

I'M A LAND OWNER

In October, after a lengthy process, I officially became the owner of a small piece of Croatia, upon which I plan to eventually build a house. It is about 1,000 square meters, or about 1/4 of an acre, and is located in a village just beyond the western edge of Zagreb. Thank God with me for this provision, and that God uses this place to draw people to himself. Much thanks also to all those who gave for this purchase. Here's the address: Ivanska ulica, Jagnjić dol, Sveta Nedelja. That is...I will eventually live on John's street, in the Valley of the Lamb, in the town of Holy Sunday. I asked three people from the church to be my land search committee; to look at various properties with me, advise me through the process, and help me with the final selection of the parcel. The property that I finally purchased (photo at left), out of all the properties at which we looked, was the top pick of all three on my search committee. Because I am a foreigner I had to apply to the Croatian Ministry of Justice for permission to purchase the land, a process which took about three months to complete. Over the next few months, and especially into the spring and summer, I will be doing a lot of site work.



WHAT'S AHEAD

My next big project is organizing the second Jesus Conference, which we will hold in Zagreb on March 12-14. Then it will be time to prepare for Champs Camp, which will be in June. We plan to hold Champs Camp at Lake Jarun, like we have done the last four years. This time we also plan a second Champs Camp in the neighborhood around the church/institute building. Several of us have dreamed of a week of Bible camp for our teens. We are hoping, with God's help, to make that a reality sometime this next summer. As I said above, I hope to at least do preparatory site work for my house in the spring and summer, and perhaps even begin the initial construction phase. Next fall I will celebrate five years in Croatia, which means I will be eligible to apply for permanent residency.



PRAYER POINTS — 2015

- Pray for the direction and fellowship of the Holy Spirit in all things and that I will be quiet enough to be able to hear Him.
- Pray for obedience to follow God's ideas and timing for ministry and not my own.
- Pray for continued favor with the Croatian authorities, especially in regard to my residence permit. Pray that I will receive my permanent residency in the fall. Passing a test of language fluency, history, and culture is a part of the requirements for this.
- Pray for my continued progress in language acquisition.
- Pray for God's provision of finances.
- Pray for the completion of the initial site work on my piece of land.
- Pray for the resources to begin the construction process on my house.
- Pray for friendships and close fellowship, with both Christians and non-Christians.
- Pray for unity among the various churches and mission groups in Croatia.
- Pray a covering of God's protection over the missionaries and other servants of God in Croatia. Pray for health and strength in their bodies, hearts, souls, marriages, and homes.
- Pray for a hunger and thirst for Jesus in Croatia, and in my own life.
- Pray for increased discipline in my life.
- Pray that many children and youth will come to know Jesus through this work, and that a new generation will be raised up to follow Jesus in Croatia.
- Pray for my work with the Biblijski institut staff and faculty, that we will grow strong working relationships.
- Pray for natural, everyday opportunities to share Jesus with people.
- Pray that in all things the Kingdom of God is advanced.

TO SEND DONATIONS:

To make an online donation, go to my blog address below. Make physical checks payable to Pond Springs Church of Christ and mail to this address:

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Steve Taliaferro Mission Fund
c/o Jan Swinney
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Steve Taliaferro 2014 Ministry Report

Zagreb, Croatia

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GREETINGS FROM CROATIA!

Dear Friends,

As I write this, I sit at the kitchen table in my apartment in Sveta Nedelja, just beyond the western edge of Zagreb. Reflecting on the events of the year, I find it challenging to adequately put into words and boil down a year's worth of life and ministry into these four pages. However, I do hope you enjoy reading here about the events in my life and work in Croatia during 2014. You can keep up with me throughout the year by following my blog at: www.stevetaliaferro.blogspot.com. On the blog site, you can also subscribe to my email newsletter, which I produce a few times per year. I am thankful to God for you and pray God's peace, joy, and life for you in the year ahead.

Blessings,

*Love the Lord your God with all your
heart and with all your soul and with
all your mind...and love your neighbor
as yourself. — Jesus*



INTERESTING CROATIA FACTS

- On the days of October 31, and November 1 and 2, Croatians go to place flowers and candles at the graves of relatives (photo above).
- In the middle ages, The Croatian coast was the site of a struggle for power between Venice (Northern Italy) and Dubrovnik (Southern Croatia).
- The baptistry in our church building in Zagreb is modeled after one found on the Croatian coast, dating back to around 900 AD (photo at left).

BIBLIJSKI INSTITUT PROJECTS

I was involved in several projects this year for Biblijski institut. In the spring we started an extension program with students from churches in the coastal city of Split. We send a professor to them one weekend each month. The students complete one course over two intensive weekends. I started out coordinating the logistics of the program. I went to Split personally in early December to teach my Pedagogy (Education) class. We are viewing the program in Split as the beginning of a much larger distance learning program, in order to reach students from around the region who cannot be in residence in Zagreb. In May we held a reception for alumni, at which we heard updates from them and prayed for them and their ministries. We also enlisted their assistance with recruiting new students. In the fall I spent a week and a half at our partner school, Evangelical Theological Seminary, in Osijek, eastern Croatia. I was there teaching my class, Introduction to Pedagogy (methods of teaching). In November I was responsible for coordinating our graduation ceremony (photo at right). This was the fourth graduation in the history of the Institute. We celebrated the largest graduating class ever, with 11 students receiving certificates and diplomas.



