

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Please partner with us in prayer (see prayer needs below left). Please also participate with your financial contributions, in the following ways (see methods through which to contribute below right):

- **Become a new monthly supporter of me personally. I need to find \$500 more per month in personal support.** This is because I have to begin paying taxes in Croatia next year, which will amount to \$3,000-\$4,000 per year. This will also help to replace some regular monthly support I have lost over the last few years.
- **Make a one-time donation toward our start-up expenses of \$30,600 for the Youth Center.** This includes: Late model used van; computers and printer; furniture and supplies; musical instruments.
- **Monthly support for our Youth Center and related youth and family ministries. Our monthly budget is \$6,400.** We have \$2,500 per month pledged through 2020. You can help us with the rest, and beyond 2020. This budget includes: Support for two Croatian co-workers; rent and utilities for Youth Center space; office supplies and printing; accounting; van registration and maintenance; website and promotional materials; camps, retreats, and seminars.

HOUSE UPDATE

During the last part of the summer and throughout the fall, I *finally* watched my house become reality. Much thanks to many of you who helped with this project. Construction of the foundation started in early August, with most of the rest of the house following in September and October. The photo here was taken in early November. By the time you read this, we should be finished with most of the interior details: water, electric, heating, floors, paint, etc. I hope to move in just after the first of January. My new address is in the side bar at right. Your guest room will be ready for your visit next year. Come see me! Pray that this home will be a place of personal rest and refuge, as well as ministry. A place where people feel the presence of God's Spirit and are drawn to Jesus.



PRAYER POINTS — 2020

- Pray for the fellowship of Jesus and counsel of the Holy Spirit; the life God wants me to live, and the work He wants me to do; that it is done in and through me.
- Pray for grace, mercy, peace, and joy.
- Pray for friendships and close fellowship for me here.
- Pray that this generation of young people in Croatia are raised up to follow Jesus.
- Pray for confidence and increased leadership ability as I lead these ministries.
- Pray for my work and interactions with Mateja and Igor; that we will grow strong personal and working relationships.
- Pray for favor toward us and our ministry from government offices and officials.
- Pray for continued, stable, and even some new personal financial support.
- Pray for the completion of support for Mateja and Igor, as well as the funding for our new youth ministry initiatives and Youth Center.
- Pray for the location of just the right space for our Youth Center.
- Praise and thank God along with me for my house. Pray that it will be a place of both refuge and ministry, for me and for others. Pray that the house will be a place where people feel the presence of God's Spirit and are drawn to Jesus.
- Pray for unity and cooperation, instead of competition and jealousy, among the various churches and mission groups in Croatia. Pray for healthy relationships.
- Pray God's protection over the missionaries and other servants of God in Croatia. Pray for health and strength in our bodies, hearts, souls, marriages, and homes; and for the protection of relationships.
- Pray for a greater hunger and thirst for Jesus in Croatia.
- Pray for natural, everyday opportunities to share Jesus with people.
- Pray that in all things the Kingdom of God is advanced in this place.

CONTRIBUTIONS

You can use the Venmo mobile app. "Pond Springs Church" is the payee to search for, and my name should be written in the "What's it for?" section.

To donate online, click "give" on my website (address below).

Make physical checks payable to *Pond Springs Church* and mail to this address:

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Steve Taliaferro

2019 Ministry Report



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GREETINGS FROM CROATIA

Dear Friends,

I am taking a different approach in this year's report than I have in previous years. I am focusing in these pages on the biggest news of the year: A new ministry focus to which God has been calling me, and into which I have launched. In addition to the goals and strategies of these new ministries, you will also find inside some stories of specific young people who have been, and continue to be, impacted by these ministries. Please pray for us and for these dear ones as you read.

