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Liberty University

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## Changing Culture: Missions-minded senior holds ties to homeland of Romania

June 01, 2009 | Sarah Funderburke

Campioni Pentru Hristos! That means champions for Christ in Romanian, one of several languages familiar to Liberty University senior Philip Luca.

Born in Brasov, Romania, in 1986, Luca grew up in the former communist country where religious freedom is still a recent concept.

As a child, his family members were some of the few Baptists living in Romania, with over 87 percent of the population being Christian Eastern Orthodox and another 5 percent being Roman Catholic.

“My grandma was saved in our village, which was very hard for her and for my grandfather because they were very ostracized,” Luca said. “For my parents, it was a bit easier, although under communism they were persecuted, especially my dad; he was sent to a canal to dig with the Army because he didn’t want to give his Bible away.”

**Training Champions for Christ**



“A Champion for Christ is somebody who loves Jesus above everything else and wants to pay their price to search for and live the truth.”

— Philip Luca

Luca became a Christian when he was 12, and although he faced some stigma at school for being Baptist, it was not as harsh as what his parents and grandparents experienced.

“People don’t really know about us [Baptists] there,” Luca said. “I wouldn’t say I was persecuted, just looked weird upon.”

Although he did not come to the United States until he was 19 and entering his freshman year at LU, he learned English long before ever stepping foot on American soil, thanks to some unusual and very famous teachers: Bugs Bunny and the “Cartoon Network” cast.

“In school we were taught English since kindergarten ... but you really learn English from watching TV and watching movies because the good movies, at least, are all in English,” Luca said. “And from cool music ... You kind of learn it from the pop culture, so to speak.”

Luca ended up at Liberty University because of the encouragement of two alumni, older sister Patricia and a cousin, but he said that Dr. Jerry Falwell may have been responsible for Romanian students in general finding out about Liberty.

“I hear that in the ’90s, right after communism fell, Jerry [Falwell] went to Romania and gave 40 [Liberty University] scholarships away and people came [to LU] and then their relatives came, and so on,” Luca said.

During his sophomore year at Liberty, in 2007, Luca began considering organizing a mission trip to his native country.

“I just felt God laying it on my heart that I should plan a mission trip back home to Romania because I know the people and I know the language.”

After talking to some friends, and trying to see how much student interest there would be in the trip,

Luca made the decision to trust God and start planning it. Although he had been on a mission trip his freshman year to New York, organizing an international trip was much more involved.

“I started everything from scratch,” Luca said. “I had no idea how to put a mission trip together. There’s no booklet that I knew of that explained it.”

About 13 students signed up for the trip, and Luca organized in-depth training sessions.

Then, about a week out from the scheduled departure date, there was a major hiccup in Luca’s plans.

“My passport never came through,” Luca said. “It was supposed to have come months before that [date].”

Rather than call off the whole trip, or send the students over without a guide, Luca asked his best friend, Dorin Captari, another Romanian student at LU, if he would lead the trip.

“My best friend was going to Romania just to see his parents, and I talked to him about a week prior [to the departure date] and said, ‘Buddy I need you to lead this trip if my passport doesn’t come through,’” Luca said.

Captari agreed, and although Luca remained in the U.S., the rest of the group successfully made it to Romania and spent 10 days running a Vacation Bible School for gypsy and local children in Brasov.

Although passport issues forced him to miss the 2007 trip, Luca did eventually receive the document, and was able to visit Romania with Liberty friends in 2008. He is currently planning a second mission trip to Romania this summer.

“We’ll be working with the orphans in Romania doing some urban ministry and working with a local church to do outreach,” he said.

**Luca shares his story for LU's "[What's Your Story?](#)" campaign**

On campus Luca holds down two jobs: one as a quiet studies monitor in a computer lab in DeMoss Hall and another as a Resident Assistant (RA).

“I wanted to be involved with the student leadership on campus so I started out being an SLD [Spiritual Life Director], and then I moved into an RA position,” Luca said. “I think half the stuff I have learned at Liberty has come from being an RA.”

Working as an RA has strengthened Luca’s people skills and problem-solving skills — two qualities that

are important to him because he hopes to be a pastor some day.

“It’s really good life training,” Luca said of being an RA. “It makes you speak up; it makes you learn how to confront people.”

This spring he was dual enrolled in Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary courses and the final undergrad course requirements to complete his Biblical Studies major and Computer Science minor.

Although he enjoys dorm activities and prayer groups, his favorite part of working as an RA initially sounds a bit unusual.

“I just love room checks; it’s so cool. Sometimes I spend an hour doing them,” Luca said.

His interest in room checks doesn’t lie in a love of punctuality and enforcing Liberty’s curfew, but rather in getting to know the students living in his hall.

“I just love to talk to the guys ... and that’s a time when they’re open about their lives,” Luca said. “Every now and then you find somebody who is looking for a good friend or a good talk.”

Luca will enter his third year as an RA this fall, when he also begins taking Seminary courses full time.

“I think it’s the people and friendships that make this place.”