I pray they are not lost and they know Jesus claims them every day.

Date: 2/7/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:



Matthew Abudulai

I woke up early this morning and saw lots and lots of people going back and forth just in front of our guest house. Although I knew that just in front of us was a market, hardly did I know that today was a market day for the people of Kintampo and its surroundings. As the day was getting older, market women, men running trucks both empty and loaded, were going and coming. Buyers and sellers were all over the place to do brisk business. It was indeed really amazing to see a market which was almost empty days before that day, and all of a sudden, it was filled with people and goods. As if that was not all, the scorching sun never spared all the people there. Some had their opportunity to be in sheds and other were just under the scorchy sun.

As curious as I was, I entered the market to see things for myself. On entering the market, I really saw lots and lots of goods ranging from yams, cassava, plantain, maize, beans, groundnuts, pepper, goats, sheep, chickens, and the like. In all this, I appreciated the fact that the God that we have takes absolute care of all creations, especially his children. Interestingly enough, this is the market that our main contact buys our foodstuffs and prepares food for us.

Just after I return from the market, the team dashed down to the hospital to entertain and pray for them as well. We were ushered into the children's ward to this. At the ward, the senior nurse at the Kintampo hospital at post made us aware that almost all the kids had been discharged. Praise God, we said to ourselves. If coming to share with sick people and by the grace of God, almost all have been discharged, then of course we have brought some healing to the hospital kids.

Date: 2/8/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

Yesterday was a very neat experience. Cross Fire went to do a program in the children's ward at a hospital. There were about 35 people there, mostly women and small children. While we were playing "Onyame ba" (O Son of God, come for Your praises), as well as our other songs, the women were up dancing and clapping, truly worshiping God with us. What was so special and inspiring to me, though, was that these women had sick children. These women did not praise the Lord because everything in their lives was okay. In spite of having ill children, they still celebrated with us.

**Jana Melpolder**

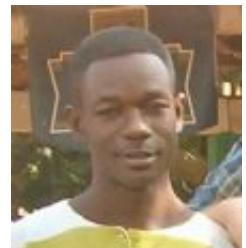
It made me think how much I can "flop" from praising God when things in my life are good to questioning Him when things aren't so great. I do not want to keep doing this in my life, either. I feel it is not healthy for my relationship with God, and I need to pray for help in it.

The women yesterday were amazing, and I wish we could have spent more time with them. They really helped start a desire in me to strive to praise God in everything, good or bad.

"Give thanks to the Lord of lords; His love endures forever."—Psalm 136:3

Date: 2/9/2007**Submitted by:** Matthew Abudulai**Journal Entry:**

Goodbye to the people of Kintampo and its surroundings, I said to myself. That would be the greetings I and my brothers and sisters will say come the next day February 10, 2007.

**Matthew Abudulai**

After almost a week of intense activities such as going to schools, hospitals, waterfalls, and preaching stations, the last day of our stay in the town of Kintampo arrived today, and we were very surprised that we had not done laundry for the week. I quickly organised myself and had a young lady who was so willing to do this very important work for us. Almost all of us, including our van driver, heaped our clothes and this industrious young lady, touched by the love of God and the love she had for the team, put these clothes into a thorough wash. A burden I must say was carried down from my shoulders.

A fifteen minute drive to our last programme location at a town called Babato started off. On reaching the premises, there were only two people there. Frankly speaking, I was so much depressed to the extent that I nearly suggested to my teammates that we should call it off and perhaps come back in the evening, by which time the pupils and the workers, who are predominantly farmers, would be back for us to have enough people to share with. To my uttermost surprise, before I could say Jack, the church room was filled with people of all ages, dominated by children. There and then I said to myself, my thoughts are not His thoughts, neither my ways are His ways. The team actually had a good peace to demonstrate to all those who were gathered at the temple. It was all joy.

One thing that happened when I stepped foot at Kintampo was where the Lutherans in this town were worshiping. It was indeed no place to write home about. On our return from Babato, Jacob our contact for today took us the new plot the church has bought to have their church building, a school, and possibly a mission house on. I would like to use this opportunity to appeal to all who want to donate to support these projects above to do so if they are touched by the plight of these

Lutheran, loving people in Kintampo. I really loved Kintampo during our stay here; maybe because it is geographically the centre of Ghana.

Date: 2/11/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

What a weekend! We made our way from Kintampo to Nalojni on Saturday. The climate and the scenery began to change drastically. We took the temperature of the van, and it was 124° F! Plus, the further north we go, the drier the air is because we're closer to the Sahara Desert. Our eyes are dry, our lips are chapped, and our mouths are thirsty!

All of a sudden, our van broke down on a deserted road with a small village in the distance. Kyle and Matthew went to find water and returned with many villagers, anxious to see more Americans. These people were of a different people than what we have met before, and none of us spoke their language. As our driver fixed our van, we smiled and stared at each other. We took pictures and showed them their faces on the digital camera. Many kids ran away crying! (But they came back.) Before we left, a few brave kids approached me and began petting my hairy, white legs. They were so amazed. At home, I might have been embarrassed or offended, but here, I thought it was innocent and hilarious.



Katie Trathen

We left that village and headed to the next. The woman who tended to us is named Rebecca. She insisted on carrying our belongings (even if only a few feet) and escorted us everything. She called me "Sir Kate" as a sign of respect and did the same for Jana and Rachel. Upon our arrival, everyone insisted that we bathe. One man said, "We'll set up chairs and watch while you bathe." The "showers" were stalls with no ceiling and four-foot walls, right in the middle of everything. The whole village sat outside, maybe fifty people. Rachel and I were chosen to bathe first, and I started laughing hysterically so that I wouldn't cry. Rebecca carried our things to the shower, we took a deep breath, and we went in. Luckily, there was a cement rock inside, so we were able to sit down where nobody could see us. Yessss!

The next morning, we bathed again, and I felt brave, like I had overcome this shower thing. Then we went to church. They had set seats for us in front by the altar, facing the congregation. It was difficult for me to accept this place of honor because I feel like it belongs to God instead. I noticed a large space between us and the pews. As it turned out, it was a dance floor. Before long, all the Ghanaians were dancing in ways I had never seen before. It looked very tribal and complicated, with men in one group and women in the other. Sofumami, the pastor's wife, pulled us out onto the dance floor with her, and we danced. Many of you might know that I hate dancing. But I really enjoyed dancing for the joy of the Lord that morning.

Please continue to pray for our safety, good health, and perseverance!

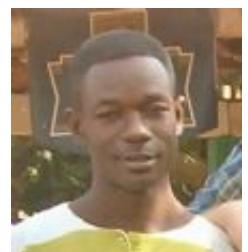
Much love,
Katie

Date: 2/12/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

The regional capitol of Yendi is in the northern part of Ghana. The name of the village in which we were is called Nalogni. I will say that the people of this village according to them had never witnessed the visit of a Cross Fire team ever. They always heard that Cross Fire would be coming to visit them, but the old story always stands.



Matthew Abudulai

It was full of joy in their hearts and faces full of smiles when Jonah the youth president in the Lutheran church there met us and brought us to the village. Indeed, I was so much overwhelmed with the kind of reception they offered us. Though poor, they did all they could to feed us and give

us a place to sleep without any cost on our side. We were privileged to worship with them on the Sunday morning and also in the evening. The members of the church showcased the traditional dance during the worship service. The whole of the service was full of excitement seeing people praising and worshiping God in their local way. Myself and some of the team members could not help but join in the traditional dance to exercise our bodies, spirits, and souls. There came the turn of the team to present to the church whatever we had. Songs, skits, and stories, the word of God was the content of our presentation. Indeed, I felt very honoured to be given the opportunity to share the word of God with them from the Gospel lesson read that day, from the Gospel according to St. Luke, 6:17-26. It was really a joy when I had Rebecca Kumboja, one of the dynamic youth ladies, translate for me. God really used her mightily for the translation that day. As if the presentation of the Cross Fire team was not enough, the church elders requested that we come again in the evening and offer them another package, which we did willingly, though the place was full of total darkness. One song that one of the youth members sang that made me quite sad was in its content that we the team should remember them in our prayers wherever we may be and we should not forget them at all.

Come the following day, on which we were to depart to our next stop, they really demonstrated how they appreciated our presences with lots and lots of gifts—yams, fowl, a type of seed for soup called “alcatua” in our local language, pepper, and a he-goat. There were tears running down my cheeks when we drove off to our next destination.

