

## MINISTRY THROUGH MUSIC

I want to introduce you to my friends, Andrea and Davorin Gelemanović. Some of you may remember the long-time minister of our church in Zagreb, Mladen Jovanović. Andrea is Mladen's daughter. She and Davorin have three girls. Andrea is a gifted musician and songwriter, who is writing and recording original Croatian worship music. Davorin is involved on the production side of her music, in their home studio. They choose to use this gift to bring people into closer fellowship with Jesus. They do this through singing at local Christian events, and especially through their YouTube channel (also with some songs in English):

[www.youtube.com/@studiorimon](http://www.youtube.com/@studiorimon). Join us in praying for their ministry. We recently decided to work closer together, and Andrea will help us with music for the teens. Especially impactful are Andrea's original songs, such as the one at this link: [bit.ly/ti-si-moj-mir](http://bit.ly/ti-si-moj-mir). The song is, *Ti si moj mir*. The English translation is, *You Are My Peace*.



## SOME WORDS FOR REFLECTION

I want to share with you some reflections from a favorite author, and the basis of a sermon I preached recently, as well as a truth we share with teens:

“Jesus came to reveal God to us. He is the defining word on God—on what the heart of God is truly like, on what God is up to in the world, and on what God is up to in your life. An intimate encounter with Jesus is the most transforming experience of human existence...bringing people to a regular experience of Jesus. That’s what Christianity is supposed to do.

*1 John 1:3*

*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

The records of Christ are written so you can experience him as they did, this intimate connection with the Father and the Son.”

— John Eldredge, from the book, *Beautiful Outlaw*

## PRAYER POINTS — 2024

- 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; and 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 “my boys” (Adam, Roby, Tristan, Maks, Jan) that I mentor and disciple.
- Pray for favor toward us and our ministry from parents, schools, and government.
- Pray about a Family Bible Camp next summer, for the families of kids with whom we work.
- Pray for confidence and increased leadership ability.
- Pray for strong working relationships and interactions with Croatian co-workers.
- Pray for the ministries of Tom and Sandra Sibley, through the *International Christian Fellowship*, and Davorin and Andrea Gelemanović, through their *Music Ministry*. Pray for us all, as we work more closely together.
- Pray for our financial support, both personally and for all our ministry activities.
- Pray for unity and cooperation among the various churches and mission groups in Croatia.
- 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.
- Pray that my house is a place of both refuge and ministry, for me and for others. Pray that it is 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**, **@Pond-Springs-Church** is the payee. Make a note that it is for the Croatia Mission.

To donate **Online through Paypal**, scan this QR code:



Make **Physical Checks** payable to **Pond Springs Church** and mail to this address:

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## Steve Taliaferro 2023 Ministry Report



Zagreb, Croatia

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## GREETINGS FROM CROATIA

Dear Friends,

I hope you enjoy reading here about my life and work in Croatia during 2023. A high point was our series of regular youth meetings through the school year. This year we had a very consistent group of teens who were with us most every time we met, ready to talk about and pursue Jesus together. We also celebrated with some of them, as they committed their lives to Jesus. Read on for more...



Blessings to you,



## INTERESTING CROATIA FACTS

- Almost 10% of the Croatian land area is given to 8 national parks (including **Plitvice Lakes**, photos above), 11 nature parks, and 2 nature reserves.
- **Burek** is a Croatian food specialty, made of thin phyllo pastry, layered with meat and onions, cheese, or spinach. It is greasy, filling, and delicious.
- Evangelical Christians make up **less than 1/2 of 1%** of Croatia’s population.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS

Of all the various ministry activities in which I am involved, some of my favorite ones are also the most important things I can do. They are represented in the two photos at right. They are: talking with young people about Jesus and things that really matter, both in group settings, and especially one on one. You will read inside about the individual discipling relationships in which I am involved with several young men. I see this as the one most important thing I do. It is an honor to talk with these young men about Jesus, and point them to Him. It is also a great joy to give them needed affirmation, that they have what it takes, both as men, and as ones loved by God.





