Greetings from Lithuania,

I have accepted a new position with LCC International University. LCC has established a satellite campus in Tbilisi, Georgia. The goal is to offer Syrian war refugees and other war effected people a safe place to live that includes intensive English classes so that they can continue their lives and move on to college and universities in Europe or Canada. This program is a direct response to the flood of refugees coming from Syria to Europe. Most of the refugees cannot return home; they cannot stay in Jordan, or Turkey or Lebanon.  Their lives, their work and their education have been disrupted; they need skills to survive, including an education outside their home countries. As an international language, English will be a valuable ticket for them.

The LCC Board approved a satellite campus in fall 2015; so after securing funding for 3 years, our LCC staff is now moving along in the admissions process with many interested students. We will likely also work with internally displace people (IDPs) in Georgia. LCC is currently networking with the many NGO’s and international organizations that are already positioned in Europe and the Middle East; and LCC is getting much affirmation for a language program as one small solution to the growing crisis. Our staff is wrestling with a complicated tangle of bureaucracy to allow the refugees into Georgia legally. But we are hopeful that the way can be cleared for our prospective students to come to Tbilisi. We plan to begin classes in May.

There will be many hurdles in starting a satellite campus, not the least of which is recruiting teachers and developing curriculum. That’s where I come in; I’ll be directing the academic component of the program. In addition, we plan to have a full staff of counselors with expertise with victims of trauma as well as resident life staff to facilitate a safe, learning, dormitory environment. LCC has hired program directors who are former LCC professors whom I really respect.

I will be leaving Klaipeda, Lithuania, in early May, and moving to Tbilisi, Georgia. This decision has come after much prayer and discernment. Over this past year, I have been moved by the plight of war affected people and I realized that I can’t simply stay here and do nothing. At first, I was hesitant to move; I love Lithuania and Lithuanians dearly. But I can’t ignore this call from God; this is another move in a series of moves in my life in which I clearly hear God’s call. I love my job here; after 19 years, it’s going to be tough to move away from my support networks in Klaipeda. I will remain in my current role as chair of the English department through the spring. I will be a visiting instructor at Caucuses University in Tbilisi for one week in April as part of an Erasmus scholarship that I received. I will transition to Georgia in May. I will continue to be an LCC employee, essentially just working from the “other campus.”

The TESOL profession offers many opportunities to teach less fortunate people, to build peace through language instruction, and to promote multicultural communication. I teach English not because of “English” but because of the opportunities to breakdown stereotypes and to build mutual understanding between people from all over the world. There will be many steps of faith on the road ahead. As a new program, there are yet unknowns. However, we continue on, one step at a time, in faith that God has called us to this task. We know that reaching out in faith may lead to other opportunities, yet unseen.

Robin Gingerich