Internship Report: Episcopal Relief & Development

This summer I had the opportunity to live in New York City, work in the Episcopal Church building, and learn communications and marketing skills at Episcopal Relief & Development. This organization is a small non-profit, associated with the Episcopal Church, reaching out to over three million people annually in almost 40 countries. They support local programs that engage communities in building a better future for themselves and their children. With programs in agriculture, clean water, sanitation and hygiene, maternal and child health, malaria, micro-finance, gender issues and women’s empowerment and disaster risk reduction, the organization provides asset-based community development.

Working closely with the communications officer, I was first trained in Episcopal Relief & Development’s branding strategies, enabling me to write articles, website updates, and press releases with the organization’s voice and style. I had the opportunity of quickly learning about the programs in the countries abroad, how they work and how the organization’s supporter’s donations are used to offer funds for asset-based community development. In the first week and a half, I had read so much about the programs headed by our own staff in almost 40 countries, that I felt I had a full understanding of the impact Episcopal Relief & Development made in the world—a task many of the employees admitted it took months to grasp. With this knowledge, I was able to update a lot of the website’s content.

One of my favorite tasks this summer was taking notes from program officer’s trips to countries such as Ghana, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, and creating stories about
different members of each community and the work that they are each doing to increase the economy and health of their community. After completing a story, I felt as if I really knew the person who I had just written about; these were people who dedicated their lives to making their children’s futures better than their own circumstances and it was inspiring to read and write about these incredible individuals. Some of these stories were published on their website, others in Episcopal Relief & Development’s annual summary, and one story was even published in the summer edition of The Episcopal New Yorker!

While I had been briefed on the organization’s writing style, there was still so much I needed to learn about writing for a donor-audience. Once I finished an article or a story, I sent the document to be reviewed by my supervisor. We sent the document back and forth a few times as she made suggestions for edits and when she was finally satisfied with the piece, I asked the head of the marketing and communications department to look it over as well. Naturally, there were many more things that she suggested needed editing. By the time I was finished making changes, it hardly felt like my own writing anymore. Both my supervisor and the head of the department apologized, but the experience gave me so much insight into what goes into getting a piece published, that I didn’t mind the hard work. Even my supervisor, who has been working for Episcopal Relief & Development for six years says that her own articles are often sent back and forth throughout the department before they are ready to be published on the website.

My work in the communications field was challenging and insightful—I enjoyed all the writing I was able to do, and I was pushed to write with a voice other than my own. I learned so much more about the process of non-academic writing, which is a skill that I will use throughout my future in my career. While my supervisor was also having a very busy summer of working on
her own assignments as well as guiding me through my own internship experience, I had some days where I did not have a long list of things to do. I learned to fill my time by figuring out my own ways to complete useful tasks; I created a presentation powerpoint for employees to use at conferences when trying to explain all the different areas of focus of the organization’s programs and I began searching for pictures from trips abroad that could be used in the fall when they begin advertising.

As the only intern for the organization, I was given the opportunity to learn about the organization as a whole, speaking with many employees from different departments to understand better the effect that Episcopal Relief & Development has on people throughout the world. I loved having the atmosphere of a small office and getting the chance to talk to many people about their work for the organization. Because I was working in the Episcopal Church building in New York City, I was able to attend morning prayer before work each day and found yet another small faith-based community in the huge city. I even got to speak with the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Working for a faith-driven organization was an incredible experience. I witnessed how other’s beliefs shaped the work that they did and saw the passion in their actions. Being surrounded by people who considered their faith very important and influencing of the way they live their lives was a humbling experience for me, and I would absolutely love to work for a similarly motivated organization in the future.