## CAMPS

This summer was no different than the last many years, with our camps for children and teens from the Zagreb community. In June was *Champs Camp*, a day camp for elementary school aged children. This camp features several different “stations” each day: Bible, crafts, music, games, snacks. This year we had 22 Croatian and Ukrainian teenagers as junior volunteers, to help make the camp happen. Most of them were once campers themselves. Most of these teens came in July to our *Youth Camp*, a residential camp for teens in the mountains. The theme was, *What’s Love Got To Do With It?*, after the old pop song of that name. Our band learned this song for the camp and also led worship. For our main Bible lessons, we took lines from that song and made spiritual applications from them. One line is, “Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?” We looked at scriptures that talk about Jesus as the solution, and the only safe place for our broken hearts.



## YOUTH MEETINGS

We gather with teenagers every other Friday evening throughout the school year. The 2022-23 school year was the best ever for these regular youth meetings. Following on the heels of a very successful *Youth Camp* that summer, we had anywhere between 10-16 teens who showed up for each meeting. Most of them became a core group that were consistent in coming every time, and we are coming to



know them well. Several of them we are engaged with in individual discipling relationships. We always have food, worship music, games, and a Bible lesson, or some devotional thought. In the meeting at left, we were looking at several Bible passages that talk about what Love is from God’s perspective. Then they were given a red heart. On one half of the heart they were to illustrate love as the world offers it, and on the other half illustrate love as Jesus offers it. We kicked off the 2023-24 school year with a gathering in my backyard in early September. The large photo in the center of this page, below left, shows us praying over the teens that evening.

## NEŠTO VIŠE

Our ministry to youth in Croatia is called, *Nešto Više (Something More)*. We engage young people from early childhood, through the teenage years, and on into young adulthood. We work



to encourage them toward a relationship with God, through Jesus. We believe that is the “Something More” for which we were created. We do this through various activities: camps, regular youth gatherings, individual discipling, a Christian band, and a spiritual magazine for youth. My co-workers, Mateja and Igor, are vital to this ministry. *Nešto Više* is also the name of our local non-profit that serves as the legal “face” of this ministry. Our friends, Tom and Sandra Sibley, recently began an *International Christian Fellowship*; and friends, Davorin and Andrea Gelemanović are launching their music ministry. They chose to work as a part of *Nešto Više*. God is using us all to increase the scope and reach of *Nešto Više*, for His kingdom.



## UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

We are assisting several Ukrainian refugees. Some are women with children, whose husbands are back in Ukraine. The eight kids with me in the photo below are orphans from the ministry I worked with in Ukraine. They are in a house four minutes from me. They are participating more and more in our activities for youth, and I am coming to love them. They are fantastic! Anna (at top left), works with these kids as a House Mom. Anna is a Ukrainian refugee herself. She is a real gift to all of us, has become like family, and is herself finding Jesus among us.



## MENTORING AND DISCIPLING

Each year, I spend regular time with a few young men, in individual mentoring and discipling relationships. Some are from families in area churches, and they come to our activities. Some have come to us through our camps. We meet together, usually weekly, talk about life, and study the Bible together. One of these young men, Adam, is shown at right with his Dad at his baptism this spring. He is a fine young man of 13 years who is pursuing Jesus. Mateja and Igor also mentor and disciple young people in this way. Lana, one of the girls with whom Mateja has been working closely, also decided to follow Jesus in baptism this summer. We cannot take credit for the Holy Spirit working in these lives, drawing them to Himself, and both are from Christian families. However, they have been part of our ministry for a few years. This is also a good example of a by-product of our ministry to youth in the community. Protestant churches in Croatia are small, so teens in those churches may be alone, or without many other teens for Christian fellowship. Our ministry also provides them a “youth group” experience they would not have otherwise.



## 25 YEARS OF BIBLIJSKI INSTITUT

It has been four years since I left my position as Operations Manager for the Zagreb Bible Institute, to focus full-time on ministry to young people. This year, the Institute asked me to serve again in a specific role, as Event Coordinator for their 25th anniversary celebration. This event was held on November 3-4. The theme of the event was, *Walking Together with Jesus of Nazareth: A Journey of Service, Thanksgiving, and Hope*. We spent a great two days, reflecting with thanksgiving on the blessings of God over 25 years, and considering with joy and hope the present and the future. We invited alumni, churches, and other Christian ministries to participate in the program, and several set up display tables. We had several guests from the USA, both supporters of the Institute, and former guest lecturers. Renowned American lawyer and Bible teacher, Mark Lanier, came to speak on the theme of the event. It was a blessed time of celebration.