

Tuesday May 30th

Waking up Tuesday morning, I expected it to be just another ordinary day. After graduating the past Friday and a busy convention weekend, I was ready to begin my summer and finally take a breath. Little did I know what would be in store for me just a few hours later. In such a short amount of time I had come to realize that the plans God had for me were so different than my own. The previous night I had given up my room to the Antimie girls---Alice, Miriam, and Abigail. These girls were complete strangers to me at the time. I had assumed that the next day would be the last I would see them for a long time, given that they live in Tennessee. The night before, I remember asking them where they were going. When Alice mentioned they were going on a mission trip to Romania, it didn't elicit that much of a response from me. I wished them a good trip and that was that. While I was intrigued, I had actually never thought about going to Romania myself, at least not for a few more years. The following morning my mom had suggested that I take the girls out somewhere. They had a few free hours before they planned to go to O'hare Airport. My sister Debbie and I decided to take them to a local shopping mall. While there, I bonded with all three of the girls. Throughout the day we would jokingly mention how great it would be if I went on the trip with them. While I knew they weren't being serious, a part of me began to consider the option, as crazy as it sounded in my head. I can recall telling the girls that I should ask my dad, and the girls suggested that I should. Coming back home I told my mom about the idea and we waited for my dad. When I asked him if I could go, without any hesitation, he said yes. They had no doubt in their mind, even with it being so last minute and with people I have never met. I am so thankful to God that I have parents that were willing to let me, their youngest daughter, go on this trip.

Wednesday May 31st

We arrived at the airport in Bucharest around 4 pm and we drove two hours north to the city of Buzau. We arrived at the church in Buzau where several members of the youth sang solos, while I sang in the choir for the first time as well. After the church service we arrived at the place we would be staying for the night, which was a missionary organization named God's Family. The pastor's family prepared a meal for us and we settled in for the night.





Thursday June 1

The following morning after breakfast we had a time of fellowship and worship. We left for the road and had a quick stop in Barlad before arriving in Vaslui later that day, where the service was held outside. After the service we handed out candy to the children. We left Vaslui to stay in Negresti for the night.



Friday June 2

After breakfast we left for Iasi. We visited the Star of Hope Foundation and got a tour of the facility. After the tour, a presentation was held where testimonies of missionaries and those with disabilities were given. The rest of the day was spent visiting the beautiful city of Iasi. We left



the city a few hours later and arrived in Suceava, at the Simeniuc family's house, who hosted us and provided a meal. The Antimie girls, their father, and I had planned to stay with a close family friend in Radauti for the few days that we planned to stay here, so we rented a car on our own and left for Radauti.



Saturday June 3rd

The following morning in Radauti Aurel showed us around his hometown of Marginea, a small village just minutes away. He took us to the house where he grew up as well as to the small town center. In one of the shops we were able to witness how the black clay is made into ceramics, what Marginea is known for. That evening we went to Filadelfia Church in Suceava. We had decided to combine our choir with theirs so we practiced together beforehand. After the service, the church provided a meal and the youth was able to play games on the field. We arrived back in Radauti and settled in for the night.



Sunday June 4th

The following morning, we attended Maranata Church in Radauti. After the service I met my cousins Ema and Edward Verhun, along with their parents, and my grandparents on my mother's side. We had lunch along with my cousin Iulia Verhun and her parents. I had the chance to spend time with my family before going to Betel Church in Suceava. After the service I went home with Iulia's family, where I spent the following nights.



Monday June 5th

The following morning, I visited my mother's home where she grew up, which was right next door to my cousin's house. I spent time with my grandmother and grandfather. Later on in the evening Iulia and Ema took me to Antique, a popular restaurant in Radauti. I spent the rest of the evening with my family.



Tuesday June 6th

Tuesday morning I met Adriana and Ghita Iacoban, my father's aunt and uncle. They took me into the town of Radauti where we visited several shops and restaurants. They then took me to Satu Mare, where my dad built an elderly home right next to the house where he grew up. They showed me around his former house and the elderly home, where I got to meet several of the elderly that lived there. They then took me to Herghelia Radauti, where we met one of Adriana's granddaughters who rode horses there. Later in the day Aurel picked me up from my cousin's house, and we went to a church in Vicovu de Sus.