Date: 2/13/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Today we did a lot of traveling. Through the dirt on the long, lumpy road came our van, into the village of Gbintiri. We learned on our journey today a little about the Northern Region of Ghana. In the Northern Region, there are no pineapples, but there are many oranges. Let me tell you about these oranges. At first glance, the orange does not look like an orange that we Americans would recognize. The peel is a greenish-yellow tint, and some are sold with the outside of the peel cut off, so only the white part of the peel is showing. Once the orange is bought, the top fourth of is cut off to prepare it to eat. At this point, the orange looks delicious, just like our oranges in the United States. The Ghanaian way of eating the orange is to squeeze it in your right hand and suck the juice out. It takes a lot of strength, but the sweet juice is worth the effort. One more difference I have found about Ghanaian oranges is the seeds. I dug twenty-seven large seeds out of my orange today. Yes, I counted each one of them. With all of this said, the oranges are great!



Rachel Arends

Date: 2/14/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Valentine's Day is popularly known in the world's calendar today. I knew very well that 14 February was to be celebrated as Valentine's Day with people popularly in their red outfits all over the place, as I observed in the years past when I lived in Tema.



Matthew Abudulai

Gbintiri is the name of the village we were in, with very minimal communication gadgets or even none at all. There were no telephone booths, no internet facility, no cell phone communication network, not even electricity. We were partially in darkness if not total darkness. Due to these inconveniences, one was not able to know what was happening in the world outside

Gbintiri. As if this was not enough, the team had to manage and have its meats prepared without anyone's help apart from the six of us. We were rather fortunate to have Pastor Samuel Konlan to have some liquid petroleum gas that we depended on a while we were there for the cooking of our meals. Though we were not very good cooks and also we were not able to find all that we needed to assist in cooking whatever we wanted. No wonder the team really experienced settling in Gbintiri at the Lutheran training centre where we lodged at their hostel.

The roads here are also feeder roads, and it took us much time to travel to the scheduled programme location for today. This was about a nineteen kilometer journey we embarked on from Gbintiri. The name of the village is Gbong. At the village, there were many people there to buy and sell since that day was a market day. On reaching there initially, we had a hard time in getting a location to stand for our presentation due to a tree nearby which was reported to have been inhabited by a swarm of bees. Eventually, the message of the Lord had to be released, no matter what the circumstances were. Although we had the feeling that most of the people might be Muslims, due to a mosque we saw around, we had quite a sizeable number of people who got around as we ministered unto them. Our pastor and contact, Pastor Samuel Konlan, did a very good job by interpreting for the people to understand the simple message we had for them.

Since we had to prepare our own meals in Gbintiri, we took the opportunity to buy some foodstuff in the market after our programme. We however did not get all we needed, but it was worth it to buy those that we needed. Staying in Gbintiri was quite challenging due to the weather conditions, food, and the nature of the roads. With all these, the team was able to have a feel of the life of the people in this area of the world.

Date: 2/15/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

Good morning from Ghana! Last weekend, I had a great experience I wish to share with you. We were staying at the village Nalogni-Uchado for only a few short days, but what a wonderful time it was with the people there who call it home.



Jana Melpolder

On Sunday, we woke up early to do a program at the church there during the service. I felt by now I was starting to get a feel for the services in Ghana, but at this church, you danced during worship. Being a little hesitant, I asked Matthew if it was okay that I join in, to which he answered, "Yes!" So I did, and the people at the church (especially the children) were very happy that I did.

After church, my teammates and I had lunch and played with the children. This was so much fun as we would chase them, they would run away acting scared, and then they would laugh and come back for more. The adults were standing off to the side, laughing right along, and we were all having such a good time.

Later in the day, I was with my friends Rebecca and Jonah (who were both from Nalogni-Uchado), and we were all teaching each other church songs in one another's languages. This was so much fun to be with them and learn new worship songs. Many children and adults were around us singing along or just enjoying the music and fellowship. Being at that place for a few days was such a wonderful time with the people. For me, that really was a very large blessing from God.

This time last weekend as well as this past month has been such a good personal growing experience for me. I'm learning to become more vulnerable and trying to understand what is proper or not in a culture where I don't know a lot of what is going on around me. It's somewhat like being a servant—not having expectations and trying to do what is best for others, not necessarily yourself. I knew that being a servant (or in a lot of ways, an outsider in a community) would be difficult, and I certainly am not always good at it. This weekend was such a good time, though, and I have to remember that being a servant or an outsider is not always a large burden, but sometimes a huge joy and blessing!

Date: 2/16/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Bunkpurugu is one of the newly created district capitols in Ghana. This town is deprived of so many amenities, such as telephone, electricity, and pipe-borne water. It is also on the border line between Ghana and Togo. Driving from Bunkpurugu to Togo is about three kilometers. Though the town is deprived of these facilities, we had quite a decent guest house to live in. Madam Sarah, the manageress of the guest house, was very friendly and hospitable to us for the period we stayed there. She took precious time of hers to prepare meals for us and also attended to our various needs. Not only is she a manageress but also a head teacher of one of the primary schools in the town, a musician, a mother of three, and also a student. Indeed, she is a woman of many parts.



Matthew Abudulai

The team had the opportunity to minister unto two schools today in Bunkpurugu. The first one was a junior secondary school and the second was a senior secondary school. The junior secondary school is where our main contact for the Northern Region teaches. His name is Kenneth Laar. Kenneth is also the secretary for Lutheran Youth Organization-Ghana. He is a very dynamic young man. At the school, the students were well-behaved to enjoy the presentation we had for them. For me, I really felt how the Lord was using us greatly in this mission work. To confirm this, I asked one student how he felt after the performance. He was moved with so much joy and wished that we would give them more music and stories. He also wished that we would come there every year to visit them. As to the lessons he learnt from the performance, he found his faith had been strengthened and he thanked the Lord for touching our hearts and having us leave all that we do in our various origins to come and share the Good News with them.

At the second school, the team was also privileged to meet the headmaster at his office. He was very nice to us. He gave us a warm welcome and handed us over to his senior housemaster who led us to where the students were gathered under trees waiting for us to minister unto them. Just close to where the students were gathered was a "day care centre," a school for children between the ages of two and five. Immediately as they saw us, they had to close the school for the students to be part of the audience. After the performance, the senior secondary school students and the day care centre kids were filled with Christian joy, and so was I. Unfortunately, our team member Kyle Nelson was down with malaria, and so he was not with us. As tradition demands in Ghana, we had to say goodbye to the headmaster and also thank him for giving us the opportunity to be part of this joyous occasion. The assistant headmaster who was at the performance could not hide his feelings, but expressed his joy at how much clarity the words had, despite the American accents. The headmaster also did not hide his feelings by showing them by way of giving us an envelope to express his gratitude for remembering and coming to his school through the Lutheran pastor, Pastor Kombat. I am very excited to be part of this ministry, for allowing myself to be used mightily to help in accomplishing the Great Commission in Matthew 28. I have not in any way regretted being part of Youth Encounter's team ministry.

Date: 2/18/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

Today we are in Bunkpurugu, which is right on the border of Togo. We can see for miles here, so I'd like to think that it's Togo that I am seeing. Just like every other Sunday, the five of us put on our blue and white team outfits and headed to church. This church was packed full of people, mostly adults. Everyone wears their finest clothes to church, and all the women look so beautiful with fabric in their hair, which matches their outfits.



Katie Trathen

The sermon was really interesting. First, the pastor gave the sermon in English and then again in the local language. He talked about how women in developed countries have more leadership and how Ghanaians should learn to respect women and allow them to lead. This caught

my attention, since we have experienced the way that women are treated differently in Ghana, versus in the U.S.

Soon it was time for our program. I gave the message, which was then translated to the congregation by Kenneth, our contact. I talked about Romans 8:38-39, where Paul says that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. It has been our experience that the Law is the main focus in much Ghanaian preaching, so I was really excited to talk about the Gospel.

After the message, I realized that hundreds of kids were crowding by the doors and peeking through the windows at us. Kenneth said, "They are waiting for you." When we returned to our seats, Rachel and I began sticking our fingers through the windows and playing with the kids. One kid's eyes were peeking through, so he and I made funny faces back and forth at each other for a while. The kids here really make me smile when they look at us. They have the most innocent and curious looks on their faces.

After church, we headed to Tamale, the capitol of the Northern Region. And that's it! A typical Sunday for Cross Fire.

