

Paul and Albana's Prayer Letter



Dear Friends,

Greetings from Korçë. We hope you are keeping well? It seems so recent here that we passed through week upon week of snow for a four-month period. Some of that can still be seen clinging to the high peaks around us, but down in the city the temperature today is 30 Celsius, and sandals are back as the daily choice of footwear as spring heats up rapidly into summer.

At Easter, we organised a special celebration with a service and activities in the church garden in Vloçisht (top photo, Palm Sunday). Albana shared a message on the porch from the sketch board about Jesus bringing all things back to life. Petrika had chosen a film clip that showed how children in Israel had experienced Jesus' life and what it meant to them. The children did their own drama about the events surrounding the resurrection. Darda, Petrika and Margarita's daughter,

came to lead worship on the keyboard. Illir cooked up 120 sausages on our barbeque to put into bread rolls for everyone, and Hanni entertained the small children with a giant bubble wand. Eliada, Petrika and Margarita's other daughter, led a raffle for a frozen chicken, and I led a big 'tug of war' with a fifteen-meter rope. It was a terrific event, with almost a hundred people present in the warm, late-April sunshine.

As the post-pandemic travel regulations relaxed, we were really pleased to welcome back this May our first international visitors to work with us since 2019: John and Heather Knowles. Dr John didn't do his usual medical clinic in the village, but did a number of quick checks and consultations in passing with people about their health. He led a Bible study with a joint meeting for the men from Vloçisht and Bulgarec (first full services to be held there from June 5th), preached at our Sunday service, and also got stuck into some practical work around the church garden with me repairing the wood tower and painting a picnic table. Heather shared a word with the women's group and led a popular jewellery-making workshop with the girls. They came along too with Petrika, Margarita, Albana and I on home visits where we prayed with families, and were an encouragement to us and to the church members they spent time with.

Since Christmas, we have had to negotiate a difficult period with our youth leader, who I eventually had to suspend and then stop serving in Vloçisht. Two of the older youth in his programme continued to come for a short while whilst I led the group, including Wilson, who was baptised in the summer. I brought in extra help from a young man called Keli, who leads a church plant in another of the Korçë villages. We tried repeatedly to contact and meet these young men, and to regather the group with an event a few weeks ago, but with little fruit to show for it, and so for the moment have put the programme on pause.

We took these boys for a coffee at the Montrelux Hotel on the mountain above Korçë last November, and gave them a very clear gospel presentation, sensing the Lord's presence with us on that day. I shared with them then three of the Lord's special promises for those who choose Him: 'He will be with us always. He will give us strength. He will

help us in times of trouble.’ So for the moment, content in that knowledge, we have given them over to the Lord. We would, of course, love to be able to continue to disciple them, so we would ask you to keep them in prayer.

With the younger teenage boys, Albana and I have had more success in gathering them back. As well as the core Bible study, we have cooked sausages with them, taken them to the ‘Pheasant Forest’ for rides on Hanni’s electric scooter, made caramel tea and played ‘Jenga’ for prizes. For Risti, Mateo, Eric, Arnold and others, please pray that the seeds sown in them will take root and grow for the season they are with us. “My prayer is that they will seek who Christ really is,” says Albana, “and as they pass through the trials they’ve been facing they will gain the crown of life.”

Albana says that she is encouraged by the knowledge her women’s group now have of God’s word, and their dedication to coming to the meetings despite being busy with their work. “When they get teased, they have stood their ground and invited others to join them,” she says. “When people have challenged Kadime about her health issues and financial difficulties, she has answered them that it is better to go through such situations with God than without Him.” The women have been praying about where God will use them in service in the life of the church. “One woman called Lika came forward this week to say excitedly that she would like to gather the women of her neighbourhood to do a Bible study in one home there, and that in fact she was already setting it up!”

Also in May, I held the third meeting of a group I’ve founded to help Albanian Christian writers develop their work: ‘Eagles Writers’. The idea has been to connect them up for support, encouragement, training and advice as they work out their own callings to serve the Lord with this particular area of skill. It began with three of us and we now have sixteen members in Albania and around the world. It takes its inspiration a little from ‘The Inklings’, and has the banner: ‘Farsight the eagle was a friend of the King, and he fought with him. He was a messenger and he could see across great distances.’ ‘Farsight’ was a

character in CS Lewis' 'The Last Battle'. After Pastor Arjan and I prayed for the group, I was contacted a day later independently by the Association of Christian Writers to mentor an Albanian Christian writer based in Tirana known to both of us.

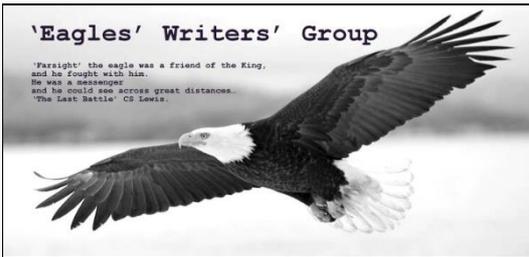
I recently dropped Hanni back at his boarding school in Bath after three weeks with us here in Albania over the Easter holidays. The first thing we did when we picked him up at the airport in Thessaloniki was to take him out for one of his favourite meals downtown in the city: a big, seafood, spaghetti dish the Greeks do very well. Perhaps it is meals like this or the vigorous sport at the school that has caused him to reach the same height as me at the age of 13. He is surely going to pass me by far!

May Christ shine strong in your hearts.

Paul, Albana and Hanniel.



Dr John makes a thorough examination of Shyqo's leg!



Banner for the 'Eagles' Writers' group for Albanian Christian writers.



Girls in the church gather for Heather's jewelry-making workshop.



Albana and (a well-fed) Hanni in Greece during Hanni's Easter holiday.



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Paul and Albana serve with Open Air Campaigners, Albania.

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