"…living every moment as a unique chance…"

Last summer I had the privilege of traveling to Africa as part of the Nootbaar Institute's Global Justice Program. I spent eight days in Kampala, Uganda, working with Pepperdine faculty and students to assist 17 Ugandan teenagers who were living in the Naguru Remand Home awaiting trials on criminal charges ranging from murder to defilement. Many of these young men and women had been in the Remand Home for nine months or more, away from family and loved ones, largely forgotten by an overcrowded criminal justice system.

The stories of three young men I had the chance to meet stand out in particular. They were charged with murder, each accused of having participated in a mob killing in their rural village. Months after the murder they were rounded up by military forces, with many other villagers, and unceremoniously taken from their homes in the middle of the night. Worst of all, no one had ever singled out any of these three young men as having participated in the murder.

We interviewed the boys, reviewed police and case files, and prepared briefs for the court and the lawyers in the case, carefully laying out the facts that pointed so clearly to innocence. On the day of the appearance of the three young men before the High Court Justice who was assigned to hear the case, we watched as the judge announced that the prosecution had decided to dismiss the charges against the three teens because of a lack of evidence. The three young men turned to us and they smiled widely, saying, "It is okay" and "Thank you." It was a thrilling moment as we witnessed these young men embrace their newfound freedom, experience the sweetness of justice, and look ahead expectantly to restoration in their families, schools, and villages.

N.T. Wright says that "God's passion for justice must become ours." In a world that is sadly full of injustice and unfairness, Wright reminds us that "we are called to work, at every level of life, for a world in which reconciliation and restoration are put into practice, and so to anticipate that day when God will indeed put everything to rights."*

As we celebrate the gift of a new year – full of promise of a fresh start and the possibility of new beginnings – may we seize the opportunities before us, living every moment as a unique chance to be agents of reconciliation and restoration. I give thanks for the many Pepperdine people who so beautifully embody a passion for justice and spirit of compassion and pray that we will all resolve in this new year to commit to this kind of justice-seeking and peacemaking wherever we find ourselves, whether in Malibu or Uganda or somewhere in between.

Timothy L. Perrin
Vice Dean and Professor, School of Law

* N.T. Wright, Simply Christian at 13, 226 (Harper 2006).