Date: 2/19/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Going back to the capitol city of the Northern Region of Ghana, Tamale, was a return journey, since we had already been through there. The team decided to travel to Tamale to enable us to do some sort of team stuff.



Matthew Abudulai

Due to the rushing spirit we had leaving our guest house, we unfortunately left our water filter there. Though we had an extra one there, we were quite worried for leaving such an important machine. Our trip to Tamale took about one and a half hours. We arrived at Tamale before midday. The team's budget was quite tight so the team put in a lot of effort to look for one of the less expensive guest house in the municipality. A lot of effort was made to locate such a house, but we were very close after almost an hour drive around in the city. Finally, we had one after our lunch.

The breeze in Tamale was quite refreshing and relaxed. I really was somehow happy when I bounced into a driver who always traveled up north. He did share his experience with me in his ten years of driving and how the good Lord had led him throughout his long time up till this time. I also shared the team's mission here in Ghana and the experience we have gone through from Accra to Kumasi to Bechem, Takyiman, Kintampo, Gbintiri, and Bunkpurugu. It was indeed very fruitful to talk to this driver. Thank God he is a Christian.

At Bunkpurugu, there were no communication opportunities for us. Therefore, I had opportunity to talk to some friends and church members who we did meet in our travels. Again, I saw a lot of different kinds of vehicles every passing second that were not in existence in the last two places we were.

Date: 2/20/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

I've been thinking about people lately. Today I realized that people are who you make them out to be. If you expect someone to be crabby and not helpful, they probably will have those traits, or at least you will remember those parts of the encounter. In the same way, if the expectation is that the person will be kind and willing to assist, this will more than likely happen.



Rachel Arends

We met a man named Ishmael, who is a vendor in Tamale. We seemed to be misplaced, so we asked Ishmael for some help in finding some certain places. He directed us to

these places. The next day, today, we found ourselves searching again for a certain place to purchase something. Ishmael was there again to help us. Our expectation was that he would direct us, as he had in the past. But this time, Ishmael went above and beyond our expectations and led us to where we wanted to be. He explained everything to us, whether we understood or not. He was with us for about an hour. When we thanked him, he said that he would not accept thanks, as it was something he wanted to do for us.

The kindness that was shown to us by Ishmael is something I hope all of us show to others every day. May God grant us the love, patience, and kindness that only He can give.

Date: 2/21/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:



Would I say today was a rest day? Yes it was. Though the team had no original schedule to be in Tamale for any programme, it was very important the team to come and rest in Tamale and other stuff. I woke up mid-morning only to see the van outside being washed by John, our driver, for the mission. I went closer to him to keep him in company while washing the van. John drew to my attention that the van needed to undergo oil renewal. Since this was a need, John and I never wasted time to do that. I did help him to change the oil, which was a little over three weeks old since it was renewed.

Since it was a rest day, I took the opportunity to go to town with John to walk around the municipality to have a view of it. As I was walking around, I met a gentleman who asked me about the Lutheran church, since I was putting on a yellow t-shirt with a Lutheran inscription on it. I took my time to explain what Lutherans stand for and all that is about. I did not hesitate to tell him the Gospel which he was very glad to hear. Indeed, meeting this man was a high for me today and in Tamale. Although it was not a programme day, the Lord opened an avenue for me to share the love of Christ with him through the t-shirt I was putting on. Thanks and glory be to Jesus.

Date: 2/22/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:



Jana Melpolder

I am writing this journal with my flashlight in my other hand while I sweat a lot since the fan is off. In Ghana, our team has learned that in the towns and cities, there are certain days that the power is turned off for conserving electricity. As it is an inconvenience for us as well as other people in Tamale right now, not having much light really opens up a whole new world. Without the light, I notice I'm more in tune with listening to the things and people around me. Now that I can't see what is all in the room, it gives me more of a chance to concentrate on my own thoughts. I have even thought while it is dark (we have one night without power just about once a week) that it is a good time to pray, since I cannot entertain myself with cards or reading easily.

This reminds me a good bit about my relationship with the Lord sometimes. There are so many debates and disagreements, it seems at times, in Christianity. I pray and hope for more unity. But as I see different groups, I look at the Gospels and at Jesus, and everything is clear. It makes sense. It's like in the dark when I can only see one thing that the Light is showing me, I can concentrate on it and understand. Perhaps as Christians, no matter the denomination we are part of, we have more in common with each other than we think. Jesus is all of our Light, and with Him, we'll see our way through and out of the darkness.

Date: 2/23/2007

Submitted by: Kyle Nelson

Journal Entry:

Well, today I can proudly write you and say that I had malaria and survived! Yes, that's right. I had a case of what I've been calling "the mals." Is it fun? No! It's the worst illness that I've had in a while! It's like the flu. Last Thursday morning, I woke up at 3:00 a.m. with a headache and I felt feverish. I took my temperature, but either my mouth is colder than I thought or the thermometer was going wacko! Later the next day, the doctor read my temperature at 102° F. That reminds me—my doctor's name was Doctor Fresh! I really think that's the best name for a doctor! He was from Germany, and he gave me pills to take. After sleeping for two days straight, I woke up last Sunday feeling great! Praise the Lord! So, don't worry—God is always good and has healed me!

Kyle



Kyle Nelson

Date: 2/23/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Bawku is the district capitol of Bawku East in the Upper East Region. It has a savannah-like vegetation and somehow dry. The district capitol has so many villages surrounding it, which are mountainous, and less amount of trees. There are also farm animals like cattle, sheep, and a lot of donkeys for transportation. There are not many birds like chicken, but a lot of free-range guinea fowl. Guinea fowl is a kind of fowl found predominately in the northern part of Ghana. It is a delicacy of the northern people of Ghana. Only in the township of Bawku can one find that the settlement is dense. The houses are built closer to each other; however, in the surrounding villages, they are scattered due to the occupation. The occupation here is mainly farming—growing of crops and animal rearing. There is only one season for growing of crops, and when the rains fail to come at the time expected, it causes severe hunger in that particular year. For this reason, farmers are very alert and ready to sow when the time is due to cultivate and sow.



Matthew Abudulai

Our arrival in Bawku yesterday was very welcoming. Immediately, we got there and we realized that our contact, Pastor Nicholas Salifu, had done a very good job. He had looked for a very good and moderate guest house for our eight-day stay in Bawku. The team was privileged to minister to three schools instead of two schools. Though more than the stipulated number of schools, it was still fun to be at the third school. The first school was a primary and junior secondary school, the second was a primary school, and the third was the only secondary school in the municipality, which happened to be the alma mater of Pastor Salifu, who is now also staff of the school.

At the first school, the students and teachers were so pleased to see us. We shook hands with them by way of greeting them while some of the teachers gathered the pupils for the thirty-minute programme. After the programme, the kids still expected more from us, but it was unfortunate that we had to leave, relax, and get to our next programme. We rested a bit at the guest house and drove to the best primary school in the municipality. At the school, there was a bit of sunshine and there was no big hall for us to stand for the performance. What choice did we have? The only choice we had was to stand under the sun and have the children form a circle around us. We kept on turning thirty degrees around to enable every pupil standing at every point of the circle to get a glimpse of our faces while we performed. After the performance, I was able to conclude that the school is the top school in the municipality due to the way they responded to the programme. We now drove straight to Bawku Secondary to give the adult teenagers a fun time. It was indeed a time cherished by the students. A thing that pleased me was a student who walked up to me and said he wanted to give his life to Christ. That was really a high for me for this day.

Date: 2/25/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

What a fascinating weekend!

On Saturday, we traveled out to a village that was pretty far away from town. Since vans aren't common to the area, many people came to our program just to see what these white people in a van were up to! This gave us a mixture of Christians and Muslims at our program. It was my turn to give the message, so I told a story about a time I got lost at the mall and used that story to illustrate the Gospel. Afterward, it is common for the leader to ask the people what they learned from our program. People stood up and said things like, "I learned that Jesus washes our sins away" and "I learned that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." It is so amazing to me that I can speak in English, then someone translates it into Kusaal, and they learned all of that. Perfect.



Katie Trathen

Afterward, we learned the Burkina Faso border is only ten kilometers away! (And apparently, no security!) So we drove to a dried-up river bed and walked through the river and into Burkina Faso. Then we took a picture and went back to Ghana. Later on, we're hoping to walk into Togo!