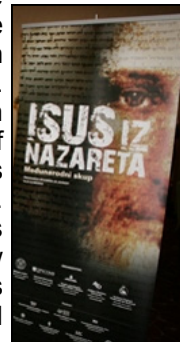
CHAMPS CAMP IV

On June 16-19, for the fourth year in a row, we hosted Champs Camp at Lake Jarun in Zagreb. This was our biggest camp ever, with 93 children attending. We also had our largest group of Croatian teen helpers, many of whom were campers in previous years and who are now helping work the camp. We also had a group of American volunteers with us from Lindale, Texas. They were led by friends who previously lived and worked with us in Zagreb. For four days the children enjoyed Bible lessons, games, skits, snacks, crafts, and lots of fun. We also had three days of activities after camp to pour something extra into the lives of our teen helpers. Several of them are now considering what it means to follow Jesus themselves. We are encouraged by how many of the kids' faces, names, and parents we now know, because they have attended each year. We also had probably our largest group of parents who came to the camp closing. Then they wanted to stay around afterwards, visiting with us and each other. God even blessed us with a window in what was some quite stormy weather in Zagreb. Please pray for this continuing outreach to our community.

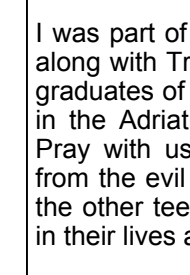


JESUS CONFERENCE

One of the most significant projects with which I was involved this year was our Jesus Conference. Held in Zagreb January 23-25, this was Biblijski institut's first such conference on a large scale. I was responsible for most of the logistical details of the conference. We had about 20 guests speakers, and close to 300 participants from various church backgrounds, as well as non-Christians. We heard academic papers read in daytime sessions at the University of Zagreb. We also heard keynote sermons each evening at the Hotel International. The speakers focused on Jesus as He is presented in both the Old and New Testaments. With teachers and preachers from the USA, Romania, Israel, and Croatia, it was a real international event. The conference was a great success, with local media coverage and good feedback from churches, and the name of Jesus was truly lifted up.



LEADING YOUTH



I continued this year in being part of teaching and leading the youth in our churches. I am involved in monthly teen gatherings, together with the Croatian minister of our church, Mislav Ilić, and Trevor and Kayla Keele, an American missionary couple working with the Church of Christ in Varaždin. We are dreaming of and planning for a new camp for teens next summer. I also led the teen discussion group at our annual spring retreat. August 8-15 saw us on the island of Ugljan, for camp at Činta. This was the 45th summer the Churches of Christ in Croatia have gathered on the coast for Bible camp. I was part of the team leading the teen discussion group, along with Trevor and Kayla, and Andrej and Nina Lovše, graduates of the Institute. Two of our teens were baptized in the Adriatic Sea at the campsite (photos above left). Pray with us for these young souls, for their protection from the evil one, and for their growth in faith. Several of the other teens are also currently contemplating this step in their lives and their walks with Jesus.

NEW ROLE AT BIBLIJSKI INSTITUT

As I mentioned on the front, with the start of this academic year (large photo above) I assumed a new role at Biblijski institut. I am now the Operations Manager, with wide-ranging responsibility in most areas of operations (non-academic). In this role, I am one of three leaders of the school, along with our Director and Academic Dean. On a daily basis, I am responsible for working with the staff, as well as for general office management. This includes leading staff meetings, counseling with staff on work matters, and training new staff on office procedures. It also involves creating office processes and procedures, and managing facilities. In addition, I have responsibility for approving purchases, financial management, and leading the budgeting process. Along with these new duties, I continue to be responsible for managing various major projects and events for the Institute, coordinating outside communication pieces, and scheduling the production of various printed materials. In this new role, I honestly feel a bit in over my head at times. However, I know that God is growing me through this, and I am confident that He has put me here.



CHURCH LEADERSHIP



Our congregation in Zagreb has a leadership team that consists of three elders and six other "servant leaders," of which I am one. This spring, after the death last year of our minister, Mladen Jovanović, the nine of us started a process of evaluating where we are as a congregation, discerning God's purpose for us, and establishing our vision and mission for the future (photo at left). This process took us most of the spring and fall to complete. It was amazing to us that we all came basically to the same five areas that we feel like our congregation needs to focus on and develop over the next several years. We feel like this was definitely Spirit-led, the way it came about. Those five areas are: Evangelism, Discipleship, Body Life, Humanitarian Work, and Worship. As part of both Discipleship and Body Life, we agreed that we need a renewed focus on small groups in the church. The elders have been working to identify servant leaders for each area. I was asked to develop and lead our small group ministry. I am also among those who have been sharing the preaching duties this year. Pray along with us, that we will continue to catch God's vision for us as a congregation. Exciting days are ahead for our congregation and for the Kingdom in Croatia!