*Engaging and serving youth and families;
encouraging them toward discipleship;
and capturing the next generation for Jesus.*

Blessings to you,

NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVES

This new ministry focus is actually not new. Each of the last nine summers we have offered Champs Camp to 100-130 neighborhood children. Around 50-60% of the children and families that are involved each year are repeats from previous years. The camp has gained a good reputation, and we have developed trust and relationship with these families.

We have 15-20 Croatian teenagers each summer who volunteer, helping make Champs Camp happen. These teens were all once campers themselves. Having aged out of the program, they want to stay involved. We now have special activities with these teens both before and after the camp. They are considering for themselves what it means to follow Jesus.

Our Youth Camp has also seen steady growth over the last five years. With 30 teens, this last summer's camp was the best attended so far. We also saw some significant spiritual advances with many of these young people.

Now it is time for a more consistent, year-round approach. I am shifting my full-time attention away from my role at the Zagreb Bible Institute, in order to devote myself to encouraging these youth and families, both in their lives in general, and toward a relationship with Jesus. Read on to find out more...



INTERESTING CROATIA FACTS

- Young people tend to **live with their parents until about age 32.**
- Croatia has one of the **highest youth unemployment rates** among European countries.
- Since 2013, **some 300,000 — 400,000 people have left Croatia** to live in western Europe.
- In spite of reporting being unhappy with their social status, and Croatian society in general, almost **2/3 of young people recently surveyed said that they want to stay.**

MINISTRY GOALS

- To consistently engage youth and families in year-round activities, in addition to and outside of Champs Camp and the Youth Camp; so that we can further develop connections and relationships with them and point them to Jesus.
- To love and serve these youth and their families in a meaningful way, by creating culturally relevant opportunities for them to experience an encounter with Jesus.
- We desire to bring many of these youth and families to a saving faith and discipleship with Jesus.
- Continuing and building on the successes of our Champs Camp and Youth Camp, we will develop and implement new ministry strategies designed to engage these young people, and others, throughout the year.
- The idea is a comprehensive, developmental approach that follows young people in ministry throughout their lifespan, from childhood into young adulthood.

MINISTRY STRATEGIES

A centerpiece of our strategy is a **Youth Center**. This will be a welcoming place where young people (and their parents) can gather; find a place to belong; as well as experience fellowship, support, mentoring, and discipleship; all from people they already know through the camps. The Center will also serve as a base and a "staging area" for our ministry out in the community. To serve as an administrative and legal support for the ministry, we plan to register a Croatian non-profit organization. **The Youth Center will offer:**

- Before/After School Activities
- English Club
- Youth Coffeehouse / Fellowship / Weekend "Hang-out"
- Spiritual Magazine for Youth
- Discovery Bible Groups
- Music Lessons / Youth Choir / Musical Productions
- Hiking and Camping Excursions

We will continue **Champs Camp** and the **Youth Camp**, as well as develop **additional camps and retreats**.

For parents, we will offer **Christian Parenting Seminars** and **Bible Study Groups**.

MEET MY NEW CO-WORKERS

Igor and Mateja Vugrek are from Varaždin, Croatia. They got married in August. The photo below is from their wedding, and it captures their spirits perfectly. They are enthusiastic and great connectors with people. Mateja told me that she and Igor were going to move to Zagreb after their wedding and that she wanted to work with me and be mentored by me in ministry to youth. Mateja is a graduate of the Zagreb Bible Institute. Knowledge that she received at the Institute, she has already used in ministry to children and youth. She is also enthusiastic about writing articles and stories for young people. Mateja has led the Youth Camp with me the last five years. She will continue in these roles, and more.

Igor is a musician. He teaches drums at a nearby music school. He also plays drums in a band. Igor led worship at our Youth Camp this summer. He will lead various music programs at our Youth Center. Igor and Mateja love each other, love Jesus, and love young people.