Today there were six baptisms in church—two adult women, one child, and three babies. The pastor told us that one of the women had been a Muslim and started coming to church out of curiosity. After a while, she decided she wanted to be a "child of God," and so we watched her get baptized, along with the others. It was really beautiful.

To the other International Teams: I've really enjoyed reading your journals! Keep pressing on toward the goal! You're not alone.

Love. Lots of it!

Katie

P.S.—Spaghetti! Mmmm...spaghetti.

Date: 2/27/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Here we are, Ghana, day number 46, and the day was a good one. Cross Fire spent the day traveling, doing programs, entertaining children, and learning more about Ghana and Ghanaian people.



Rachel Arends

First, we traveled to a primary (elementary) school. The kids were a bit tentative to participate in our program or even interact with us at first. We learned yesterday that oftentimes when Americans come to their school, it is usually to give them vaccinations. Once the students realized that we were not carrying boxes of needles but rather instruments, they quickly learned to enjoy us. By the end of the program, the students were dancing, clapping, and singing with us.

Also at this school, some of the church members came, and we had the opportunity to pray with and for them. I think it is amazing to have a perfect stranger come up to us and ask for prayers. The power of God is at work!

After these experiences, we went back to our guest house. I started talking with our contacts, Elijah and Francis. We were talking about the weather. I attempted to explain Minnesota weather to them. With the help of my pictures, these two men were fascinated with snow, pine trees, and a green lawn. It was fun for me to experience their wonder, curiosity, and awe with the place I come from.

Our final program today was at a church in a remote village. One of my favorite parts of doing programs at churches is when we arrive. The people, usually mostly women and children, are singing and dancing as we come in and set up. They realize we are there and incorporate shaking our hands as a part of their dancing and worshipping. This program was very interactive, and somehow more people kept appearing throughout our program. This week, our translator Elijah (also our contact) has been asking after every program what people have learned from our program.

It is amazing to me how God really is working through us. We have adults tell us that they learned that Jesus died for their sins and conquered death so that we may live in heaven. Many other topics are brought up. What I think of as basic knowledge of Christianity isn't always known by people who consider themselves strong Christians. It is great to hear what God has spoken to them through us.

Date: 2/28/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Very glad to wake up in the morning to see this day, freely given to us by the Almighty God. The team's schedule in Bawku this day had no programmes, but rather a visit to the palace of the paramount chief, a visit to the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), and the popular crocodile pond in Paga.



Matthew Abudulai

The first place we visited was the paramount chief's palace. Before we drove to the palace, we went to town to get some presents for the chief. This is because traditionally when one is visiting a chief, you need to go with something to offer him. Our contacts helped us to get kola nuts, a bottle of schnapps, and some few cedis. On reaching the palace, we were informed that the paramount chief had left to Bolgatanga thirty minutes before we arrived. All the same, we were received by his elders very warmly. They did regret for us not meeting the chief. After presenting to them whatever we had to the chief through the elders, they were very happy to see us and were very excited for the mission work we were in Bawku to do.

Just after the palace, we went to the Bawku district office administration to say hello to the Municipal Chief Executive. Here again, we missed him, too. We were received by the Bawku Municipal Coordinator. Immediately when we saw him, we were very glad. Why? Because we were staying with him in the same guest house in Bawku. Due to the acquaintance we had struck up before, he was very welcoming and did wish us traveling mercies to all the other regions we would be traveling to.

It was now time for us to journey to the most popular crocodile pond in Paga, a border town to Burkina Faso. At this time, we were close to lunch and quickly went to our guest house to have something to eat. Due to the cordial relationship we have built as a people, we had our main contact, Elisha Osman, together with Regina and Gladys, who were our cooks during the period we stayed in Bawku. James, who was also one of the leaders in the church, also joined us to make the trip to the Paga Pond. It took us about two hours to get to the Pond. At the Pond, we were excited to see lots and lots of crocodiles. We also had opportunities to take snapshots of the amphibians. As if that was not enough, we held the tails of little animals and had pictures.

Another interesting tourist site was not left behind—museum of the people of Paga. The same person guided us through the museum of his ancestors during the slave trade. In the museum, we saw an ancient bedroom, living room, bow and arrow during war, necklaces, bracelets, objects carved from wood, carcasses of wild animals, and some vegetable tree plants. We were so excited to see and touch most of these things that generations past had gone through and experienced. This again revealed to me the wonders of our Maker, how well his splendor is seen in his creation. I do count myself blessed to be part of this mission trip.

Date: 3/1/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

Kan-kan! Hello from Bawku, which is in the northeastern part of Ghana. It has been such an incredible week with all the programs we have been doing. Watching the kids and adults as they get excited and even start to dance gives just more energy and enthusiasm. We have met several chiefs, a mayor, and even a local prince. All in all, it has been a great and action-packed time in Bawku.



Jana Melpolder

One thing I have noticed recently in myself, now being here for almost two months, is how I realize

even more that I do have certain feelings of how things "should" be. Let me give you an example of what I am speaking of. Growing up in the United States, I have been taught what many people in the United States feel and think. The result: I have the same thoughts and feelings that I am extending to other people. Realizing this now more fully, I can see how God can be pushing and growing me this year, which I find to be a good thing.

Some of the feelings I have are that things should be on time and that lateness is bad. Or if there is a silent pause in a conversation where nobody says anything, it is awkward and the people are bored. Another one would be solitude time is important and to always be around people is quite difficult.

The important thing is that there are obviously different opinions regarding these ideas, and that is fine. But for me personally, I am finding it to be such a stretching experience (which I think is positive) to think outside these ideals. To be honest, it is hard to do. But once started, I know God can show me more, and I can assimilate to the host culture even better. What a wonderful and diverse world the Lord has given to us!

Date: 3/2/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Was I glad to see myself in the village? Yes indeed, I was.

Having got to the upper East Region, the uppermost part of northern Ghana, which happens to be my native region, I was yearning to meet my extended family the very day we got to Bawku, the district capitol. Due to the tight schedule we had from our host contact, I found it quite difficult to pinpoint the particular day I would like to be at the village. Our days in Bawku reduced every passing day. Before I could say Jack, it was left with less than twenty-four hours to leave Bawku for Accra. I said to myself there is no choice of day for me any longer. After the team was done with the previous day's programmes, I said goodbye to my teammates and told them I was going to my village, and God willing, I would be back the following day, that is, today.



Matthew Abudulai

I managed to get a passenger transport to the town before my village called Aaru. On reaching Aaru, I was quite stranded because there was no way I could get a passenger vehicle to the village. There were two means of transport I could use; either a bicycle or a motor.

By divine intervention, a good friend of mine whose name was Gladys arranged for a motor for me to the village. It was quite exciting because for a very long time I had not sat on a motor. I was driven together with Gladys on the motor in the night to my village. In about fifteen minutes' time, we were at my village. My uncles and other family members were very happy to see me. I had the opportunity to eat my native food. I really enjoyed it. I was also very excited to sleep in the village house that was very different from the city.

When I woke up this morning, I decided to leave around nine o'clock this morning to join my teammates in Accra. To my surprise, there were lots and lots of people who trooped into the house to catch a glimpse of my presence. I kept on greeting people till I became very hungry. I then asked for some food to eat. Although I was late to meet my teammates in Bawku, they were pleased to see me immediately as I joined them.

Our friends and other contacts we made were very sad when they saw us packing to leave to Accra to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary at the Independence Square. The time that we took off was about four hours to supper. This was likely to be at the capitol city of Northern Region, Tamale. When we got to Tamale after a fast drive, we were very tired and had no choice but to get food to eat. Indeed, the drive was so fast that it partially scared my other teammates. However, the Lord was very protective and granted abundant traveling mercies.

Date: 3/2/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen
Journal Entry:



March 2! Happy birthday, Sara Crowley!

Today we made our way from Tamale to Kumasi, as we continue our journey south for Ghana's fiftieth anniversary on March 6. We're staying once again at the Lutheran Training Center where we spent our second week. This is the place where the Americans were doing the Deaf Institute of Theology in January. We are glad to be somewhere familiar for a night.

About 10:30 p.m., Matthew knocked on our door to tell us there was a lunar eclipse. We **Katie Trathen** stood outside and watched the earth cast its shadow over the moon, moving so slowly. It brought back memories of other eclipses in my life: my first, when I was about five, in the driveway of my aunt and uncle's house; my second, when I was in college and I got my friends out of night class to watch the eclipse with me. Good times.

