I am the mission and outreach intern at Bethany Community Church. Elli Oswald, the director of mission and outreach is my direct supervisor. The mission and outreach department at Bethany contains both local and global outreach programs and organizational partnerships. My internship responsibilities include a variety of tasks and projects with both global and local focus. I began my internship in September 2013 and it will conclude in June 2014. The following will be a reflection of my experience thus far as well as include a projected timeline for current and future tasks and responsibilities.

The focus of my internship has been tailored to my specific passions and experience as well as the needs and interests of the ministry of Bethany Community Church and the mission and outreach department. In addition to a range of weekly responsibilities that include personal and spiritual development classes for interns, staff theology meetings, Sunday service shifts, check-in with my supervisor and community group meetings, I have been assigned certain personal tasks and projects as a part of my internship. One of these tasks includes the development of ministry program evaluation materials. Each spring, the mission department implements a church wide spring missional initiative with the focus of supporting and encouraging missional living in the congregation. While the perception is that these, among other programs at Bethany have been successful, it is the desire of the church to create systems by which the success of their programs can be assessed. It is my task to develop resources to assess this year’s spring missional initiative focused on the “art of neighboring.” For this project, I have been looped into the planning process and will be communicating with staff across multiple campuses and ministries to best design measurements for the relevant areas of assessment. The goal is that the resources I develop could be utilized not only for this year’s initiative, but would help put systems in place for future assessments and program measurements.

Additionally I have been assigned as the trip leader for this year’s strategic visit trip in March to our global partnership with Roblealto Childcare Asscoiation in Costa Rica. My leadership for this trip has thus far included participation in a biweekly fall community group, educating members on issues of poverty, development and global ministry using the resource When Helping Hurts by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. This winter we have moved into the application and preparation phase of trip planning. I have held informational meetings, provided promotional materials, and processed individuals’ trip applications leading up to the present. The team is now finalized and I have been leading biweekly trip preparation meetings that will continue from this time forward as weekly meetings until the time of departure on March 21. It my task to enhance the trip preparation materials and create more appropriate materials specific to the timeline of the strategic visit trip to Costa Rica.
I will complete this as a document to be added to the Bethany Short-term Missions Guidebook.

It is my responsibility along with the rest of the team to consider areas of growth and expansion for Bethany’s partnership with Roblealto. I have been tasked specifically with assessing possible areas of involvement for Bethany’s youth program in potential future visits as an extension of my passion and experience working with youth in mission in Latin America and the expressed desire of Roblealto to have youth mentorship exposure for the adolescents in their programs. A key part of Bethany’s strategic visit trips to their global partners is the opportunity for connection between Bethany’s congregation and the lives of those being reached by our partners. In the time we are in Costa Rica, we will collect information and resources to communicate what we have learned upon our return. For the six months following the trip, I will be involved in leading and coordinating our team’s ambassadorship of the partnership to the rest of the congregation. This will include monthly meetings to follow-up with and encourage team members’ personal transformation after the trip and facilitate our communication of Bethany’s partnership with Roblealto in creative ways to the rest of the congregation.

It has become apparent in planning for this year’s trip and upon reflection of trips in year’s past, that the current model funneling people from fall community groups that educate people on issues of poverty alleviation, to Costa Rica strategic visit trip members does not work as planned. Often, the team is assembled last minute with people who have not been involved in prior discussions of poverty alleviation and mission as a part of the group. It is my supervisor’s desire to have team members be educated and engage in discussion around these issues prior to attendance on a mission abroad experience. It has now become an interest of mine to explore new ways of meeting this goal through a different format. I will be involved in the discussion and development of new materials and methods for recruiting and preparing members of the congregation for strategic visit trips to Bethany’s global partners.

An additional long-term project of mine includes the development of a trip alumni group, providing opportunities for continued involvement and connection with Bethany’s global partners for individuals who have attended global strategic visit trips with Bethany. I am also involved locally in Bethany’s Sunday night community meals, providing reflections about how to better integrate and facilitate connection between the marginalized visitors with the rest of the Bethany congregation. Lastly, I sit in on and am assisting in the development of the global partnerships council, a work in progress with the intent of creating a body of individuals to help govern and pass down the ideals and standards for Bethany’s global partnerships.

I began this internship with the intent of exploring my desire to work in poverty alleviation and community development locally and in other parts of the world through the church. I specifically wanted to work in a church environment as opposed to another nonprofit or NGO to help me better understand the
opportunities for poverty alleviation and development work through the church and get further exposure to the experience of working in the church institution. I have certainly learned a lot through my experience thus far and have found it extremely helpful in my exploration of each of the items mentioned above. I have prior experience working in a smaller church in the US and alongside a nonprofit mission organization in churches throughout countries of Central and South America. This internship has provided a unique experience working in a rapidly growing nondenominational church in the US. I have struggled to understand and relate to the environment and style of ministry of a larger church like this one, but have come to appreciate it in many ways as well. I am accustomed to the environment of a smaller church where decisions and people appear to be more widely known and are mutually supported by a smaller staff. This is simply not possible for a larger organization or church of any kind, and though it in ways appears less personal for me, it has definite strengths. Especially in regards to the mission and outreach ministry, Bethany has the capacity to take on large scale initiatives and make significant contributions to poverty alleviation efforts with partner organizations in other parts of the world. This is extremely exciting for me as I consider ways in which the church can most effectively contribute to development efforts in areas of poverty locally and around the world. The inherent challenge Bethany faces, which I am involved in addressing, is integrating these programs with the entirety of the congregation, creating connection and meaningful, sustainable transformation. Questions at hand include, how do you connect a congregation of 4,000 with a ministry happening halfway around the world that realistically only a handful of people will have the opportunity to visit and experience first hand? These questions inform the ministry and experience of working in a large church such as Bethany. I am in the process of deciphering the kind of environment that I fit into best. This experience has reinforced in me the belief that I am well suited for the work environment of the church and has fueled in me a desire to continue forward with the intent of working in the church specifically as opposed to a parachurch or other form of nonprofit or NGO.

I have found the regular connection between my supervisor and I to be extremely helpful. I certainly respect her and feel mutually respected and trusted for my contributions. Her guiding vision helps to inform the work I do, and yet I am given significant breathing room in my responsibilities and tasks to make them my own and apply my own unique giftings to them. I continue to look forward to the development of my tasks and ongoing personal development through the variety of classes, mentorship and experiences that this internship provides. I am passionate about my role and am thankful for the contribution that this scholarship makes towards making this internship opportunity available to me.