



Weekly Missions Article

January 29, 2009

MISSIONS UPDATE

A letter from our Kingdom Partner, Mike McCollum

Nineteen months ago we arrived in Croatia with eager anticipation of working with Croatian believers to start new churches. In these months since we arrived here, we have experienced and learned many things. There have been both joys and struggles while living here and beginning our interaction with the people of Croatia.

Church planters need an extremely high level of cultural and language competencies wherever they work. It does not matter if it is in America or Croatia. To reach people we must be able to know them; to connect with them at a deep level.

Brenda and I are very proud of our children, Ariel, Connor, Ian, and Lily. Over this time, they have done everything we have asked of them. Lily attended the national school. All of them took formal Croatian language classes. Each has been involved with activities in church. They have participated in non-church, extra-curricular activities in the community. They even tolerated having both their parents in full-time language study for our first year here.

Despite the efforts all of us have made, we have come to the painful realization that we cannot attain the level of cultural and language competencies that are necessary to plant churches in Croatia. Without these competencies our family will either become inwardly focused and unable to minister or risk tearing apart and disqualifying us for ministry. We value each other and God's work here too much to let either happen.

Brenda and I have sought counsel to learn if there are any ways to address the adjustment needs of our family in Croatia. We have discussed as a family our options for continuing ministry in Croatia either in church planting or another ministry that would require less cultural adaptation. We have shared these concerns with our colleagues. We have prayed fervently. We have brainstormed.

Our conclusion is that for the health of our family we must return to the United States.

Having worked hard to make Croatia our "home," returning home will be difficult for us now. We believed that God called us to Croatia to serve Him. We believed that we came here in His will. However, we know that before God called us to Croatia, He called us to be His children. He called me to be a husband and Brenda to be a wife. He called the two of us to raise four wonderful children to be fully devoted followers of Him.

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Leaving Croatia does not mean that we are leaving God's will or calling. It means that we are following His calling on our lives. I don't know all the reasons He would bring us here for less than two years only to have us return to the United States. I do know that we are not the same people who began on this journey to Croatia more than five years ago. He has broadened our understanding of His creation, His people, and Him. He has shaped us in ways that we don't even know yet. He has prepared each of us to serve Him in ways we would not have been able had we not followed Him here.

With the support and full blessing of the SCE Area Council, we will leave Croatia at the end of February. We will remain with SEND through June 2009 while we seek counseling to help our family heal and while we explore the possibility of a State-side assignment with SEND. If such an assignment is not feasible, we will either enter an inactive and non-supported status with SEND or resign.

Of you, our partners in prayer and finances, we ask that you would help us by continuing in the manner you have. Please continue to pray for us. Pray for healing and direction. Support us emotionally. Brenda and I are not joyful about our return to the States. It will be much easier knowing that you are there and that you care for us; that you love us. Please continue to read our updates so that we can maintain this vital relationship with you and so that you will know how our progress is going with healing and another SEND assignment.

We can't thank you enough for the many ways you have stood beside us over the past few years. We are humbled and forever grateful.