After the eclipse, I went to bed and put my headphones on. I was lying there, getting so peaceful, when all of a sudden...BOOM! There was a huge crash outside my room. I jumped out of bed and opened the door. I poked my head out to make sure it was safe. I saw nothing. Then I heard water running in the bathroom, and at a closer glance, no one was in there! Then I saw it. A 100 lb. steel water heater had fallen from the wall eight feet above and into the bathroom. Water was gushing out from the broken pipes. Pieces of plastic were blown all over the bathroom. The scary part: one of my teammates had showered beneath the water-heater-of-death just two hours before. She could have died! But since she didn't, I thought this was SO hilarious. Kyle and I even videotaped the aftermath. Tomorrow morning, I'm taking a shower in the other bathroom, and I'm going to stand in the back of the tub. I just can't take that kind of risk.

Good night!

Katie

P.S.—A Ghana lesson for everyone. Peanuts are called "groundnuts," and therefore peanut butter is "groundnut paste." Pop is called "minerals." If you are going, you say, "I am coming." And, in the spirit of the fiftieth anniversary, you might be interested to know that Ghana was the first African nation under colonialism to gain independence.

P.P.S.—Spaghetti again. Lots of it!

Date: 3/4/2007
Submitted by: Kyle Nelson
Journal Entry:



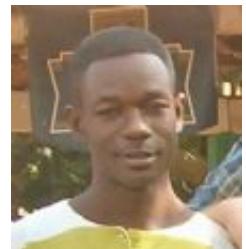
Today is a travel day for Cross Fire. We traveled from Kumasi to the capitol of Ghana, Accra. So for breakfast, we did something quick and easy. Katie and I walked to a grocery store that imports many kinds of food from all over the world. They have products that are familiar to us, like Ragu and Jif, but also products that can only be found in Ghana. One of those is called "Fanyogo," or, if asking for it, it's best to use a Ghanaian accent and say "Fawn-Ice" or "Fawn-Yogo." Fanyogo is yogurt made by a company called Fanmilk. Their products are all frozen and come in a plastic pouch. To eat the yogurt, you can either eat it while it is frozen or wait. I love the taste of it frozen. Then, you bite off part of the plastic pouch and begin to eat! The whole purpose of eating and packaging is based in the culture. There are not many ways for people to keep things refrigerated, so buying a gallon of milk is out of the question. Also, taking the time to take it home and use a spoon doesn't work either. It is easily one of my favorite foods right now!

Kyle Nelson

Date: 3/5/2007
Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Today is a great day to the people of Ghana because it is the day before the birthday of Ghana. On arriving in Accra to see how electrified the capitol city was, I was overwhelmed. The tree, the magnificent buildings, banks, restaurants, cars, people along the roads, and almost everything one can set his or her eyes on was decorated with the Ghana colours—red, yellow, green, and a black star in the middle of the yellow. Driving throughout the city was very lovely. People appeared very excited. A lot of foreign dignitaries were in the country. Presidents from other countries like Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Togo, the Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and many others. No mean a person like the Duke of Kents was also expected to be in attendance.



Matthew Abudulai

The pre-fiftieth anniversary celebration day was a day I will never forget in the history of this country. Getting on board a taxi to a restaurant for our lunch, there we saw lots and lots of foreigners, some of whom were Europeans, Americans, Chinese, and Nigerians who were in the country to celebrate with us the fiftieth anniversary. It was quite obvious that the country was charged with celebration mode. In fact, this day was a day I inwardly accepted that Ghanaians are really patriotic. Stirring around to see how busy the whole restaurant was was amazing and colourful.

There were so many people in the city of Accra. Some buying and others selling. Guess what? Souvenirs, ranging from cups, bracelets, necklaces, pictures, whistles with straps, t-shirts, small and big flags, earrings, hats, and many others. After our lunch, the team did not hesitate to buy some souvenirs. Each member of the team had a souvenir or two. I had a bracelet, Katie and Kyle had a t-shirt each. I am not very sure what Rachel had, but she had something. It was really fun when we were getting the souvenir items. Earlier on in the day, the team had a big Ghana flag with colours red, gold, and green, of course with the black star in the middle.

Our stay in Accra was not going to be quite long according to the schedule, so on the day's itinerary, we were to meet the Youth President of the Lutheran Youth Organisation (LYO), Mr. Elvis Doe for certain discussion. Where we last bought the souvenir items was not quite far from the headquarters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana. Because we did not use our van today, due to the fact that the van had visited the clinic, we had to foot it to the headquarters.

At the head office, we successfully saw Elvis and had our discussion with him. I left to Tema in the night to meet my brothers, while the pastor of All Saints Lutheran Church, Pastor Mills, left with the team to Anya where we stayed in Accra, awaiting tomorrow's celebration. The hand of God is on Ghana.

Date: 3/6/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Trust me, you are going to want to read this!

Today was one of the most exciting days in Ghana EVER! You see, today is the fiftieth anniversary of Ghana getting its independence. I've never seen so many flags and people in one place. Happy Independence Day!



Rachel Arends

The day started out with us going to Independence Square, where the huge jubilee was happening. On the way there, we were listening to the radio, and Kyle sent them a text message, and they actually read it on the radio. It said something about being a U.S. evangelist and being excited to be here during this exciting historical time. Thus started our day of childlike awe and amazement.

We got to Independence Square, and wow, were there a lot of people! We estimated more than 2 million, with a small handful being white. Needless to say, we stuck out a bit and were welcomed by many people around us. The Ghanaians are funny that way: either they ask us lots of questions, or they just continue shouting "abuni" (white person) until they can't see us anymore. There were military personnel, police, dignitaries, horses, and random performers. What little I could see reminded me of the opening ceremonies of the Olympics. We have told you in other journals that it

is hot here, but just imagine African sunshine, 2 million people screaming, and constantly being pressed up against others. That's right! We were a mess of sweat, sunburn, and dirt. Through all of this, we managed to have a great time experiencing "Ghana at 50" and seeing how our host sisters with us reacted to the entire thing.

Throughout the rest of the afternoon and evening, we saw many police escorts of dignitaries from many countries, including Sudan, Rwanda, Nigeria, United Kingdom, and Canada. We didn't see any cars with United States flags, but we heard a senator from North Carolina was here to represent us. We learned much more about another United States dignitary when we went to a local hotel to check on some things. We were sitting and waiting for a hotel worker to come assist us.

Surrounding us were many important-looking people, bustling around and chatting in numerous languages. Suddenly, Katie's eyes lit up, and she quickly said, "Um...isn't that the Reverend Jesse Jackson?!" Come to find out, there he was, standing in the lobby by himself, only to wander into the elevator and disappear. However, we were still there when he came back down. He greeted us as we stood there with goofy grins on our faces. Don't worry, we filmed him for a bit.

This evening, Kyle and I went with our host family and we ended up going to this amazing restaurant that was literally on the shore. The ocean at night was beautiful! The power of the waves crashing against the huge stone boulders brought me a great peace. Standing in the ocean breeze, watching the waves roll in for five minutes gave me a peace I haven't felt for a very long time. I found it amazing how God can make the day seem so chaotic and exciting, but then grant the opportunity to stand and gain His peace in the evening. God really is pretty swell!

Date: 3/7/2007

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

It is not as if the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary was over a day after; rather, it was a continuation. I thought since today was a holiday after a joyous birthday celebration, people will be tired and stay indoors to rest. It turned out that the whole capitol city was still full of the foreign dignitaries. The radio stations and the television were full of activities that took place yesterday. The stations did well to present to their listeners and viewers all that took place in the ten regions of Ghana.



Matthew Abudulai

A few minutes after I woke up from bed, here was George Lampley, the office assistant of my home congregation, Trinity Lutheran Congregation, to visit me and the team. He has been the team's friend from the day that the team arrived in Accra. He came to see how I was faring and then gave me information about my congregation. He decided to do this because I had entrusted most of my duties in the church to his care during my absence. He did give me the rundown of all the activities of the church and the plans underway to be executed. Indeed, I was so happy to see him and so was he. I later on invited all my team members to see him and also told them he was here to visit us. Everyone was glad to see him. He came around to converse with the team while I was outside conversing with our host pastor, Reverend Mills.

As part of our team exercise, we are expected to meet once in a while and evaluate and improve upon our programme. We did meet today and created a new skit, the Ragman. We took pains to discuss the skit and assign roles to each member of the team. We did rehearse a number of times to our satisfaction. All this time, George was with us, but he was sleeping on the stuffed chairs in the living room.

