Mid-Term Reflection Paper

Zdravo (hello)! I’m writing this from a friend’s couch, in a tiny flat, in a sleepy Eastern European town, Celje, all the while being amazed at where God has brought me. This town is where I spent my entire summer last year, and where I have returned to work with a group of missionaries from the Christian non-profit, Josiah Venture. Celje is situated in the mid-eastern side of Slovenia, a nation few people have even heard of (and if they have, often confuse it with Slovakia). Until the 1990’s Slovenia was a part of the former Yugoslavia and under communist rule. So what would motivate a 19-year-old American girl from Seattle to spend two summers in a small, ex-communist country tucked away in the western corner of Eastern Europe?

Three years ago I began to sense God calling me to Eastern Europe and last year doors suddenly opened, allowing me to serve with a music ministry, Fusion, in Celje. Fusion is a ministry outreach that employs music as a tool to build relationships with youth and share the gospel.

Since this is my second summer in Celje working with Fusion, I have been pleasantly surprised by the new responsibilities and role I have been given. I am living in a little apartment for three months with another American intern, Elle, and a Slovene girl, Maša, and working primarily with three American full-time staff members of Josiah Venture. Josiah Venture’s vision is to see, “A movement of God among the youth of Central and Eastern Europe that finds its home in the local church and transforms society” by calling and equipping young Eastern European leaders to carry out this vision. A large part of what this looks like during the
summer is the planning and implementation of summer camps across all thirteen countries Josiah Venture’s serves in Eastern Europe.

For the first half of the summer we have been continuing the year-round *Fusion* events (like our weekly Tuesday band practices and Thursday *Fusion* hangouts), planning the logistics of camp, and promoting *Fusion* in Slovene classrooms and in downtown Celje. In a couple of weeks an American short-term team will arrive from Nashville, Tennessee and the camp we have been planning will take place in Millstatt, Austria. Following six days of camp we will all return to Celje to perform a number of *Fusion* concerts, allowing students to show their newly acquired musical/artistic skills from camp. Our *Fusion* group is comprised of students who have learned to play the drums, bass, electric guitar, piano, along with others who are developing skills in videography, photography, dance, and conducting. Additionally, our concert will even feature a rock choir!

The second half of the summer after camp will consist of follow-up events to continually nurture the relationships that were established at camp, and to help get students plugged into the local church. While the first half of my summer consists of logistical meetings and endless spreadsheets, the second half will focus totally on the relational aspects of the ministry, like planning day-trips, going out to coffee daily with students, and hosting Bible studies.

Throughout the entire summer one consistent element I have grown to love is the opportunity to disciple young women. Coming from an American culture that thrives in its ability to offer student programs and mentorship for young men and women, it’s completely different here. Students in Slovenia rarely get “poured into” so we have witnessed the profound impact a loving environment has on students who are often only familiar with shame-based, competitive environments. Talk to
any of our students and they will tell you that because of this love, Fusion has been a life-changing experience for them.

Previous to last summer I had only worked with missionaries while being part of a short-term mission team, but now that I am serving in a leadership role, things look completely different to me. Living on the mission-field for three months at a time has given me a profound respect for the way Christian non-profits like Josiah Venture operate. Upon our arrival in Europe we became quickly acclimated to the culture through a 3-day immersion experience called the Amazing Race. Next, a week of intern training took place in the Czech Republic. Having this time to be equipped for the mission-field was especially impactful on me, and helped give me solid footing for when I arrived in Celje.

Josiah Venture also does an incredible job of checking in with their interns. At the beginning of the summer I set specific goals for myself, and every week I meet with a full-time JV staff member, Gwynne Gardner, to review my WIC-5 (Weekly Intern Checkup) which covers five key areas: emotions/character, skills, relationship, spiritual growth, and anything else I need space to talk about. Having these weekly meetings has helped me stay focused as well as provide me with a tangible way to track my progress/growth over the summer. This type of accountability is a great way to be supervised and to build meaningful relationships with the people I work alongside of (both Slovene and American). As a result of the way we have been poured into by the missionaries we are working with, our weekly staff meetings are always enjoyable because it is like working with a tight-knit family. So far my internship has been characterized by joy, even in the midst of challenges. I couldn’t imagine being anywhere but Celje for the summer and can’t wait to see what God has in store over the next month and a half.