

SPECIAL VISITORS

This was the year of visitors. In May I had a visit from “the sisters” (below left). These are ladies I met on my trip to Israel two years ago, who quickly became like family to me. Through the summer, we hosted a total of 60 American visitors. Most were here for camps, but a few were personal guests. In early August I had a visit from one of the elders and his wife, as well as another church member, from my sponsoring church (below). Then in late August I had a visit from my brother, Justin, and his family (far right). It has been a very full year, but also great to have so many I love come visit. Are you next?



PERSONAL LESSONS

As I said, this year has been like no other. It has brought many challenges. It has also brought good personal lessons, and opportunities for my growing. At times I have been tempted to give in to anxiety, or simply just exhaustion and wanting life to be easier. God’s consistent message to me through all this can be summed up in one scripture passage, along with a quote from the most current book of a favorite author:

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

From Resilient, by John Eldredge

“...we only sort of want God; what we *really* want is for life to be good again...We must lovingly shepherd our famished thirst back to the source of life...For most of us, a sabbatical in some gorgeous refuge is not available. What *is* available is the River of Life, God himself, in ways we have not yet tapped into...”

PRAYER POINTS — 2023

- 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 that “my boys” (Maks, Jan, Raybod, David, Leon, Adam, Jakov) will trust Jesus with their lives.
- Pray for favor toward us and our ministry from parents, schools, and government.
- Pray for confidence and increased leadership ability as I lead these ministries.
- Pray for strong working relationships and interactions with Croatian co-workers.
- Pray for our financial support; for myself; for my Croatian co-workers; as well as for our camps, youth magazine, youth band, and other ministry initiatives.
- Pray that God’s purposes are accomplished through us, and in us, in these things.
- 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 that the enemy’s plans are thwarted.
- Praise and thank God along with me for my house (photo right). 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 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.

TO SEND DONATIONS

On the Venmo mobile app, find *Pond Springs Church* as the payee. Note that it is for the Steve Taliaferro Croatia Mission.

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

2022 Ministry Report



Zagreb, Croatia

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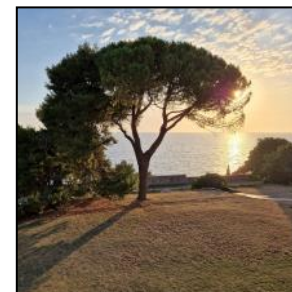
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GREETINGS FROM CROATIA

Dear Friends,

I hope you enjoy reading here about my life and work in Croatia during 2022. A highlight has been the on-going personal discipling relationships with several young men, as well as our best Youth Camp ever. Our hearts have been heavy and we have been moved to prayer over what is happening in Ukraine.



We have also been serving several people who have fled Ukraine, all of them contacts from when I lived there years ago. Read on for more....

Blessings to you,



INTERESTING CROATIA FACTS

- The town of **Rovinj** (above) and all of the northern part of the Croatian coast were controlled by Venice during medieval times.
- **Pašticada** is a delicious stewed meat dish from the Dalmatian coast of Croatia. It is beef stewed with onions, garlic, red wine, and plums. It takes two days to prepare.
- Evangelical Christians make up **less than 1/2 of 1%** of the population of Croatia.

A TIME LIKE NO OTHER, AND A REMINDER

This year has been unlike any I remember. In addition to usual ministry, we have been hosting 22 Ukrainian refugees. Along with them has come a powerful reminder to me. The photo at top right sits on my desk. In the middle is 10 year old Denis, an orphan at a camp I worked in eastern Ukraine in the late 90s. Denis lived in the Center run by the ministry I helped start there. He and his wife married there. They became Christians there. They serve in church ministry in Kyiv. This photo is a reminder to me that, with God, nothing is ever wasted. The photo at right was taken with Denis just recently in Zagreb. His family is one of those we have had with us here the last many months.



SUMMER CAMPS

We held Champs Camp in June, with 60 children, 21 Croatian teen volunteers, and 16 American guests. We then held our Youth Camp in July. This was our best youth camp ever! We had 19 American teens, and 22 Croatian and Ukrainian teens. Our theme was, *Something More*. Our main lessons were: *More with Jesus*; *More with Self*; and *More with Others*. Each day we had an activity that related to that evening's lesson. On the *More with Self* day, the teens were given a blank booklet, and were to write and illustrate the story of their lives. Many of our Croatian teens, uncoached by us, wrote something about how Champs Camp has been a formative experience in their lives. I was quite moved by this. On the *More with Others* day, each teen was given a blank puzzle piece. They were to write and draw something about themselves on one side, and "color by numbers" on the other side. The completed puzzle is in the photo at far right. It was a powerful illustration of how all our individual stories come together in the church, as a picture of Jesus. All the teens were quite impacted by this.