In the afternoon, myself and Jana stayed at home while my other teammates went to town to do some exchange. I deliberately did not want to go with them due to the fact that I believe now they are getting familiar with the environment. I was glad when they came back home without any difficulty. While my teammates were away, I had to escort George to Tema. I was really happy when he took time off his busy schedule to visit. Thank God to have a caring brother as George.

Date: 3/8/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

Freedom.

That's the word I think of when I reflect upon this past week. In every Ghanaian household, a celebration was held to commemorate 50 years of independence. On March 6, 1957, the famous Ghanaian leader Dr. Kwame Nkrumah stood in Independence Square (that is located in Accra) and stated his famous speech that would change Ghana and Africa forever. He said, "Ghana, your beloved country, is free forever!", thereby ending British colonialism there and having a ripple effect throughout Africa.

**Jana Melpolder**

Now in 2007, Cross Fire was lucky enough to be in Independence Square on the Golden Anniversary, along with 20 world leaders and thousands of Ghanaians. There was such happiness and excitement in the air! People were so pleased to commemorate the works of the person who helped bring them into freedom. Even though Dr. Kwame Nkrumah is no longer alive, he is still highly thought of and respected.

This whole scene makes me think of what heaven will be like for us. We'll join with many, many other people from all around the world to celebrate the One who gave us freedom from sins. Even though most of us haven't seen that Savior in person (yet!), just like how most modern Ghanaians have not seen Dr. Nkrumah in person, we can still celebrate today who that person is.

Date: 3/9/2007**Submitted by:** Katie Trathen**Journal Entry:**

Last night we drove from Accra to Takoradi, about a five-hour drive along the coast. We've been here for eight weeks now, and I have finally seen the Gulf of Guinea. It was beautiful. Large white waves crashed toward the shore where fishermen had pulled their boats in, and the sun was setting. This is much different from anything we've seen in Ghana before. You can tell there is all of a sudden humidity by the way my hair sticks out all over the place and gets really curly. We also notice more greenery—bamboo, banana, papaya, avocado, and palm trees everywhere.

**Katie Trathen**

Today we drove to a village outside of Takoradi. We did a school program and then were taken to a church "to rest." People started following us, and soon there were nearly 100 children gathered. Adults brought in tall stalks of sugar cane, bags of bananas, and finally coconuts. Right in the middle of the church, they cut and peeled the sugar cane with large machetes (or "matchets"). They chopped open coconuts and had us drink the milk. Afterward, they showed us how to eat fresh coconut. You get your finger between the meat and the shell and separate the two. Fresh coconut is slimy and doesn't taste anything like any dried coconut I've ever had.

Time to rest? Not quite. Kyle did magic tricks, Jana danced, Rachel sang, and I learned how to drum. We entertained these kids for hours. It was fun, but I was relieved when I heard it was time for our evening program.

We drove down the road to our program, where the village had set up tents and rented a generator so that we could use microphones. It felt like the county fair. There were about 400 people present. Storm clouds came rolling in, and we smiled as we sang, "Hallelujah, grace like rain/Falls down on me..."

After our program, we went back to the church where dinner was waiting for us. This time, the pastor had the kids wait for us outside, so we got a brief moment of quiet. I was excited to see that they were serving my favorite Ghanaian meal: groundnut soup! I selfishly grabbed for the big piece of chicken, too. When I finally got around to the meat, I noted the very thick skin. I found the meat and ate some. Chicken? Really? So I asked our host, "Richard, do you know what kind of meat is in the soup?" He thought for a second and said, "Well, it's a bush meat. In Ghana, we call it RAT." I just started laughing hysterically. I didn't know what else to do. Matthew asked, "How do you find it?" I answered, "Hilarious."

I ate rat.

Date: 3/10/2007

Submitted by: Kyle Nelson

Journal Entry:

Today Rachel and I decided that we would go for a walk and explore the rainforest we are in. We expected to walk down to the River Pra and take a few pictures and that would be it. It turned out to be much better than that! Our contacts' children, who are all teenagers, wanted to come with us, so we let them lead, and they showed us so much! They took us to the river and showed us where people swim, bathe, wash clothes, and find their drinking water. Each place existed for only one task. Then they wanted to take us in the log canoe to the other side of the river. It was so exciting to be part of this time with them.



Kyle Nelson

Then, we heard something crazy—that there were lobsters in the water! I didn't think a large lobster could or would live in a river. Then the oldest son said, "Should I catch you one?" We said, "Sure!" Then he took off his jeans and shirt and dove in. After maybe five minutes, he came up with a little creature that we would call a crayfish. He caught two more, and we went back and cooked them as an afternoon snack! It was such a good day!

Date: 3/13/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Let me tell you something about the children of Ghana. There are two types: the first is the kind that sees us and instantly starts running in the other direction. We have learned that this may be because they think we are going to give them immunizations. The second type is the kind that swarms us, usually screaming "Abuni" (white person) and has no other communication with us. These kids seem excited and without fear, but when one of us moves toward them, they scatter. Those are the two types of kids in Ghana.



Rachel Arends

At least, I thought all children fell into these two molds, until I met Emmanuella last night. She and a few other children had been playing with Kyle while I was busy with other things. I came outside later and was the only "abuni" around. Instantly, Emmanuella sprinted to me and jumped into my arms. I had no choice but to catch her and hug her. She didn't want to let go. I appreciate this six-year-old's attitude. She helped me to feel like Jesus for a moment and have an acceptance that I rarely feel from the children here. I hope we can all see faith through the eyes of the children like Emmanuella. She helped me to see the Kingdom of God.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." -Jesus, Luke 18

Date: 3/15/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

So now Cross Fire is a little over halfway done with their time in Ghana touring. I must be honest and tell you that I am not necessarily inspired to write anything for this journal. This is not because I'm having a hard time here, I'm grumpy, or anything like that. I just feel a bit of calmness and decently adjusted to the different cultures (for me) here in Ghana.



Jana Melpolder

It's neat, too, when I feel I understand what is happening and why it is, as well. I love being just

"part of the gang" when I hang out with our contacts and people from the community to watch the big soccer tournament, for example, called CAN 2007. Or just feeling relaxed and so content when I can just sit with a group of kids and they can take turns and tell me stories, like what happened the other night.

These little moments will be some of the most precious ones I'll take back with me. Being a part of a community and watching them in their own way "glow," is becoming such a beautiful part of my trip here.

That's all I've got. Nothing huge or explosive this week. More just calm and simply wonderful. I hope when I go back to the States I notice and enjoy moments like that. The End.

Date: 3/18/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

We're currently in Takoradi, which is a big city on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea.

While we're here, our contact is Kofi, a Takoradi TV and radio personality, as well as youth leader for this church. As we travel to school and community programs, Kofi comes with us and translates into Fante, the local language. At each program I say, "Hi! My name is Katie and I'm from Portage, Indiana." Then, Kofi says a magic word, causing all the children to clap for me. The same is true for each of my teammates.



Katie Trathen

One day Kyle asked, "What is that magic word?" So Kofi taught us to say, "Yambansen," which means, "Let's all clap." Then Kofi led me to an unsuspecting group of kids and told me to try it out. "Yambansen!" And it worked! This is great. So Kyle and I decided we ought to do something deserving of applause, and he chose a somersault. Again, "Yambansen!" and wild clapping. Now, at each program, after our introductions, we join Kofi in asking the audience to clap for us. "Yambansen ma Katie!" And this brings me great joy.

My joy today comes from the worship service. Unlike most Ghanaian churches we've visited, this church looks familiar to me. I see a pulpit, pews, purple cloths for Lent, the old 1941 "The Lutheran Hymnal," and so forth. THEN, the offering. A boy reached up on the altar and grabbed the offering basket. It, too, looked familiar. Maybe because it was the same trick-or-treat bag Rachel used this past fall! It's the one on a black pole, with a black bag, and a bright orange monster hand reaching out of the middle. Needless to say, I began laughing out loud immediately. I loved it.

This afternoon, our only responsibility was to go to the beach with the young adults of the church. We waded into the waters of the Atlantic wearing our skirts--what a sight! The waves were Jana and Kyle's entertainment, while Rachel and I somehow ended up with two small children in our arms. We named them "Bill" and "Ted." We also made plans with some of the church members to swim to the U.S., but alas... it was time to go.

