

Stamatis Status – March 28, 2009

From the beginning the focus of IBIA was to benefit all the Balkan nations – not only Albania. A few days ago the Serbs marked the 10 year anniversary of NATO bombing in Serbia. They still have very hard feelings toward Americans. That makes the focus of IBIA more challenging. To expand into the Balkans will require a comprehensive, long-range plan with multiple, well informed partners.

As I constantly evaluate IBIA, I continue to ask what God wants us to be. In my studies of Paul's letters I see these four common strategies: 1) learn His Word, 2) live His life, 3) love His disciples, and 4) lead the world back to Him. I am trying to incorporate these four strategies into every facet of the life of IBIA. The success of IBIA depends on each individual doing his or her part. While the school continues to progress on several fronts we simultaneously seem to regress in other areas. Our success and progress are a constant blending of opportunity and opposition.



Two of our graduates, Altin Koci and Eduart Hoxha, begin working on a full time basis with the congregation in Fier on April 1. It is encouraging and exciting to me that they will be able to practice what they learned at IBIA and have been dreaming about for more than a year of what they will do.

They will be the first full time Albanian workers in Fier. There has been a succession of American missionaries working in Fier over the years. The latest were Steve and Ruth Byrne who are moving to work with a congregation in Hawaii. The Slicer Street congregation in Kennett, Missouri will be the sponsors and supporters of Edi and Altin.



To celebrate this new milestone for these two guys and God's people in Fier, we took them for dinner on Mount Dajti. We got more than we bargained for. When we entered the cable car at the base of the mountain it was raining. When we exited the cable car at the top of the mountain we entered a world of snow. There was at least a foot and a half on the ground and accumulating very quickly. We had a few interesting adventures on the top of the mountain.



The current students continue to study and face the challenges of change that God's Word brings. Last term we studied Romans, 1 Corinthians (part2) and Discipleship. This term we will study Isaiah, Ephesians and Colossians and Song Leading. At IBIA we allow God's Word to lead the students to Christ. We try to maintain an atmosphere that enhances the spiritual struggle to help them grow in Christ.



Intertwined with the opportunity is the opposition. Over the last month Deborah and I have lost \$500 per month in our personal support. In that same period we also discovered that the school has lost \$1,600 per month. Through the very generous gift of a family that believes in what IBIA is trying to accomplish, we have breathing room for the next three months.

We need your help. We need opportunities to present what we are doing in Albania for the Balkans to congregations in the States while we are there this summer. With our current funding and the generous short-term gift, IBIA should manage to get to the summer break. If funding does not increase before September, we will not be able to finish the school for the six current students. With our personal funding, the situation is the same.



As I gaze to the horizon and imagine the future of IBIA I see more and more opportunity. Even though I know the opposition will be there, the opportunity far outweighs it. For us to be victorious in the struggle there are four things we must remember and commit ourselves to.

1. **Serious and intense effort**—we never win by half measures. The success of IBIA requires hard work.
2. **Getting rid of anything that holds us back or gets in the way. We must strip our lives down to the essentials.**
3. **Singleness of mind, eyes on the goal.**
4. **A price to pay.** If we are committed to our comfort and pleasure above the needs of others and God's call, we simply will not be able to follow the Lord. The Christian life is a contest. It is a struggle that demands dedication and great energy.

We are so incredibly grateful to those of you who have partnered with us through the years. Together we have enjoyed opportunity and endured opposition. At this time we desperately need your help to not only endure but to overcome this opposition so we can be stronger on the other side than we are now.

Be strong and courageous,
Steve Stamatis