



KNIGHTLINE

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The Kingdom in the Margins of Urbana

As you heard in my last letter, God was doing, and continues to do, some significant, life-transforming work through the program of Urbana 09. But I have to say that one of the "Urbana highlights" for me was something he was, and continues to do, in the margins of Urbana.

Those of you who have been on this InterVarsity journey with us for awhile know that, since 2000, the country and people of Bosnia have developed a special place in my heart. That year my former area, the Central-South Coast, began a ministry partnership (twinning relationship) with the newly established IFES movement in Bosnia. I am very happy to say that the twinning relationship remains healthy and active today. It has led to nine summer teams visiting various cities in Bosnia to do ministry alongside Bosnian students. Currently there is even an InterVarsity Link-Staff couple, who were formerly on staff at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, serving with the Bosnian staff team. Good stuff has happened on both sides of the Atlantic because of this relationship! One of the joys of this partnership for me is that it has led to a wonderful personal friendship with Enisa Dedic, the General Secretary of IFES, Bosnia.

But who would have ever thought there would be some tie between Bosnia and St. Louis! At InterVarsity's national staff conference in 2008 I took advantage of the opportunity to join a bus tour of the city of St. Louis. During this tour we heard a bit about the multiple refugee communities in St. Louis. My interest was piqued when I heard that one of the more sizeable refugee communities in the city was the Bosnian community. Established as Bosnians fled their homeland during the 1990s Balkan war, some estimates put the size of this community as high as 50,000. Riding along the St. Louis streets I began to dream a little, "Could there ever be a way that some of the folks we are connected with in Bosnia could serve the refugee community here in St. Louis?" The thought raised some intriguing possibilities but, over time, faded into the background with our move to Madison and engagement in planning for Urbana 09.

But God wasn't quite done with the dream. About six months prior to Urbana, Cassie Meyer joined our operations team to serve as an admin assistant for our Volunteer Coordinator in St. Louis – who also happened to be her mom. I soon found out that Cassie was getting involved in a new church that had felt called by God to plant itself in the Bosnian community in St. Louis with a desire to serve that community and live out the gospel among them. The challenge – although convinced that they were called by God to be there, the church knew virtually nothing about Bosnian culture and those they had been sent to serve. *Hmmm, perhaps I knew someone who could help!* What if Enisa were invited to come to Urbana as our guest, take in the conference (which by itself would be a good reason to come!) and then meet with the leaders of this church (BEVO) to help them understand more about those they were called to reach? The dream could be coming to life.



Meghan and Enisa in St. Louis

To make a longer story short, I invited Enisa and she was able to come. Urbana was a great experience for her and she had a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with scores of people (students and staff) who had been on one of our nine Global Projects (summers) to Bosnia. Then, on January 2nd, after Urbana, Enisa and I (Meghan joined us too) met for about three hours with some of the leaders of the BEVO church to help them begin to understand more about the Bosnians and their community. Enisa had discovered, from friends in Bosnia, that many of the refugees in St. Louis had come from the Bosnian city of Srebrenica. A significant discovery as Srebrenica was the site of one of the most horrific genocides during the war. Enisa spoke the following day at the

Urbana 09 was successful as an eye-opening, life-transforming, commitment-producing call to join God's mission.

BEVO church service sharing some of her own story of coming to Christ from a Muslim family and up-bringing and providing the church with some insights about connecting with the Bosnians in their community. It was a wonderful gift for the church.

... and the dream continues. In early June of this summer 7 people from the BEVO church will be traveling to Bosnia where they will be hosted by Enisa to learn more about the country, culture, people and church of Bosnia! Their visit will include a trip to Srebrenica. I would ask you to pray for them – that this relatively brief exposure to Bosnia would enlighten and shape them in ways that will make them more effective in being the body of Christ among the Bosnians in St. Louis. Please pray that all that God intends would be accomplished through these established, and newly forming, relationships. I often wonder what all God may intend to do to make the dream a reality!

Big decision about our future

Looks like we'll be diggin' in for another three winters in Wisconsin! Earlier this month I made the decision to stay on and serve as the Director of Operations for Urbana 12. Prior to Urbana 09 I had been asked to consider staying but I didn't want to decide until Urbana 09 was over. It hasn't been the easiest of decisions as there were a number of things to consider in making it. However, through an extended time of prayerful consideration and the helpful counsel of others, we have arrived at what seems to be a good and right decision. Sherry is very supportive of the decision and, along the way, was probably even more settled with the idea of staying in Madison for another three years than I was. It is good to feel that we can settle a bit here – though we're not buying any burial plots!

As I write this letter Sherry and I are waiting to hear whether we will be able to begin a long-planned trip to Ireland today. Months ago we began planning a 10-day trip to Ireland to celebrate our 30th anniversary (which was in February) but the recent volcano in Iceland has had things on hold. Yesterday morning the trip seemed pretty unlikely so we began thinking about a "Plan B". But yesterday afternoon Heathrow airport opened and the airspace over Ireland was reopened. We will find out this morning from British Midland Airways, when their US office opens at 8:00AM, if the trip is a go. We're hoping so!

Blessings

Rob