Finally, we ended the day with my favorite Ghanaian food: Fan Ice. This is vanilla ice cream in a plastic sleeve. You bite off the corner of plastic with your teeth, squeeze, and enjoy.

Oh yeah...I also wanted to tell everyone that every program, we send your greetings to the Ghanaians, and they send their greetings to you. They have spoken their gratitude toward our families and sponsors for making a way for us to be here, and I want you to know that.

Love,
Katie

Date: 3/19/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Even though today is not my journal day, I want to tell you about this program we

went to tonight. We went across the beaten path to an unfinished cement structure, only to find out that the basement layer was indeed finished and was a church. We walked in to people testing microphones and making sure their drums worked. There's no doubt in my mind that they have always worked. Our program started with the people who were members of the church singing for us. The six Ghanaians sang songs about our great God for our enjoyment.

Tonight I witnessed one man that changed my view, at least when I watched him sing. He had his eyes closed the entire time he was singing and had gestures that seemed to be supporting his praise for the Lord. I found myself intrigued by and watching this man during the entire song he sang. His beautiful baritone voice was perfect for me to hear God working in this place and to see the Spirit moving. What a blessing it was to be a part of an actual worship and have the feeling of being spiritually moved. I hope and pray people see this in our programs, but more importantly in our lives. May we all work our best to be visible Christians, so more people may know Jesus, just simply by looking at us.



Rachel Arends

Date: 3/20/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:



Rachel Arends

What an adventure today was! Our contact, Richard (or Kofi), told us about a special village on the water that we should see. We agreed. So we loaded our van with a few extra friends and we were on our way to Nzulezu.

We arrived at the visitor's center to find out the logistics and take care of business stuff. Then we drove out into the bush, into a random flat grassy area. All of a sudden, we stop. The Ghanaians started getting out of the van, and the four non-Ghanaians looked around confused because there was nothing but grassy land and something in the distance that looked like a swamp. We saw no village. Finally, our friend Emmanuel explained that we had to walk to get to the boats to go to Nzulezu.

The hike started. We got to the swampy area, which felt like hot-tub water and went up to our knees. (Remember, it is extremely hot in Ghana, so hot-tub water doesn't feel as great as you would expect.) After the muddy hot-tub and a short walk, we came upon more water and many wooden boats. The ten of us and our two guides loaded into the boats and started our hour-long paddle experience to Nzulezu.

While in the boat, Katie and I in one (with four Ghanaians), we started asking questions about the environment. We quickly learned about the beautiful water lilies, the monkeys that were nowhere to be seen, and the crocodiles who live in the water we were invading. This last bit of information was enough for Katie and I to keep all limbs inside the boat at all times. Through the canals and the woven fishing gate, we found a large lake. Then we found the village. Richard was right, it is a village on the water, literally. All of the buildings are on stilts and the people get to town with their boats, through the same water we had just come to them in.

We were able to get out of our boats and walk through the bamboo and palm wood paths and buildings. I was surprised to find their own elementary school, a Roman Catholic church, a store packed with minerals (soda/pop), and a guest house (hotel). We met the chief and learned some history about Nzulezu and the seven families who live there.

On the way back to our boats, we came upon two monkeys on leashes. I was quick to ask if we could touch them. Of course, they let us. Only one monkey liked us, but I pet him and he rolled over so I could rub his stomach. What a funny little creature.

We paddled back, walked through the hot-tub swamp again, and loaded our van to go catch some lunch. Luckily, we were able to order it and not have to literally catch it ourselves. The place we went to eat was beautiful and in the city of Beyin. It was absolutely fabulous to eat literally on the beach. The ocean and palm trees looked like pictures that aren't even real. After lunch, Kyle, Jana, and I played on the beach with the waves and the sand.

Soon, we found ourselves back in Takoradi preparing for a program at the church where we are

living for the week. The program started with some of our new friends doing some songs. Auntie Eugenia, Ben, Harry, and some others were making music perfectly for the Lord. It was a great way to start the evening.

Our program was fun and went well, even though we all felt exhausted. The people of St. John's knew almost all of our songs and could sing and worship with us. What a blessing! I really enjoy when they know our songs, so we can worship and not have it be such a "show," as they say here.

For me, the Lord gave me this day to find His joy again. Our friends who joined us for the day are truly my brothers in Christ. May God bless Richard, Emmanuel, Ben, and Luther for showing God's love to us today and every day. What a blessing!

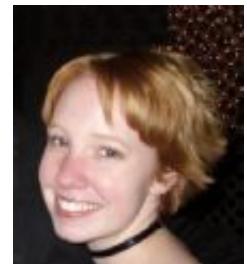
Date: 3/22/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

Since being overseas, my world has gotten so much bigger. Meeting people and hearing their own stories about life is such a pleasure. I want to tell you about a little boy I met who has inspired me. I'm keeping his name confidential, but I'm sure his story is like many others.

This eight-year-old was born in the north of Ghana. Not being from a wealthy family, he had to work from a very young age. For him, that meant carrying things balanced on top of his head for long distances. He did it so often that his head started to become bald. One can imagine that now his life is not too easy. The pastor's family (from the church we are staying at) eventually adopted him, and now he has a chance to go to school. He now lives in the southern part of Ghana (where there are greater educational opportunities for children) and is enjoying his new life there.



Jana Melpolder

I'm not sharing this story to make anyone feel upset, but just to increase social awareness. I wish you could meet this special boy and see his smile. It pushes me to want to do something for kids everywhere, to ensure that they have an opportunity to go to school. And if or when they work, it is within safe jobs. Perhaps you may be encouraged like I was to pray and do other things for these kids. May the Lord bless each of them.

Date: 3/26/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

Today was the first time I ever hiked while wearing a skirt. Being that our guesthouse was within walking distance of the Kakum National Park, we decided we ought to check out this tourist attraction. Kakum is known for its canopy walkways, which are suspension rope bridges above the trees at 30-40 meters high. It is located in what is left of Ghana's rainforest, high above forest elephants, monkeys, and more. They say it is the only one of its kind in all of Africa, and the fourth in the world.



Katie Trathen

We paid our fees, put on our badges, and began the hike to the top. Just when we reached the part where I thought I was going to die from an asthma attack (the "stairs" are steep!) our guide, Doris, announced that we completed the hard part. After another brief hike, we reached the platform and therefore our first of seven rope bridges. Each bridge is connected by two trees on either end, and made of mostly rope, with a wooden plank down the middle to walk on. It is shaky and wobbly, and we found it difficult to balance. We made faces and screamed part of the way and loved it all the same. We saw great views of the rainforest and all felt like we'd really accomplished a great feat. At the end of the last bridge, I started to run, which made it worse. But there she was, Doris the tour guide, congratulating us on our finish.

After we hiked back down, we ate lunch at the REAL Rainforest Cafe. It might not have been as fancy as the ones in the U.S., but we were really, truly dining with all the sights and sounds of the actual rainforest around us. We soon noticed the gray storm clouds rolling in, and rolling in FAST.

We had a full out thunderstorm for two hours. Luckily, we were under the roof of the restaurant, while some other tourists were out on the canopy walkway! Yipes!

As we were leaving the Rainforest Cafe, a man came up to us and said, "I've met you before!" And he told us that he was a teacher at one of the schools we did a program at back in the beginning of February, in a different part of the country. Wow--small world. He even said to Kyle, "You were David, in the David and Goliath skit." It looks like we made an impression.

After Kakum, we drove to the nearest city, Cape Coast, to look for food and housing. At the first restaurant we tried, Kyle and Matthew went in by themselves to see if they had pizza. The man who helped them was our server for lunch, at the Rainforest Cafe, which was an hour's drive away. Again, small world!

But they didn't have pizza, so they sent us to another restaurant, which was right on the ocean and right next to the Cape Coast Castle. The castle was built by the British and once used for slave trade. It's really incredible to be in the same place where so much important history happened.

Here ends our day.

Love to you,
Katie

Date: 3/27/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Note: This is not a journal written by Rachel Arends but a message from the Youth Encounter Team Department.

We wanted to inform everyone who is reading Cross Fire's journals and holding them in prayer that there has been a change made with their overseas schedule. After much prayer and deliberation, the leadership at Youth Encounter has decided to bring Cross Fire back to the United States a month earlier than originally planned. As you have read in these journal entries, the team has been doing powerful ministry in Ghana, and God has used them to touch countless lives and proclaim His Gospel in dozens of communities over the last two and a half months.