MENTORING AND DISCIPLING

Of all the ministries in which I am involved, I feel the most important are the one-on-one discipling relationships with several young men. I continue to meet regularly with these young men, and I am praying about two others joining me. With Maks and Jan (at left in photo below), I finished reading through and discussing the book of John. We always talk about what they learn about themselves and God in the text. In the spring, after two months of not seeing each other (because of my work helping Ukrainian refugees), I was able to again have some time with both Maks and Jan. It was a blessing, as both of them opened up areas of their lives to me that they had not shared before. I again started my regular meetings with Jan when school started in the fall. Jan also invited me to his basketball games. He has been opening up more and more to me. Pray that Jan gains more confidence in himself; knows his worth as a person; and sees his need for a relationship with Jesus. Pray for my continued connection with Maks, and that Adam and Jakov will also like to start with me. Pray that they all will come to a point of surrendering their lives to Jesus.



WINTER CAMP

February found us at our Winter Camp for teenagers. We went with our teens to a beautiful camp in the mountains west of Zagreb, in a town called Severin na Kupu. We enjoyed great fellowship, games, music, Bible lessons, and discussion groups.



We focused our Bible lessons and discussion groups on the interactions of Jesus with various people, especially people like Mary Magdalene, and the response of those people to Jesus as a result. We talked about how Jesus also offers us the same type of healing, restoration, and life. We asked questions such as: What did Jesus offer Mary? What did he do for her? How did Mary respond to Jesus? What do you need Jesus to do for you? What do you need healing or restoration from? How does Jesus want you to respond to him? The Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred on the first day of this camp. Little did I know then how life would change in the following weeks.



UKRAINIAN FAMILIES

Since March we have been helping some Ukrainian women and their children. Their husbands are back in Ukraine, working with 30-40 other men, traveling back and forth across the country in a convoy of vehicles, taking aid and supplies to the east, then loading up their empty vehicles with people who are trying to evacuate west. Then repeating the process, back and forth all the time. These women and their children arrived in Zagreb in March with winter clothes and boots, each with a small backpack. That's it. They have needed literally everything you can imagine. Our church has rented them apartments, and we are providing them a living stipend to



make up the difference between what their husbands can send them and what things actually cost here. In the photo at left are Yulia Gryshchuk (left), and Yulia Zolotaryova (right). I worked with Yulia G.'s husband in Ukraine. Yulia Z.'s husband is Denis, who I mentioned on the front page.

YOUTH MEETINGS

We host regular youth meetings throughout the school year. Many teens from the camps come to these meetings a few times per month. We always have time to hang out, food, games, worship music, and a brief Bible discussion, usually in small groups. Our teens are open and seeking the Lord. They enjoy these meetings, as they get to be together with other youth who are doing the same. Our times together with the teens generally focus on various themes. One time we were talking about our thoughts and how they have an impact on our lives. Another time we discussed how we are important to Jesus and why it is important to trust him, even when we do not believe that we are worthy. We discussed our worth *to* Jesus, and our worth *in* Jesus. Then we talked about the love of Jesus, and how love is an action we take and a choice we make. This fall we have had 12-14 teens at these meetings. In September we had a "back to school" fellowship at my house, pictured above. I had food and my grandmother's cookies that they all love. After our meal, we sang a few worship songs. Then I shared an encouraging Bible message and related video with them. We finished our evening with some games, laughter, and good conversations.



UKRAINIAN ORPHANS

We also received a group of 10 orphans from the ministry I worked with when I lived in Ukraine. Their ministry houses a children's Rescue Shelter, approved by Ukrainian Social Services. Early in Russia's attack on Ukraine, the 10 children in the shelter hid with their caretaker in a cold root cellar, with missiles flying around them. In a daring before-dawn escape, the children's caretaker loaded them in their van and drove them out. During this time, our church in Zagreb was busy getting ready for their arrival. We rented a large house and furnished it, and began working with local authorities. They stayed a while in western Ukraine, as we all worked through the necessary bureaucracy, both in Ukraine and Croatia, that finally allowed them to leave Ukraine and arrive here. They finally arrived here to us in the middle of April. Since then we have been helping their caretaker work with local Social Services, as well as other matters necessary to get them settled here. The big, unanswerable question for these children, and the families that are with us, is how long they will need to be here.