MELKIOR'S BAPTISM

I have developed a special relationship with Melkior over the nine years that I have lived in Croatia. For all of those years, I have invested in Melkior's life as a mentor and a discipler, at first with him as a pre-teen, and now as a young man. Melkior and I meet frequently and regularly for Bible study, discipling discussions, and informal fellowship. Now a young man of 20, Melkior decided to give his life to Jesus this summer. A highlight of my year was baptizing Melkior (photo at right) in the Adriatic Sea at the annual Family Bible Camp. Melkior is not only my student and mentee, but also a good friend and brother in Christ. Melkior is experiencing joy, and the Holy Spirit is at work molding his character. He is also already leading a group of his friends in Bible study. This experience with Melkior is a good example of the impact of this "lifespan" approach to ministry that I mention at the top of this page. We have to look at ministry with children and youth as a marathon, not a sprint, and then stick with them through the long haul.



MEET PATRICIJA TEPŠIĆ

Patricija has been with us since the very beginning of Champs Camp nine years ago. She was first a camper and has been one of our teen volunteers now the last few years. Her foster mother has shared with me that Champs Camp has been one of the most formative aspects of Patricija's life. As she has grown and matured, Patricija has also begun helping with some of the promotional aspects of Champs Camp. In a recent article in the Christian Chronicle, Patricija had this to say about Champs Camp: "I like that it's connected with Jesus and church. It's just all very positive and beautiful, and I want that in my life." Asked if she knew Jesus before she came to Champs Camp, she replied, "Yeah, but I'm not really a true believer. But I like that they teach children about it." What would it take for her to become a true believer? "I don't know. Maybe a miracle," she replied. "But I like that the children learn about it so they can make their own choice, whether they will believe in God or whether they won't believe in God." Please pray that through continued involvement with our ministry, Patricija will experience that miracle and come to be a true believer. She is on her way.



WHY DO WE FOCUS ON MINISTRY TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN CROATIA?

- Because these young people have become dear to us and we want to see them come to follow Jesus.
- To see the loneliness and hurts among this generation filled and healed, as only Jesus can do.
- To see these lives changed, with their hearts made whole and surrendered to Jesus.
- The great opportunities that exist here. Non-Catholic groups are looked on with suspicion, but parents are enthusiastic about positive activities for their children.
- To meet the need for spiritual input, encouragement, and fellowship on the part of Croatian Christian teens.



MEET PAULA HABDIJA

Paula has participated in Champs Camp for a few years, and also came to our Youth Camp for the first time this summer. At first she was stiff and "standoffish," but on the second day she started to open up. During discussion time with her group, she said that she was very grateful that she came to our camp. She shared with her group about some very difficult circumstances in her life, from childhood until now. We were amazed how she was open to share in that way with us. She experienced love and encouragement at camp.



After camp, Paula's mother sought out Mateja, to thank her for the friendship that she offered to Paula. She also suggested they could meet for coffee. When asked for her ideas about a name for our Croatian non-profit, Paula spoke in terms of "our" organization. We are encouraged by this, and the growing relationship with Paula and her mother.

MEET DANIEL PINTARIĆ

Daniel is at left in the photo below. He is from a Christian family and is part of one of the small protestant, evangelical churches in Zagreb. He has been involved the last few years in both Champs Camp and our Youth Camp. There are very few youth in his small church, and he is one of the only Christian youth (perhaps even the only one) at his school. This can be a very lonely existence for Christian teens in Croatia, at a time in their lives when they need a sense of belonging the most. Our Youth Camp and the various activities with the teen volunteers of Champs Camp have become for him a de facto youth group experience. Daniel said this a couple of years ago about the activities with the teen volunteers of Champs Camp: "This has been like a source of life for me." Through our Youth Center, and frequent youth meetings, we hope to provide this kind of connection opportunity for kids like Daniel, on a much more consistent basis. Daniel is representative of several other local Christian teens, also for whom our youth activities have been a similar experience of life and connection, with Jesus and with each other. This is an important source of fellowship, and spiritual input and encouragement for these Christian teens.

