

A HELPER WITH UKRAINIANS, AND A NEW SISTER IN CHRIST



Since summer of 2023, Iva Matijević, a Croatian, has been working alongside us with the Ukrainians we are assisting here. Iva has been invaluable in this role, as she is fluent in Croatian, English, and Ukrainian. As such, she has been able to help the Ukrainians in ways the rest of us could not. In the process, she has been a recipient herself of the teaching offered by our ministry, as well as of my preaching in the church. She has also been studying the Bible with my co-worker, Sandra Sibley. In Iva we see a tender and open heart to God, and a genuine desire to serve. She has studied with Sandra this year and she decided to be baptized this fall. I was privileged to assist her in taking this step. Please pray for Iva as she begins her walk with Jesus; as our faith community walks alongside her; and as she continues to seek out ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus to others.

FAMILY EVENINGS

This summer we started evenings of fellowship for small groups of our teens, together with their families. The goal of these gatherings is to build closer relationships with the teens, and to better know their parents. We plan on hosting a few more of these evenings through the school year. We are hoping these evenings will provide natural opportunities for some productive spiritual discussions, as we deepen these relationships. In the photo at right is the group we had for the first of these evenings, in July at my house. Please pray for these families and their teens, and for our fellowship and deepening relationships with them.



PRAYER POINTS — 2025

- 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 for confidence and increased leadership ability.
- Pray for strong working relationships and interactions with Croatian co-workers.
- Pray that this generation of young people in Croatia are raised up to follow Jesus.
- Pray for “my boys” (Adam, Noa, Ivan, and Marko) that I personally mentor and disciple.
- Pray for favor toward us and our youth ministries from parents, schools, and government.
- Pray for our financial support, both personally and for all our youth ministry activities.
- Pray for the church of which I am a part in Zagreb, the Kušlanova Church of Christ. Pray for Ivan, myself, and our elders, as we lead. Pray for God’s Spirit to show us the way forward.
- Pray for me as I now have ministry responsibilities in several different capacities. Pray for rest in the midst of a full schedule, and for wisdom and direction from the Holy Spirit, to know and pursue what it most important.
- 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 that in all things the Kingdom of God is advanced in this place.

TO SEND DONATIONS

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Pond Springs Church
Croatia Mission
c/o Jan Swinney
621 S Baker Cir
Leander, TX 78641

WEBSITES

steveincroatia.com
nestovise.hr (in Croatian)

EMAIL

steveincroatia@gmail.com

POSTAL ADDRESS

Steven Taliaferro
Ivanska ulica 57, Jagnjić dol
10431 Sveta Nedelja
Croatia

CROATIAN MOBILE

+385-91-155-5161

SKYPE

Skype Name: stvetaliaferro
Skype Phone: +1-512-481-7440



Steve Taliaferro

2024 Ministry Report



Zagreb, Croatia

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GREETINGS FROM CROATIA

Dear Friend,

I hope you enjoy reading here about my life and work in Croatia during 2024. In addition to our regular youth meetings, we enjoyed our summer and winter camps. The photos at right and below are from winter camp. This year we also celebrated with some, as they committed their lives to Jesus. Read on for more about these happenings, and other events of the year.



Blessings to you,



INTERESTING CROATIA FACTS

- The city of **Zadar** has a **sea organ**, which uses the waves, pushing air through tubes, to create musical tones.
- **Šibenik** is the site of the world’s first **hydroelectric power plant**, built in 1895.
- The city of **Dubrovnik** was an independent republic for 450 years, and was a **medieval rival of Venice**.
- Evangelical Christians make up **less than 1/2 of 1%** of Croatia’s population.

A NEW ROLE, AND IMPORTANT THINGS

In the following pages you will read about an additional ministry role I took on this year, at the church in Zagreb with which I am involved. In this role, I coordinate Sunday worship services; the preaching calendar; and I preach often. God seems to be developing in me a talent for preaching, and I am getting generally good feedback. It also seems to be having an impact on people (See Iva’s story on the back page). But of all the various ministry activities in which I am involved, I think my favorite one is also what I believe is *the most important thing I can do*. That is, talking with young people one-on-one about Jesus, and things that really matter. You will read inside about discipling relationships in which I am involved with several young men. It is a great honor and joy to walk alongside them; give them needed affirmation; and point them to Jesus.



YOUTH MEETINGS

We have 15-20 youth gathering with us every other Friday evening throughout the school year. They are Croatians and Ukrainians. Some are from the community, and come as a result of their involvement in our camps. Some come from various churches around the city that don't have many youth. This year a few new ones joined us. We always have fun games, food, music, and a Bible lesson. One Friday we talked about how to be closer to God. Some of the teens were deeply touched and asked some great questions. We also had a visit from friends of mine, Rob and Cheri McVay, who shared their testimony of God's work in their lives and marriage. We are involved in individual discipling with many of the teens who come to these gatherings. Some of them have chosen to follow Jesus over the last several years. We pray the others will follow.



