

UMC Albania



Tirana



Pogradec Lake Ohrid



Porto Romano

United Methodist Church in Albania

January 2011

Christmas in Albania



The weather in Tirana was quite mild in December. Good news for so many people who cannot afford heating. The evening air is otherwise highly polluted, not only through the wood fires, but also due to the ever increasing number of cars.

The weeks leading up to Christmas were quiet - no Christmas music in the stores, no advertising and no rush of people doing their Christmas shopping.

But Christians in all of the churches celebrated Christmas. December 24th is a working day like any other, Christmas day is now a national holiday, though without any Christmas traditions. The bigger celebration for the Albanians is the New Year. January 1st and 2nd are national holidays, families gather together to let the New Year in, with good food - often turkey - and fireworks. These are also two days where the shops and markets close completely. Even the decorations are attributed to the New

Year. The red and white Father Christmas becomes „Mister New Year“, the buildings are brightly illuminated as a sign of the light of the coming year. The city of Beijing donated the illuminations for the government buildings in Tirana.

Two weeks before Christmas the European Union lifted the visa restrictions, in the Schengen Zone, for Albanians. The original reports in the media gave the impression of unrestricted travel and the possibility of work and studies in these countries. This had to be amended and the Albanians discovered that they still had to fulfil a number of requirements in order to travel and were obliged to return after three months.

The difficult situation for most Albanians remains. High unemployment, especially among young people, an increase in the cost of living and a general lack of social and medical security do not offer bright prospects for the future.



It is in this situation that the church has an important task.

The church is called to form a community which can be trusted and where people learn to support each other and raise hope. The message of God's love towards all people helps us to understand that it is love and trust and a readiness to serve others which form the basis of human

relationships and society. This leads to respect - also towards those who think differently - and enables people to develop good practice and live together. Christianity is essentially "a faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6). In this New Year 2011, we hope and pray that God may guide the people of the church in Albania to be a good example of what his love can do.

Baptism in Pogradec



The fourth Sunday in Advent was a special Sunday for the UMC in Pogradec. After completing an introductory course 18 people, from Pogradec and Bishnica, decided to be baptized. In a moving worship service in the crowded church, the group of adults and youth laid their lives before God and were accepted into the congregation and into the membership of the United Methodist Church. This young church has stated how important it is for them that Christian faith always has a social aspect. As a church they aim to contribute, through their work in the community, towards improving the society in which they live.



Tirana



It was a joyful evening, when a lot more people than we expected gathered in the



church on Christmas Eve in Tirana. For the first time, a nativity play was performed by the young adults. Initiated by the English teacher, who gives lessons twice a week in church, it was a fine celebration and Christmas Eve service.

Undiscovered talents came to light and brought the message of Christmas to us. The warm weather - unusual for us at this time of year - provided us with a Christmas barbecue, good food and fellowship afterwards.

Superintendent Wilfried & Jean Nausner

Pogradec



On Christmas Day in Pogradec, the children and youth staged a nativity play. Accompanied by two of the youth on guitars, they sang and acted the Christmas story. Through guitar lessons, given by a young woman in church, the two youth have learned well and were able to share their talents at Christmas.

Afterwards everyone sat together and enjoyed a special time of fellowship.



On Christmas Eve, members of the church in Pogradec celebrated in Bishnica with the small community there.

wilfried.nausner@aon.at