Rachel Arends

However, traveling overseas has taken an unfortunate toll on the team members' health, and many of them have succumbed to illness and exhaustion, which greatly hinder their ability to continue doing effective daily ministry. The current plan is for Rachel, Jana, Kyle, and Katie to fly home to the United States on Monday, April 9, after Easter celebrations with a large conference of churches. Matthew will remain in his home country of Ghana and return to his leadership role with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana. After a time of rest and recovery, Cross Fire will resume ministry in the United States. We are incredibly grateful to God for His grace and provision in providing a way to bring the team home early, and also for the amazing ways that God has already worked through the team's partnerships during their time in Ghana.

Youth Encounter does regret that many communities and Lutheran congregations in Ghana will not be able to receive Cross Fire this year because of the change of plans, but believes that the health and safety of the team members is a top priority. Youth Encounter and Cross Fire wish to thank everyone who continues to lift up the team in prayer, and we ask that you also remember the people of Ghana in your prayers as well, that the Gospel will continue to be preached to all who need to be encouraged by it. We also invite you to lift up specific prayers for the team's health and healing, and for them to stay strong through this transition, as well as specific prayers for the congregations in Ghana who will miss their opportunity for Cross Fire to visit and participate in their ministry this year. Your prayerful support of this ministry is vital to its continued success and incredibly appreciated by all who are involved, so we thank you.

If you have any questions about this change, please contact the International Team Director, Heather Carr, at heather@youthencounter.org. Please continue to check back here for updates

and new journals from the team members, as you continue to follow their journey and support them in this year of ministry. God bless you all!

Date: 3/29/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

The many cultures of Ghana have given me such a new and fresh outlook on several things. One of those things happens to be the act of giving and receiving gifts. In Ghana, one always takes with appreciation what someone gives them. It doesn't matter if they need it or not, or even if they like or dislike it. The gift itself is always received graciously.



Jana Melpolder

I come from a culture where there is re-gifting (anyone besides me guilty of that?) and even returning gifts that somehow "don't suit me." What I have learned here, though, is how unfriendly that can be to the person who has given the item to you.

It has been challenging to put into effect this new perception of always appreciating and taking what people offer me. Just the other day, the lunch we were supposed to have wasn't coming (for unknown reasons), and by 3 p.m., I was basically Starvin' Marvin. But kindly, the pastor's wife made a meal for us so we wouldn't be hungry. Now I must tell you, it was fu-fu (a sticky sort of dish) with a spicy sauce, which isn't my favorite thing to eat in Ghana. I knew, however, that whether I liked the food or not didn't matter. It was the act of giving us food when we had none that was such a ministry to us. I felt that I could not and should not turn away this wonderful gift. In the future and back in the States, I'm sure I'll continue to be challenged. I feel, though, that if that means I'll continue to grow into who God wants me to be, it's worth the effort.

Date: 4/1/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

Happy Palm Sunday and April Fool's Day!

Today I woke up to a 6:30 a.m. alarm so that I'd have time to shower, put on my brand new Ghanaian dress, join up with Jana to play an April Fool's joke on Kyle and Rachel, and get in the van for our one-hour drive from Accra to Tema for church. We attended Trinity Lutheran in Tema, home church to our teammate Matthew. I guessed it would be BYOPB (bring your own palm branch) day, but seeing that we don't have a palm tree, somehow Matthew acquired palm leaves for the five of us to wave around.



Katie Trathen

The whole congregation then, with drums, tambourines, and palm branches in hand, processed out of the church and danced through the streets. We sang songs and played music and waved our branches vigorously. (Some people didn't wave vigorously, and they heard about it from the older ladies of the church.) This parade lasted about an hour, and we made our way back to the church and the service resumed.

After the service, the youth (ages 13-30) wanted to sit down with Cross Fire and "find encouragement from us." So they asked us questions about ourselves, our tour, and the Lutheran Church in the U.S. They cheered to hear that my church has the same name as theirs, and one man said, "I have a question for the Trinity girl (me). What was your saddest and happiest moments as a Christian?" Wow. They continued to ask huge questions like that and sometimes it was so difficult to answer them. But we talked, shared stories, and were mutually encouraged by one another. Maybe they feel like they have so much to learn from us just because we're Americans, but I know we have much to learn from them, too.

We said goodbye to the youth and went to find lunch. But first we stopped to pick up Mrs. Boatin, who had gone home to change clothes. She is the lady many people call "The Oldest Teenager," and we were so moved by her when we met her in January that Jana and I both mentioned her in our

overseas newsletter. She came to the van all dressed up, looking so beautiful and wise, ready for our lunch date. I was so glad we had the opportunity to take her out and experience her vibrant personality on last time before we leave. Today she was telling me how everyone fears death and it can be difficult to come to terms with. And she said, "Nobody wants to die, but everyone wants to go to Heaven." Even in her simplicity, she is brilliant. Mrs. Boatin has been one of my favorite parts of all of Ghana.

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" -Matthew 21:9

Date: 4/5/2007

Submitted by: Jana Melpolder

Journal Entry:

It's been such an adventure these last few months. I would like to share the words to a song I wrote in Ghana that is a personal reminder of how God is in control. One lesson I've learned here is to not expect to know how things will turn out, but to trust in God that things will be fine. I feel it's a good ending for our time in Ghana, since we are leaving earlier than expected. Just so you know, no laughing allowed, and there is no title (yet).



Jana Melpolder

*I see new things every day
In this world of Yours
Cravin' what is unknown
And wanting what I don't have
But You, my God,
Have better plans for me
And my life would be better
If I let you take the lead*

**Stretch me, build me
You, O my Maker
You are guiding me along
And showing me the way
You are breaking me, breaking me
My God**

*Feeling all the wrong things
In my own polluted mind
I find it hard to let go
Of what I feel I want
So take control of everything
Yes, You, my God
You won't let me slip
I want and need You, O King*

**Stretch me, build me
You, O my Maker
You are guiding me along
And showing me the way
You are breaking me, breaking me
My God**

Date: 4/23/2007

Submitted by: Katie Trathen

Journal Entry:

Dear friends of Cross Fire,

As you may know, Cross Fire came home a few weeks early from Ghana due to health reasons. Our work in Ghana took a toll on our well-being. During our first week back in Minnesota, we all went to the doctor and participated in many team meetings. The result is that I have decided to end my time with Cross Fire a few months early.

It is sad to leave this ministry sooner than I had originally planned. However, I am confident that Cross Fire has done incredible ministry in our eight months together. We have seen so many places and met so many people, within Youth Encounter and out in the world. You have been a blessing to all of us. Thank you for your love and prayers.

You might be wondering, "What's next?" Currently I am at home in Indiana, moving to Chicago in a few days and getting ready for the next step in my life: graduate school in fall 2007. Please continue to pray for me and my teammates as we make our transitions.

God's joy and peace,
Katie



Katie Trathen

Date: 5/1/2007

Submitted by: Rachel Arends

Journal Entry:

Note: This is not a journal from Rachel Arends, but a message from the Youth Encounter Team Department.

At this time, we regret to inform you of the following disappointing news regarding Cross Fire 2006-07.



Rachel Arends

As many of you know, in mid-April we shortened Cross Fire's overseas tour because of health concerns. Shortly after the team's return to the U.S., Katie Trathen and Jana Melpolder left team for health reasons. Due to Kyle Nelson's slow recovery, his doctor has recommended that he not travel any further. With that in mind, Rachel Arends feels that this would also be a good time for her to end her time as a Youth Encounter teamer.

We are sad to say goodbye to the Cross Fire team this year, but we want to express our thanks and appreciation to all of you who have supported these team members through prayer, relationships and financial contributions throughout the year. We ask that you continue to pray for Jana, Katie, Rachel and Kyle as they transition from their team tenure to the next steps in life.

Although the 2006-07 Cross Fire team is gone, we will continue to maintain this page throughout the summer. If you continue to check back, there may be some additional overseas journals posted from their last few weeks together in Ghana, for anyone who would like to read about the end of their time there.

If you would like to get in touch with any of Cross Fire's members, please feel free to send cards or letters (no packages, please) to the Youth Encounter office at 3490 Lexington Ave. N. #300, St. Paul, MN 55126; we will forward them on to the appropriate team member.

We praise God for the ministry that has been done through Cross Fire this year, and we thank you again for your continued prayers for all of our teams, Event participants, service participants, and Youth Encounter staff members.
