

lives changing.

STUDENT MISSIONS
AT SOUTHERN

ISSUE
02
2021-2022

Redefining Progress

Connections through play
page 2

A Day in the Life

Memoirs of an assistant dean
page 3

Change of Plans



ZACHERY KIRSTEIN

Zach is a junior finance major currently serving as a student missionary in Bolivia, South America. He is a house parent at Familia Feliz.

Ever since I was a little boy, I've always planned out everything, especially my future. If my plans changed, I quickly made new ones. I can't remember a time when someone would ask me what I wanted to do that I didn't know or have an answer. There was always something planned—at least in my head! From age 5, I wanted to be a lawyer; in high school, I changed my career goal to dentist; and in college, I aspired to be a hospital administrator. And, of course, serving as a student missionary was always on the list.

Here in Bolivia and for the first time in my life, I have been questioning my plans.

continued on page 2



Zach's students are teaching him the importance of service in the present over plans for the future.

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FAITH. SURRENDER. JOURNEY. PURPOSE. JOY.

Change of Plans *continued from page 1*

How can I leave this place? How can I form such close bonds with these children and then just leave them? How can I do a year of service and then go back to my “normal” life and not make service my No. 1 focus? These and many more questions are swirling around in my head, and I simply don’t know what to do or how to act. It’s evident my goals for the future have evolved since I have been in the mission field, but what those goals have evolved to, I am not sure. Nevertheless, I know my focus began changing the minute I first stepped foot in this place.

Before coming to Bolivia, I’d sketched it all out: be a student missionary for nine months, come back to attend my brother’s high school graduation, head straight to an AdventHealth internship and summer with corporate management, then return to Southern to finish up my degree. Simple and perfect in my mind, but now it’s a little foggy. Obviously, I want to continue my life dreams and ambitions and probably will, but my intentions and mindset are completely different.

Instead of wanting to get an education so I can succeed and get a job, I now see that having a higher education is an absolute privilege that many around the world do not have. Rather than wanting to just get through college, I understand the opportunity as a gift. Instead of desiring a corporate job for the status and high paycheck, I want to earn money so I can help others who don’t have the same resources. My desire to “make it big” is now fueled by a vision to help children for decades to come, in this small orphanage in South America that has changed me and everything I used to think.

It’s a different kind of work that is done here, work that before I would have overlooked as “simple” or “not difficult” because it doesn’t require a college education or years of training to accomplish. Yet this work is probably more important than anything I have ever dreamed of doing in the future. Taking care of children who have been abandoned and abused—providing a safe place for these little ones, watching them smile, preparing them food every day and buying them little treats that make them happy—has been the most rewarding experience of my life. Giving them an education and setting them up for the best future possible is beyond rewarding, and I want to dedicate my life to helping instead of living for myself.

James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” This has become one of my favorite verses, and honestly, I never knew it even existed until I came here and it clicked in my mind. This is why I feel so at peace and why I am so happy here, serving these kids. This is what happens when one experiences true religion, which is living out a relationship with God.

I have seen my life change here more than it ever changed before. My mindset, former priorities, and old plans and goals have all been questioned and restructured. I am glad for this experience, and I hope to continue growing and challenging my ideologies. I am actually grateful for the unknowns still to come.

Redefining Progress *by Mason Clark*



Mason Clark, pictured with his students, is a chemistry graduate from Southern who served in Amman, Jordan, this school year.

Sometimes the greatest progress in the mission field arises from scenarios that don’t feel like work at all. As a volunteer English teacher, I would put hours into planning a lesson, only for my students to completely miss the concepts I was trying to teach. In hindsight, I feel as though the times I wasn’t working were when the greatest connections were made.

One evening I was taking a break from a project I was working on and decided to go play basketball in a nearby park. During a water break, I turned around to find one of my teenage English students hanging out with a friend on the swing set. I walked over and made conversation with them, then went back to playing. Before I left, they came up to me with huge grins on their faces and asked, “Mr. Mason, can you teach us to play basketball?”

