

# Faith Journal

July 2023

SERVING WITH CRU AT GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

## Life-Changing Summer in Estonia

It is hard to know where to start in telling you about the summer mission in Estonia! The days and weeks were full of significant moments of connecting with Estonian students, pouring into the American students, and, of course, enjoying living in Estonia again.

Our team of 30 Americans loved being in Estonia – the people, culture, and the beautiful town of Tartu. Our team of Americans were ready to take steps of faith to open up conversations about faith and the gospel. We experienced transformative growth in our walks with Jesus as we lived on mission!

Thank you for praying for us throughout the summer! The Lord opened doors to share the gospel with many Estonian students. During the majority of the days in Tartu, we spent the afternoons around Tartu University buildings for the purpose of meeting new students. Throughout the summer, we initiated conversations with students by letting them know that we were with Agape Estonia (the name of Cru in Estonia) and that we were interested in hearing what they think about life and spiritual beliefs. We used a variety of evangelism tools to guide the conversations.

During our six weeks in Estonia, we **initiated 975 conversations** with students. As we talked with these students, we were able to have **531 spiritual conversations**. This means we had the opportunity to hear what they believed and why. In addition, we were able to share some of our testimonies or some aspects of what we believe. During these conversations, we had the opportunity to have **276 gospel conversations** with

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## Agape Summer Camp

About half way through the summer mission, we went with the Agape Estonia staff and students to an island named Hiiumaa for a summer camp. This camp is designed as an outreach as we invited Christians and non-Christians to come spend four days with us.



Our summer mission group outside of the Agape Café.

Throughout this camp, we had fun-filled schedule of a bike ride to a lighthouse (9 miles), a bike ride to a beach (14 miles), talent show, and a bonfire. In addition, there were more Estonian activities like a night game challenge that end from midnight until 2 am as well as sauna time every night! Most importantly, we gathered together to hear short talks on topics like the purpose of life, where do you look for guidance in life

and forgiveness. After these talks, we met in discussion groups to process the content.

Karl signed up for the camp from only seeing a flyer about it on Agape Estonia's Instagram. Karl knew that



Herman and Kristel Jürgens who lead Agape Estonia (standing in the picture) are introducing two Estonian student leaders who were the emcees of the summer camp in Hiiumaa.

Agape was a Christian ministry so before committing to come he talked with one of the Agape staff members over the phone to make sure that it was the kind of camp he would feel comfortable attending. We are so glad that Karl came! Karl had a great time at the camp as he took part in everything. He shared in his discussion group that he was not a Christian. He felt comfortable sharing his own opinions and listening to other perspectives too. Robert (from our summer mission group) and Karl continued to stay in touch after the camp. About a week

later, Karl began to ask some questions about Christianity. Karl texted Robert: "Now

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students! We also had **45 follow up appointments** to spend more time with students we met. This was a priority as we desired to build relationships and have continued conversations about faith.

One of the first days in Tartu, Bec and Fernando (two of the summer mission students) met Mariana. They had a great conversation with Mariana as they went through a questionnaire about worldview beliefs. Bec and Fernando invited Mariana to come to a boardgame night that we were hosting at the Agape Café (Agape's ministry space).

Two days later Mariana came to this game night! Mariana had a great time as she connected with many others. The following week, we had an outing to go on a bog hike about an hour away from Tartu. This event was designed to be a day trip to connect further with the new students we had met. The hike was not only gorgeous, it also provided time for great conversations!

Around a campfire after our hike, I asked Mariana if she had any kind of faith background. This question launched us into a great conversation where she shared that she has no spiritual background but is open to hearing about Christianity. For the hour bus ride back to Tartu, our conversation continued. I shared my testimony of trusting in Jesus as my Savior and how He has made a difference in my life. Mariana was touched and even thanked me for sharing. Mariana was vulnerable about her life including a tragedy she has experienced. When I asked if she would be interested in meeting again to talk more about Jesus, she was eager to find a time to meet!

Rachel, one of the students who I was discipling over summer mission, came with me to meet Mariana. We met in the Tartu Botanical Gardens. The scene was picturesque as we sat on a bench and discussed the gospel! We talked through the Knowing God Personally App on my phone that has diagrams, Bible verses, and the capability to switch back and forth between Estonian and English.

Mariana shared that we were the first Christians she had met. She was drawn in by our personal stories about how Jesus had changed our lives. It was the first time she had heard the gospel. Mariana seems very aware that there is something more than just the physical world which we can see. In response to hearing about Jesus' love and sacrificial death to pay for our sins, she said it gave her a lot to think about.

Mariana even expressed herself that she is on a journey of trying to understand what she believes. She has interest in learning more about God. Please join me in praying for Mariana! Pray that she will see her need for Jesus and that He is the only One who can be her Rescuer and Hope. Also, please pray for her and others like her that we met to get reconnected to Agape in the Fall when they return to Tartu.

that I have Christian friends, I think I should know some more about Christianity."

Karl is just one of the many students whose lives were touched during our summer mission. For many of the students, it was just the beginning of them considering who Jesus claimed to be. Pray for Estonians to genuinely consider the truth of the gospel and come to faith in Jesus!

### Personal Reflections

I loved being back in Estonia! Over and over again, I was reminded of God's faithfulness in working through the ministry of Agape to transform students' lives. It was a joy to be alongside of the Agape staff team who I love as dear friends. In addition, I admire them so much as they faithfully preserve in sharing the gospel on hard soil.

Estonia is very high tech in every way. They have access to so much at their fingertips on the internet but yet they do not know about Jesus' love for them. Often during conversations, students would say: "I am Estonian so I do not believe in God." Yet, many still had some spiritual interest and longings.

As I asked students about their opinion about who Jesus was or his main message, I was surprised by their intellectual honesty in saying that they don't know enough about Jesus to say who He was. This opened doors for sharing the gospel. The typical response that I received when I asked if they would be interested in hearing what Jesus' main message was something along

the line of "yes - it would be good to know." It was a privilege to share the gospel! Of course, it is challenging to not see immediate responses to the gospel message when we long for them to know Jesus. For me, it was a good reminder in trusting God's timing and work in people's lives even when it is not evident in the moment



Mariana and I during the bog hike



Sunset at 10:30 pm with my Action Group by the river that goes through Tartu. These are the students who I disciplined and lead in a weekly Bible study.