

Study Abroad Story: Sara Eveler

Germany

So I am Sara Eveler, I am a senior, and I am going to be graduating in May of 2019, and I am a German major and a chemistry major.

I guess the biggest thing that changed with me while I was studying abroad in Germany is, I would say, my faith. When I went to Germany I was sort of at a low point in my faith. I had started getting really annoyed with people who were Christians, honestly. I felt like they would throw bible verses at me. I guess I was just really perceiving what was supposed to be kindness and help from these people as a negative thing. So at that point I was just really sort of like “Ugh, faith is so hard.” I go to church every Sunday, as I have my whole life. I grew up in the LCMS Lutheran Church and it was just, I don’t know, I was still there, but it wasn’t really meaning anything to me.

So before I went to Germany, I actually prayed, I said, “God, if anything is going to happen with my faith, please give me the opportunity that my faith will grow while I am studying abroad in Germany.” And so that was sort of a good dream, sort of a “wow, that’d be so great if my faith would get better while I’m in Germany.”

And so I guess it started instantly, really, this change. A friend of mine, she did the same program, actually, that I did in Tübingen. She lived there for a year, and she invited me. She knew I was coming over, she knew I was a Christian, and she invited me to her church, and so the second day that I was in Germany, I went to one of their church services. And it was called “Freedom Night,” so it was at 8 pm, and they are a very modern, contemporary, evangelical church. There was a bunch of dancing, a bunch of loud, very popular Christian music, and I was really overwhelmed. I was still tired from the flight . . . not used to an evangelical service where they really focus on the Holy Spirit and all that that is, and I was really just overwhelmed. I was like, “Wow, this is a lot,” coming from a really little Lutheran Church in Indiana . . . that was very different.

But for some reason, I kept going, I guess she convinced me, I didn’t know anyone, and is really a very nice person, so I kept going to this church. And I just slowly started integrating into the church. So I had a spiritual mentor, and I ended up being in a small group, and I just kept going further and further into this church. I just kept learning more and more and I kept understanding where they came from more. That’s something that I had not necessarily seen in other churches, is that when new people come in, they’re very serious about making sure one, that you feel welcomed, but also that they explain what it is that they’re doing, like why do they speak in tongues? That’s something that is unheard of in the LCMS church. So they’ll come up and be like, “Are you confused about anything?” “How can I help you understand?” regardless of if that’s something you want to do or not.

So that was really really cool that they did that and they worked with me, helped me realize some of my own problems. So I started integrating into this church, and the first thing I did, actually, was I got the spiritual mentor and went to this ABC course, which was basically just like a basic, “What do Christians

believe?” And so I talked about how I started really disliking people who would “throw” the bible verses at me, I really didn’t like reading the bible anymore. So we prayed about that at the end of that night and immediately it was better. It was crazy how much this prayer had helped me actually enjoy reading the bible, again. And those little things just happened all the time - just praying for each other and seeing instant changes, like people instantly feel better, and it could just be little things, too, like the stress about an exam and they just feel a sense of relief, because they know that people care for them.

So that overwhelming sense of support really helped me one want to grow close to a bunch of people at that church, but also helped me understand that that’s what a church community is supposed to be like - and that’s how God feels about me, he is always there for me. So it just helped me to, in general, grow in my faith and just understand that having a relationship with God is a lot easier than I thought it was. I thought it was, I don’t know, it wasn’t that he was this big deity that you can’t have a relationship with. I guess I didn’t understand the fundamentals of prayer, which I understood in that course, where it’s just like you’re talking to your best friend. And even if it seems silly, talking out loud to God when you’re in the car or wherever you are . . . it’s actually really nice. It seems really silly, but . . . it’s a lot more simple than what I thought it was.

As I grew in my faith, and as I relearned the basics, the foundations of my faith, I kept recognizing how important service is in the Christian community. I joined their little coffee team - I work at Grinders here at the University - and so they had this little coffee team. So every other Sunday I would go help out and make coffee for people, and we would clean the church, like all the small groups had little cleaning-the-church sessions, so I would do that, and it just helped me realize that service is really important to me.

And that helped me in more ways than just my faith, just being back in the United States, going into the career I want to be in is . . . I want to be an optometrist. For a long time, I literally just decided I was going to be an optometrist and didn’t really have a reason why. But this church helped me realize that, as an optometrist, I can really serve people. I can help people with their sight. And knowing me, when I first went to my optometrist, she was the most welcoming person I had ever met, and that’s what I want to be for someone else, I want to be that serving, that caring person. It’s just an eye exam, but somehow it made a really big impact on me -- just knowing that I can serve people in many many ways. Service is really important, and anyone can do it and that makes a big difference.

I’m not sure if going to a church here in the United States, specifically an evangelical church, would have made the exact same change as this evangelical church in Germany did. I’d like to think it would, but I think going abroad to Germany just sort of opened my mind to a bunch of different possibilities. I think if I had gone to an evangelical church in the United States, that I wouldn’t have been as open to staying there. I would have just gone back to another Lutheran church, would have gone back to another church that was more comfortable for me.

So I think being in Germany, specifically at the very beginning of my experience in Germany, where I didn’t know anyone. I just knew this one girl who went to this church. I knew I wanted to grow in my faith. I decided to go there and I went with it. I think because I was so open, just because of all those little things that were happening, like *brand-new* in Germany, whatever, I feel like that is what made me open to that style of church that I probably wouldn’t have been in the United States.