

*Design by Colton Taylor.
Photo by Emma Zipperer.
Circular photos provided by Laura Bielec.*





LEARNING ABROAD

MRS. LAURA BIELEC
EXPERIENCES TESTS
OF FAITH DURING
HER TRIP TO SPAIN

Spanish-inspired crafts hung from her ceiling. Posters riddled with translations and charts lined her walls like a colorful spectrum. Mrs. Laura Bielec stood at the front of the class, lecturing on correct pronunciations and filling her board with notes. Every detail in her room reflected Spanish culture, which she personally experienced by taking an eye-opening trip to Spain.

In high school students, Bielec found taking a foreign language class difficult. She had no interest in Spanish her first year of study. Eventually she gained an appreciation for the language by applying it to her life.

"[The first year of foreign language] is kind of overwhelming, but then [for] the second and third year, it was very easy for me," Bielec said. "I just found that I really liked it and I was really interested in maybe doing missions one day overseas."

Bielec continued to take Spanish in college and wanted to major in it. She had hopes of getting a job in business or translating, but she wanted something more. As an undergrad at the University of Georgia Bielec took a trip to Spain. Going with people she did not know she could have her own experience.

"I found a program at UGA where I knew I wouldn't know anybody so I could have a completely individual experience. I wanted to meet new people and just see what happened," Bielec said. "When I got there [Spain] I was actually pretty uncomfortable because Spain is a lot more liberal than it is here."

Her whole life, Bielec surrounded herself with good Christian friends that all shared the same morals. She was taken aback by the night life and lack of spirituality rampant in Spain. It was her first time seeing what the rest of the world could be like outside of her usual church services and Bible studies.

"I came to Spain to learn Spanish and I came there to meet new people and to see how God could use me in Spain. I quickly realized that people who study abroad do not go for those same reasons," Bielec said. "I was actually paired up with the only other Christian on the trip, which was pretty crazy. It just happened that way and I knew that was God's blessing."

Bielec and her friend did not let the rest of the world shake their faith. Despite criticism and temptation, they would often climb to the top of a bell tower and pray for the rest of the city. Bielec also joined a Bible study for people all over the world. During a small trip to Portugal, Bielec befriended an atheist. They had conversations about faith, but Bielec never pressed her into becoming a Christian.

"The best thing that came out of my trip to Spain was that [the atheist] became a Christian after we got home and that was insane," Bielec said. "I didn't get to serve in orphanages or find local ministries like I wanted to when I was in Spain, but thankfully God gave me the opportunity to have a friendship with somebody and it led to them becoming a Christian."

Bielec returned to Georgia with a bigger world view than before. It was shocking for her

to come back from a country that seemed unaware of God then go to grad school where everyone was content, unaware of what lies overseas. After grad school, Bielec was able to teach and found teaching high school was best for her. Her adventurous spirit still led her to want something more, so she decided her Spanish students should go abroad as well, this time to Costa Rica.

"[Christian Immersion Spanish Academy] is a really cool organization because [the students] can learn Spanish and [they] are going to get to experience what it's like to know a Costa Rican family," Bielec said. "[We are going to] increase

**"THANKFULLY GOD
GAVE ME THE
OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE
A FRIENDSHIP WITH
SOMEBODY AND IT LED
TO THEM BECOMING A
CHRISTIAN."**

MRS. LAURA BIELEC

our Spanish and serve other people. I just want to take Calvary kids to see another thing and I think we should use our resources to do that."

Her trip to Spain influenced her to pursue Spanish for the rest of her life. Bielec immersed herself into a new culture which she previously was never been to do.

"[Traveling] helps you grow as a person," Bielec said. "I thought, as a teacher, I want to be able to keep exploring because you learn so much by traveling."

Story by Haley Burke.