

The Orchard in Albania

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I was beginning to think that the trip to Albania to see Tammy and Bani would not happen. With the airlines shutdown because of the volcanic ash all flights were cancelled and making contact with the airlines was near impossible. Finally after 5 days I was able to contact Malev Airlines and was able to change my flight to Wednesday the 21. All during this process Tammy and I were able to be in contact because of the internet.

Upon landing in Tirana we went immediately to the headquarters of Campus Crusade. They have a wonderful facility and the availability to do a lot of various ministries there from that center. After a brief tour and meeting a number of warm and engaging national staff we left the headquarters and went to the Tirana International Hotel where an outreach dinner meeting for local business people was to be held. Bani in particular has been very involved with business as a mission and with the work of Campus Crusade that is reaching out to local leaders to try and influence a culture which is filled with dishonesty and corruption in both the business and political life of Albania.

The hope was that they might have 50 show up, an RSVP is not a practice of that culture so the room was set up for forty. A meeting that was to start at 7 started at 8 as 78 people showed up and the room was reset and additional meals prepared. Obviously the event planners were elated. Swede Anderson a long time Crusade member gave an inspiring talk that centered on the four essential institutions of a country; the family, the work place, the government and the role of religion through the practice of one's faith. The gospel was presented and many comment cards were filled out with follow up to be done by staff. The Campus Crusade staff was thrilled with the outcome and opportunities to follow up. Most of the attendees were Muslims and they listened intently and with respect.

On Thursday Bani and I had an opportunity to meet with a Muslim man from the meeting the night before for coffee in the downtown area of Tiranna. We had a very cordial discussion and Bani did a great job translating for this 55 year old business man and myself. He is searching for truth while trying to live a good live. We can be praying for the next conversations that Bani will have with him.

That afternoon I had a chance to listen to Bani regarding his business, visit his store and hear what his heart beat is to be part of a business climate in Albania that operates with integrity and honesty. It appears that graft and corruption are choking the economy and preventing the country from developing it's full capacity.

Thursday night Tammy and I attended the college age outreach program at the Campus Crusade Ministry Center. What an encouragement as about 145, 19-23 year old college students sang praise songs and worshipped. The Campus Crusade country leader gave a talk about the character of God and how it can be trusted. Tammy told me that about 2/3 of the kinds are new believers and that 75% of all that attended were from Muslim backgrounds and families. I had a chance to speak with several of the

kids and hear how Jesus had changed their lives and many of their family members. Discipleship for these new believers is very important and the Campus Crusade staff loves being disciples and developing meaningful relationships with these future leaders of Albania.

On Friday we left Tirana and traveled to Flora in the south for another business man's lunch and gospel presentation. The meeting went well but the audience was a little rowdy. Bani said that this was typical for this region of the country. Usually we in the west wait till after the speaker's presentation to discuss what was said. There they felt quite comfortable to have a simulcast of their view along with the speaker. The Campus Crusade leadership was again very pleased with the attendance, about 45, and the opportunities for follow up.

The drive to and from Flora was an illustration of going in and out of almost third world life, to emerging nation status to modern living. The back and forth and intermingling of so many various life styles and degrees of development are difficult to express. The Mercedes alongside the donkey cart and the modern building where the sewage is transported in open aqueducts is a constant reminder of a country trying step out from one world order of political and economical suppression to a new world of democratic ideals and aspirations.

Upon leaving Albania I could not help but conclude what a privilege we at The Orchard have to be able to support the work of Bani and Tammy Doci. They are clearly loved and respected at Campus Crusade, the community at large and are deeply committed to bringing the gospel to this secular Muslim country which is in desperate need of Jesus.