MENTORING AND DISCIPLING

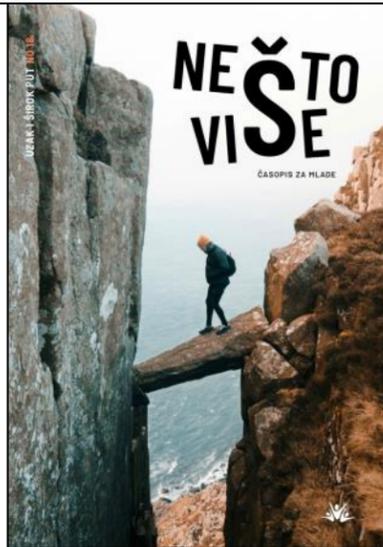
I am currently involved in discipling three young men. We usually talk about life, and read a chapter of the Bible together, and discuss it. Two of the boys are shown in the photo at right below, reading their Bibles on their own this summer. **Adam** (14) and I finished the book of John this summer, and now we are working through the book of Acts. We continued our meetings through the summer, on Adam's request and initiative. Adam was baptized a year and a half ago and is developing a deep love for Jesus and a desire to live his life for



God. Adam's family this fall returned to our church, after being away from us for several years. Adam's parents told me that one of the reasons for this is that their boys have me as a teacher and they want them growing up in a church body where I am. **Noa** (12) is Adam's brother. We are also reading through the book of John. Please pray that through our time together, he will experience Jesus and want to follow Him. **Ivan** (13), like Adam, is part of most everything we do in our youth ministries. I also work with Ivan in the same way as Adam and Noa. Please pray that Ivan will come to see the great love of God for him, and choose to follow Jesus with his life. I hope **Marko** (14) will also start meeting with me soon.

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. One edition of the magazine this year (cover above) was themed, *The Narrow and Wide Paths*. My co-workers in this ministry to youth, Mateja and Igor, are "book-ending" the kids in the large photo at right. *Nešto Više* is also the name of our local non-profit youth organization.



CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The church in which I grew up supported mission work here for many years, so I have long been connected with the Kušlanova Church of Christ in Zagreb. After a sabbatical early this year, our minister resigned, and left the church. After a period of prayer, I accepted a role as co-minister, along with Ivan Karadža. Ivan is handling administration and running Sunday School. I am coordinating worship services and the preaching calendar. We are both preaching (me below) and ministering to people. The two of us, along with our two elders, serve as the church leadership. I was also appointed to our congregation's seat on the Management Board of the Zagreb Bible Institute.



CAMPS

This year we again held Winter Youth Camp, Champs Camp, and Summer Youth Camp. Champs Camp is a day camp for elementary school-aged children. This was the 13th year we have offered this camp. We now have teenagers who have aged out, but still want to stay involved, so we bring them in as junior volunteers, to help make the camp happen. We have a weekend of training with those teens before Champs Camp, and then after the camp we take them, together with our American guests, for a weekend on the coast. This year we had a group from the Memorial Road Church of Christ, in Edmond, Oklahoma, and close to 20 Croatian teens involved. Many of these teens also come to the Youth Camps, and some hang out with us throughout the school year. The theme for the Summer Youth Camp this year was, *Explosive Joy*. Almost 40 of us were out in the mountains for this camp. We enjoyed five days of fellowship, Bible lessons, discussion groups, worship, games, sports, campfires, and my cookies (from my grandmother's recipe), which our kids love. Some feedback we received from a parent was this: "My daughter said the Bible lessons she heard at the camp were the best she ever received from any event like this."



ASSISTING UKRAINIANS

We continue to serve a number of Ukrainians here. This has actually been a good crossover with our ministry with *Nešto Više*, as all of their children are involved in our youth ministries. One of their teens is Sofia, who participates with us, and has been close with Mateja. Sofia was baptized (photo left) this summer. Her father, Dima, said this: "I believe her decision is made up of small contributions from everyone around her, including yours." In addition to women with their children, we are helping a house of orphans (photo above), from the ministry that I helped start in Ukraine (*Jeremiah's Hope*), when I lived there. Our non-profit organization, *Nešto Više*, is serving as a local administrative hub for the operation of the house in Croatia. All eight of the orphans are involved in our camps, and their teens are regulars at our youth meetings throughout the school year. We all: Me, Mateja, Igor, and Iva (read her story on the next page), helped out in the house this summer, as their caretakers took their vacations.