

backpage

Byington Jailed in Africa, Returns to MBI

by staff writer
Michelle de Carion

“We can’t live in ignorance,” said sophomore communications major Zach Byington. “If we are not active in our world, then we are as much to blame as those committing the acts of injustice.” Concerned about the conflict in central Africa, Byington flew to Uganda in June and stayed six months, aiding and witnessing to refugees.

According to BBC, there are about five million refugees in Africa who have left their homes due to war and persecution. Byington said, “I felt I had to do something because of the vast injustice of the situation. Refugees are people far from home, and the only hope they have is in their heavenly home.”

After Byington arrived in Uganda, he traveled to Yei, Sudan, where he worked four months with refugees who were learning how to live again after being in refugee camps their whole lives. He taught them about farming, sanitation and clean water sources.

Byington then felt God was leading him to Chad. Since flights were scarce and costly, he traveled 300 miles with his companion Sanda, whom he had met two years earlier on a trip to South Africa. The pair traveled by truck and motorcycle to the border of Central African Republic (CAR). However, when they arrived at the border there were no roads, so they walked 110 kilometers through the African bush to the next city, Mboki.

At Mboki, Byington and Sanda waited two weeks for transportation. Some days they went hungry and had to sleep on the ground, but “God knew what he was doing,” Byington said. “He opened up doors by bringing us English speakers to translate for us. People in the village brought us food.” Byington and Sandra also shared the gospel with everyone on the transport that eventually took them towards Chad.

However, on the way, Byington and Sandra were seized by police in CAR’s capitol city, where police took their passports and forced them into the back of a pick-up truck. “It was already night-time and we were really scared because they didn’t tell us where we were going or what we were accused

of,” said Byington. The police brought them to prison and put them in a cell with 40 other people without food and water. They later found out they were accused of being rebels.

Byington said that in prison the extent of man’s inhumanity to man was shocking. Occasionally, the police would select prisoners and beat them in the courtyard. The foreigners were treated the worst.

Byington met Arouna, a man from Sierra Leone who was put in prison for being a foreigner. Arouna accepted Christ during Byington and Sanda’s stay.

After the pair spent three days in prison, the U.S. Embassy came and let Byington and Sanda out. When they made an appeal at The United High Council for Refugees to release Arouna, he was also set free.

Byington said, “Sometimes we asked, ‘God what are you doing? We made it here, and now we’re in prison!’ But it was great to see how God worked through us by being there.”

The U.S. Embassy gave Byington five days to leave the country, so he and Sanda asked God if they should continue to Chad. Thankfully, they decided not to; a short time later Chad’s government refused to

let aid workers into the country, and war rebels surrounded the capitol.

Byington’s sister, Maegan, senior elementary education major, was frightened for her brother but not without hope. “When I hadn’t heard from Zach in a month I got really worried; I prayed a lot because I didn’t even know if he was alive,” she said. “When I heard he was in prison, I was in shock and overjoyed because I was just glad that he was alive.”

Byington spent his last month in Sudan and returned to the U.S. in December. “I miss [Africa] a lot, but I see the value in being at Moody,” he said. “I want to see God move on this campus and to see students to go out with passion for the world with a sense that we are a part of a universal church. As Christians, we are called to stand against injustice. There is no middle ground. ■



Sophomore communications major Zach Byington traveled 300 miles by truck and motorcycle during a 6-month missions trip to Africa. Here he heads for the Central African Republic with his friend Sanda. photo courtesy Zach Byington