Wednesday June 7th

The following day in Suceava we said our goodbyes to the Simeniuc family and other friends we had met. We left for Piatra Neamt where the church there hosted us for two nights. We got to explore the city and ride a cable car up the mountains, where we saw amazing views of Piatra Neamt from above. We attended a church service in Biczaz, and the pastor welcomed us into his home for food and fellowship afterwards.



Thursday June 8th

Although it rained heavily this day, we stopped at Cheile Bicazului, a national park in the Eastern Carpathian mountain chain, for a short visit. We also stopped to view one of the largest dams in Romania built along the Bistrita River, the Biczaz Dam. We attended a church service at the church that had hosted us in Piatra Neamt.



Friday June 9th

We left Friday morning for Brosteni, where we visited Bread of Life Orphanage. We were able to tour the facility and spend time with the children, handing out notes that the youth from Tennessee had written for the kids. The orphanage provided lunch for us. Afterwards we worshipped and had a short message prepared for them. Because the leaders were not yet sure where we would be spending the night, Aurel had called the mayor of a town nearby as a last resort. He informed us that he would be giving us a place to stay for the night. We were sure that this was God's hand at work. Expecting it to be a hotel, we were surprised to see that we were given cabins to stay in, at the resort Baile Figa in Beclean. The rest of the day we were able to enjoy its amenities.



Saturday June 10th

The following morning the mayor of Beclean, Nicolae Moldovan, met us in town. He showed us around his office building and invited us for breakfast. We then visited Salina de Turda, a salt mine that was converted into a museum for tourists. We were able to canoe at the bottom of the mine and visit shops that were set up outside. The rest of day was spent relaxing and hiking in the nature preserve of Cheile Turzii near Turda. We stayed at a pension in Cluj-Napoca for the next two nights.



Sunday June 11th

Sunday morning we attended Biserica din Albini, where I shortly met my cousin Emina Verhun and her husband for the first time. After lunch at the church we visited Iulius Mall in Cluj. In the evening we attended Biserica din Carpati. After church we visited a spot where we could see the whole city of Cluj from above.



Monday June 12th

We spent the majority of Monday traveling to the town of Lovrin. The Galea family, who had come from Tennessee as well, were staying with family here. They treated us to dinner before we went to the church service in Lovrin and after. We stayed at a pension for the night.



Tuesday June 13th

Tuesday we were able to explore the beautiful city of Timisoara for a few hours. We went to Jimbolia where we attended a church service. After the service the Galea family also invited us dinner where we had fellowship with those from the church.



Wednesday June 14th

Wednesday a member of the group who had grown up in Resita had contacted its mayor, Ioan Popa. He was able to bring us to a bed and breakfast resort, Ponton Casa Baraj, in Caras-Severin near Valiug. Here we enjoyed spending time at Gozna Lake and admiring the beautiful views it had to offer. That evening we went to church in Resita. Afterwards, we had fellowship with the youth of Resita at Complex Atlantic, a park near the pension we stayed at.



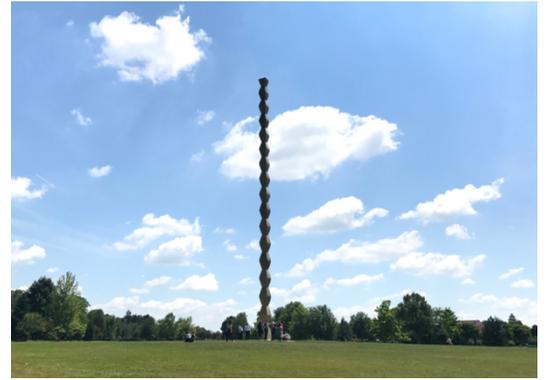
Thursday June 15th

Thursday we went into the city of Resita to visit and meet with Ioan Popa, who greeted us warmly. We went to a church service in Delinesti, a small town near Caransebes. That night we stayed at a pension in Caransebes and were able to explore the city.



Friday June 16th

Friday we visited a few national monuments in Targu Jiu such as Silence Table (*Masa Tacerii*), the Kiss Gate (*Poarta Sarutului*), and the Endless Column (*Coloana Infinitului*). That night we went to Biserica Betania in Targu Jiu and stayed at a pension.



Saturday June 17th

The following morning we took advantage of the mountainous area we were in and went hiking and climbing. We drove to the port city of Orsova, where we took a boat out on the Danube River and toured Veterani Cave, which has great significance in Romania's history. We arrived at a pension in Petrosani later that night.