A Day in the Life of a Student Dean



BRITTANY STURGIS

Brittany is a junior education major who served as a student missionary at Fletcher Academy in North Carolina during the 2019-2020 school year. She was an assistant dean and is pictured below with her students on campus.

After a long night of tutoring, comforting, and settling students in the girls dorm at Fletcher Academy, I finally get to bed at 1:30 a.m. As I set my alarm, I realize I'll have to wake up in a short five hours for breakfast supervision. I'm startled out of sleep by the ringing phone. One of my girls is an epileptic, and her roommate calls me to come help during one of the seizures that happen regularly. I rush up to the room and follow protocol to ensure everyone is safe. Now it's time to head up to the cafeteria for 40 minutes to talk and eat breakfast with many of our students. Back at the dorm, I check my email and then leave for a CrossFit class with two other deans. Spending an hour of my day exercising helps me to be a better dean by providing much-needed time with adults. Returning to campus around 10:30 a.m., I spend the rest of the morning doing room checks, grades, and other routine tasks.

After lunch, I tutor one of the girls in my office, double-check work done by the janitorial crew, teach pre-algebra, and take some of the girls to the store. Supper and recreation offer more time with these high schoolers I've grown to love, including those from the community who don't live in the dorms. Afterward, I start worship (one of my favorite moments of the day), where we discuss the importance of developing our characters. It's a blessing to share what God has opened my eyes to and hopefully inspire the young women around me.

We started meeting each day after class and soon had enough participants to make our own unofficial basketball camp. We got creative due to limited sports facilities, but several kids started coming consistently. It seemed unfair that something I had put so little effort into became so successful, but it is a testament to how God works in ways that we don't expect. It was also a crucial reminder that we have an opportunity to witness in everything we do—even during our leisure time.

A couple of months later, I returned to play basketball at the park, this time with the students who had originally asked for lessons. Although their new skills were still being refined, the smiles on their faces gave me an overwhelming sense of joy.



During study hall, many of the girls come into my office and tell me about their experiences throughout the day. At 10:30 p.m., the residents are in bed, and I wrap up the day by meeting with the RAs before winding down myself.

There are so many reasons why being a dean was the best job I could ever have. You never know what your day will look like; not one is the same, so there's always the element of surprise and fun! I always felt needed and had a purpose. I had countless chances to make lifelong differences in the lives of young adults as I connected with and mentored them. To this day, I still call and check up on quite a few! I will always remember that amazing year of my life and all the ways that I was blessed.



Velbekomme! (Danish for “Bon Appétit”)

Contributed by Angie Jones, assistant dean at Vejlebjergskolen School (Denmark)

Nut and Caramel Dream (serves 8-10 people)

Ingredients:

- Nut mixture: 1 cup hazelnuts or almonds, 1 cup white sugar
Caramel mixture: ½ cup sugar, 3 Tbs. butter, ¼ cup heavy whipping cream,
1 Tbs. brown sugar (optional for darkening)
Biscuits: ½ package Bastogne or Biscoff
Ice cream: ½ gallon vanilla



Instructions:

- Put nuts and 1 cup of sugar in small saucepan and heat on medium. Stir regularly and simmer until sugar turns an amber color. Pour nut mixture (very hot!) onto a piece of baking paper and cool completely.
Put ½ cup of sugar, butter, and heavy cream in small saucepan and boil for just a few minutes. If very light, add a little brown sugar (will be thin until cooled).
Crush biscuits in a plastic bag. Take ice cream out of freezer to slightly thaw in refrigerator.
Finely chop half of nut mixture, and coarsely chop other half.
Stir vanilla ice cream quickly together with finely chopped nut mixture.
Put a layer of ice cream mixture in the bottom of a springform pan, add a layer of biscuits, then add a layer of caramel sauce. Repeat layering again, and finish with a layer of ice cream.
Sprinkle coarsely chopped nut mixture over ice cream and cover, then freeze for at least 2 hours.
Thaw in refrigerator for 10 minutes before releasing springform pan and serving.
Decorate with fresh berries, chocolate, or other toppings (optional).

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