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○ Summer | ○ 2017

Please pray for :

- Lina and Luci
- Growth in our churches
- Developing our vision and seeking God's heart for us in this.

Albania *focus*

THE WORK OF RICHARD AND LINDA WELCH IN ALBANIA

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

When I was in my young teens, my grandmother deemed it necessary to tell me from time to time, "Patience is a virtue, possess it if you can, seldom found in women, but never in a man." I'm not sure how receptive I was to her words, but clearly it stayed with me.

An exception to the rule was recently to be found in Luci, pronounced, "Loochie", one of the young men belonging to our Saranda youth group. Luci, who's shown in the photograph overleaf, is the son of Astrit & Lina, who run a bakery in town. I've spent many happy moments in the bakery, a place where I'm always welcome to, "come in and have a coffee with us."

Of great encouragement has been the emerging bond between the teenagers of Cuke and Saranda churches, so it wasn't a surprise when Luci decided to join the Cuke prayer meeting one week. As you know, we hold such gatherings on hilltops overlooking the communities we pray for, so Luci headed for "Lekures" hill.

On the sweltering day in question, his decision to make the forty minute walk said a lot about his commitment, when also considering the steep gradient of his route. In fact it was so hot that we took the decision to postpone our gathering until 7 a.m. the following day, when it would be fresher. As this was to be the first time Luci was to attend this particular meeting, and he was going unannounced, nobody thought it necessary to inform him of the change of plan.

Dripping wet in perspiration, Luci spent a few moments at the top of the hill wondering where everybody else was? He then came to the mistaken conclusion that he'd got his days mixed up, so walked down from the summit. Before continuing with his walk back into town, he thought, "No, I was right in the first place, I haven't made a mistake." With that, he walked back up to the top of the hill!

When there was still nobody else in sight he made a phone call to Jorgo, "Where is everybody?" Jorgo explained things, then drove to meet him and take him home.

You may think that Luci had become hot, tired and very exasperated, but far from it. He later explained that although the heat and humidity made the timing of his walks less than ideal, he had actually enjoyed the experience! As he'd walked, his thoughts about his precious faith naturally led him to long periods of prayer. Additionally, as a keen basketball player, his exertions could be viewed as being a strenuous but profitable workout.

Looking on, I found this episode to be most encouraging. Not many people would willingly walk that distance on a baking hot, humid day to attend a prayer meeting. In Luci's case however, he met the subsequent scoffing from his friends with grace and maturity, "It was a time of blessing for me."

I'd like to think that Luci's example will inspire me in future, particularly on the occasions when I'm called upon to do something when feeling not as enthusiastic as I should. His cheerful, enthusiastic heart, undeterred by what appeared to be, at least on first impression, a fruitless mission, is praise worthy. Next time I was in the bakery, I told his parents that their son had made a very favourable impression on me. "I will tell our friends back home about this, as the way Luci conducted himself is an example to us all." (*cont. overleaf*)



If you would like to support the work of Richard and Linda on a regular basis we can send you out a standing order and gift aid forms. Address and contact details are shown below.

Direct payments can be made to the following bank account:

Lloyds Bank Sort code:30-92-33
Account: 05629646
Reference :

- "Albanian Support" to support the general work of Richard and Linda or
- "Richard & Linda" to support Richard and Linda's living costs or
- "Jorg and Lena" to support them as church leaders in Chooka

Cheques should be made payable to Mosaic Church and marked on the reverse with the reference above.



PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE (CONT. FROM FRONT PAGE)

A few days later, Lina pressed a piece of paper into my hands. "This is to pass on to the young people you come into contact with in England," she said. The words she wanted me to share are as follows,

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1,18)

I know that like his mother, the quiet and assuming Luci would be really chuffed to know that his family were able to give you a word of encouragement as you travel down your own path, no matter how demanding it should be.

SHARPENING THINGS UP

Personnel changes within the circle of people we partner with in Albania have resulted in our local churches taking a hard look at how we operate. This movement has provided welcome opportunity to sharpen up on some of the areas we have become sloppy in.

You already know that we strongly believe in seeing Albanian churches being led by Albanians, but sometimes it needs a different eye, and voice, to focus the minds of our indigenous leaders.

Albanian timekeeping is notoriously poor and that overlaps into church starting times. A local man once told me that when waiting for a friend to arrive for a pre-arranged meeting thirty minutes waiting time should be observed. He explained, "Ten minutes out of friendship, ten minutes out of politeness and further ten minutes out of stupidity!"

In the case of church starting times, the slackness of leaders included, things needed to change. This point was readily accepted when we gathered to meet one evening.

GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN YOUTH

Another point to make involved our splendid young people. My suggestion of asking them to lead Sunday meetings once a month, under the watchful eyes of leaders Eli, Nevila, Jorgo and Lena was readily accepted. More than that, it was whole heartedly welcomed. Their enthusiasm for their Christian faith is a major force for good, so we need to "use it or lose it".

"WHAT'S YOUR VISION?"

This can be a difficult question to answer well, especially by people who live in a country that for decades were fiercely discouraged from free thinking by their political masters. When I posed it, I encouraged our leaders to take a few days to come up with their answers. "What would you like to communicate with our partners, since what you come up with will be more powerful than being handed a slick vision statement from overseas?" What they came up with was encouraging:

- * Once a month we think it would be good to pray simultaneously with all of our partner churches. We would be in different locations across the world, but united as one in prayer.
- * We would like to form an Esther group — a monthly women's meeting, inviting non-churched friends and having a meal together.
- * We should have an annual plan, in which we could plot church activities, embracing worship, finances, communion and baptisms.
- * Training for all church groups.
- * Former youth group members, living in Tirana or further afield, to link up with current youth group to give words of encouragement.
- * Growth / deepening of faith.
- * We desire to purchase a building of our own (instead of renting our current premises), so will continue to hold prayer walks around the town with that objective.

"SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN"

An encouraging development in Saranda church is the growing number of babies and toddlers in our meetings. This reflects a growth in the numbers attending Sunday services. However, the growth in the number of young mothers and their offspring has led to the challenge of how best cater for them?

Noisy youngsters have become a distraction for some of our members, whereas for others they are a healthy sign of how we are growing as a community. Previous attempts at housing the children in a side room during certain times were unsuccessful, in part because the mothers accompanying them didn't want to miss out on what was being said in our main meeting room.

I had been concerned by the manner used by a couple of our leaders when addressing the mothers at the end of a service in which our children had been more boisterous than usual. Heat had been generated on both sides and this had to be confronted.

Most people dislike confrontation, so when I raised the issue I substituted the word "confrontation" for "clarification". I sought clarification on how the leaders view having babies and toddlers in church: did we welcome them or not? I wasn't sure on where we stood on this - and wanted to know.

After some lively discussion, we all agreed that it was very much a positive to have the infants and their mothers in the church. However, that wasn't all; do we give the right signals on this, does everyone feel welcomed, accepted and loved? Just as we need to seek solutions on better child care, we need to take care in building and maintaining good relationships with each other. What would be the point in having quiet, orderly meetings in an empty church?