Sunday June 18th

Sunday morning we attended a church in Vulcan. In the evening we attended a church in Petrosani. After the evening service we had a time of fellowship with the youth at a local gym.



Monday June 19th

Monday we had breakfast outdoors in the mountains of Petrosani and enjoyed our last few moments there. We arrived at the small village of Iacobeni, located in Sibiu, later on in the day. The church service was held in the cultural center as an act of evangelism as well as to make sure those who didn't know Christ would feel welcome. After the service we handed out candy to the children. We stayed at a pension in Agnita, where we were able to visit the very heart of Romania, at Dealu Frumos.



Tuesday June 20th

On our last full day we drove through Brasov to visit Peles Castle in Sinaia. We toured the castle and the surrounding area. We stayed at a pension in Ploiesti and were able to explore the neighborhood and shopping center.

Wednesday June 21st

Early Wednesday morning we departed for Bucharest airport, ending our trip.



Experiencing where I come from gave me a deeper appreciation of the country where my parents grew up. Able to finally see Romania with my own eyes, it highly exceeded my expectations. Every drive we took, I can recall being so mesmerized by the stunning views of mountain after mountain. It brings to mind the verse from Isaiah 52:7 that says, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" I was comforted by the fact that we were on a mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all who would listen. Even though there were times when we would be so exhausted from travel and service after service, we did not allow our flesh to get in the way of serving the Lord wholeheartedly. I will never forget how much passion each and every individual put into the songs they sang. Each sermon that was given was so powerful and Spirit led. What fascinated me the most was the fact that so many younger individuals went out of their comfort zones to serve the Lord. I can recall countless times when the teens would give a motivation for prayer and share what God had put on their heart during every church service. Throughout the whole trip I was mesmerized by God's beauty that was evident all around me. I realized how blessed I was back at home, and how I take things for granted a lot of the time. Although Vaslui seemed to be a poorer village where the people didn't have much, all I could think about was how they also had so much that we didn't. Back in America, I could never look into the distance and see a picturesque view of the mountains, all in my own backyard. To me, the beauty that I continuously saw all throughout Romania clearly portrays God's glory, just as it says in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hand." Everywhere we went we were welcomed with open arms and shown such great hospitality. When the people of Vaslui gave us a tour of their church, we were informed that the food they provided several times a day was open to everyone, not just to those that were believers. This was used as a way to be inviting to all and as an open door to evangelize. I realized that there are so many ways we could show Christ to others, and that it was up to us to make an effort as well as to be Christ's hands and feet. I can recall how happy I was when I heard that the church service in Vaslui was going to be held outdoors, as this was something I had never experienced beforehand. I will never forget how peaceful it was to see so many children, with so much energy and enthusiasm, gladly rejoicing in the Lord. I remember witnessing those that weren't believers listening in from afar, curious yet unwilling to attend. These people had gotten just a taste of the goodness of the Lord, and I pray that it planted a seed in them to have a desire to know more about Christ. Throughout the whole trip I was encouraged by the amount of people who had dedicated their whole lives to serving the Lord through different outlets. We learned that the organization "God's Family" took in people who had no place to go. A few of those individuals gave their testimonies, and they all spoke of how their past had left them in a place of hopelessness with nowhere to turn. "God's Family" welcomed them with open arms, giving them a place to live, while bringing them to know Christ's love at the same time. I can recall one man who told us how he was not able to see further than a few inches in front of him. However, God had restored his faith as well as his sight. It was encouraging to see so many people that came to Christ despite all of their setbacks. I

am reminded of Jeremiah 29:11, where God promises that He has “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”. We can all be comforted by the fact that God is always for us when we keep our focus on Him, regardless of whatever situation we may find ourselves in at that present moment. During our visit to Star of Hope we had learned that this organization was a center for kids with disabilities. If it weren't for this foundation, many of these parents would be left with nowhere to turn. Children of all ages, with physical disabilities as well as intellectual disabilities, such as down syndrome and autism, came there to be taught at a place where the instructors understand what they're going through. Star of Hope is not just a place for these children to learn developmentally and intellectually-- their firm Christian beliefs make it a place for children to grow in spirituality and their understanding of Christ. By the end of the trip, I could definitely notice a change in my own mindset. I became more in tune with the Spirit because I allowed God to work and witnessed the miracles He had done in other people's lives. I had come to look for God more all around me and continue to see His hand at work in my life.