

Hi everyone!

I hope you all are doing well at home (or school) and that God is doing amazing things in all of your lives! He certainly is here in Miami. Other than the freakishly “cold weather” (by Miami standards at least), things have been very good here. I started off the month of January in a new year and on a plane back to Miami from Raleigh, NC. Even though it was difficult to leave friends and family, I knew I needed to get back to the daily grind at the Rescue Mission and life here. Within the first week or so of being back in Little Havana, I was feeling extremely homesick and questioned why I was so far away from home. I started to lose my faith in God’s purpose for me and questioned why He put me here in the first place. I was unhappy at home, at work, and pretty much everywhere. I just wanted to be back in Virginia where I would be closer to my family. After I couldn’t hold it inside anymore, I cried as I told my housemates how I was feeling and the Holy Spirit led me to spend some quiet time by myself that evening. I read parts of the Bible and prayed for a long time, asking God to give me peace and understanding about where I was. I also decided to fast for a day so that I could receive a clearer picture from Him. After I did all of this, I felt more peaceful about living in Miami and understood that this was where He called me to do His work. I became more aware that I committed myself to His work here until August and had to keep that promise to Him. I asked for more joy in my daily life at work and home and He has definitely led me to a path where I can find joy even in the mundane things. Recently, I have found myself trusting more in Him and going to the Bible and prayer for guidance. Psalm 16 has been a really encouraging passage for me lately because it talks about having faith in His plans since He will never let us fall. I feel like my spiritual life has really been centered and God is molding me daily.

As for the Rescue Mission, things in January were pretty slow. I did my usual tasks like running the monthly reports, counting and keeping track of people who have probation community service hours, setting up the weekly kitchen schedule, and other things, but in the middle of January, I also got to spend some time at the Center for Women and Children. Ucraina, the young lady who is the front desk assistant there, went on vacation and Marilyn and Ali thought it would be a good idea for me to get out of my office to see other parts of the Mission and how they run so I took over her job for three days. The first day I was there was Martin Luther King Jr. Day so it was really slow I didn’t do much more than answer a couple of phone calls. The most exciting part of the day was at the end. At 3pm, the overnight guests (the women who come off of the streets for the night) come to claim a number for that evening. There are only eight beds for overnights in the Center for Women and Children so the first eight women who come get the eight numbers. Anyway, at 3pm, I gave out numbers and told them to come back at 4pm so that we would have time to get things ready for them. Most of them had been through the routine before. It was heartbreaking to see the same women come in each afternoon, seemingly satisfied with their lot in life and unwilling to receive any more help than just a meal, a shower, some clean clothes, and a night’s stay. Many of them were strung out on some kind of drug and had fallen into an addictive lifestyle that had trapped them. It was here that I learned that you can only help someone so much and the rest is up to that person. If they do not want to change, they won’t. You shouldn’t have to feel guilty if that person has not become better because you can only give them your best and he or she has to make the decision and be willing to take action for himself or herself. There are so many homeless people that live on the street right outside of the Mission. There is help readily available at all times. However, you cannot force someone to want to change. You can only show them the path and hope and pray that they make the right decision. God is definitely showing me things at the Mission still and helping me grow in different ways whether it is inside or outside of the office.

One exciting and educational event I got the chance to participate in was the CCDA conference. CCDA stands for Christian Community Development Association. This conference was a three day event held at a Baptist church in Miami to teach people about effective ministry, especially in an urban setting. On Thursday, we learned about the effects that race has had on urban places and how we can help alleviate those kinds of tensions through ministering to the people in those places and breaking down the boundaries of racism. On Friday, we learned how to create indigenous leaders. By this, I mean how to grow effective leaders from the people around you for the community around you. So often, we bring in outside leaders who we think can solve our problems, but the people of the community are really the ones who need to be involved the most if they want their problems fixed. No one from the outside is going to be half as passionate or care as much as those that are actually involved and living in that particular community. Anyway, I guess you can tell that I really enjoyed that seminar. ☺ Lastly, Saturday was pretty much an overview of the previous two days and also general teachings about the other seminars they offer. There are eight key components to CCDA and in those two first days, we covered “Reconciliation” and “Leadership Development”. It’s a really cool organization and if you get the opportunity to attend a class, you should definitely take it. It will make you more passionate about your community and what you can do in it. They travel all over the country, so if they end up near you, see if you can check it out. There is a schedule of events on their website: <http://www.cdda.org>.

Let’s see...other things that happened in January...

Church has been great at First United Methodist. The choir is fun, hand bells are cool, and Pastor Emilio is awesome. Our house is ok...things seem to work when they want to (the oven, the lights, the internet, etc.). My housemates are great and their placements are going well for the most part.

Near the end of January, Megan found a stray puppy (it was the cutest thing!) near where she works in Little Haiti and brought it home one evening. She saw her eating from a dumpster that was very close to the road and she couldn’t bear to see her run over, so she took her home, gave her a bath, fed her, took her to the vet to get checked out, and found her a home with a medical student she knew from work. Unfortunately, after she started living with the med student, she started having seizures and we found out she had Distemper. She died shortly after that discovery, but at least we all gave her a good last week before she was gone.

On the evening of the 27th, some of us went salsa dancing on South Beach for a friend’s birthday. It was so much fun! There was no cover charge, people were actually doing real dances, and it was even a good work out. I woke up the next morning and my legs felt like I ran a marathon the night before. I think we’ll probably go back sometime.

So that’s about it for January. Sorry it took so long to send out. February has been very crazy (but you’ll hear about that next month!). God bless you all and have a Happy Valentine’s Day!