

THE BALKANS TRIP 2 CAN-GO REPORT

Trip Dates: June 7-22, 2024

Written by Jonelle Liddell

C for Champions:

Before

- Champions: Fred and Jonelle Liddell, Vivian Titus, Stan Leach, Victor and Mimi DeLeon (From Peninsula Evangelical Friends Church)
- Praying: Peninsula Evangelical Friends Church, NWYM Board of Global Outreach and office staff, Liddell's extended family, Aufrances, Banhams, Bethel Friends in KS, Northridge Friends in KS, Lisa Garon, members of both Luke 10 trips
- Who is God calling: Liddells?

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A for Affirmation:

Before

- Pioneers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kat and the Crockers), Greater Europe Mission in Croatia (the Lehns), Operation Mobilization in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Kavedzics, Jesse McCourtney)
- Since last trip, Liddells have been increasingly drawn to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro
- There are people resolved to send Liddells but it remains to be determined if there are people with such resolve if Liddells are removed from the equation. Put another way, there is great support for this field as a potential place for Liddells to be, but we are still looking for those whose resolve is focused on the field itself.

During

- Pioneers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kat and the Crockers), Greater Europe Mission in Croatia (the Lehns), Operation Mobilization in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Kavedzics, Jesse McCourtney), Assemblies of God team in Montenegro (Tamara and Jonathan, with

message from national pastor who was busy that day), Pastors in Mostar (Dalibor, Ben, Karmelo), Pastors in Croatia (Ico, Daniel, Neno, and church elder Niksha)

- During this trip, we learned that much demographic data we had seen was a few years out of date and that all three countries are seeing some major shifts in the last few years. Pastor Dalibor in Mostar helped correct some of those misunderstandings. Interactions with the three pastors in Croatia and time exploring there brought Croatia back to the forefront of all of our thinking, as it had been at the end of the first Luke 10 trip to this region. We learned that there has been a recent influx of Muslims from the Middle East into the Bosniak areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of low income workers from the developing world into Dubrovnik, Croatia and into Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croatian pastors and the Lehns highlighted the area around Orebic as a key area with no workers in it currently.

After

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N for Need:

Before

- This region is mostly religious by ethnicity and they define their religion accordingly. Religion is mostly cultural in practice. There are deep ethnic/religious divides, with suspicion and hostility of neighboring groups. Historical offenses are held onto for centuries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, everyone over the age 30 was involved in the war or directly affected by it in some way. Most larger towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina have at least one Christian worker in them and often a church. There are only six churches in Montenegro and three in the southern half of Croatia. Bosniaks are generally Muslim, Croats are Catholic, Serbs and Montenegrins are Serbian Orthodox.

During

- North Croatia is more secular than nominal catholic, unlike the Dalmatian Coast where we were looking, but in this whole region religious identity is held to tightly because changing religion means changing your whole identity and risking social and family ostracization and hostility. Among Bosniaks, there are recent immigrants encouraging both increased zeal in Islamic faith and increased extremism in its expression. There has been a heavy influx of Muslim immigrants and money in the Bosniak population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- The missionaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Montenegro all commented on the importance of treating those countries much like a closed country. To be very careful of what is posted on social media or online, and very careful about how you present your reason for being in the country to nationals. To be honest, but careful not to present yourself as a threat to the local mosque or Orthodox church (avoid language like “I am a priest, here to set up a new church”).
- Ministry Needs:
- Wide spread trauma/PTSD, need for counseling, family/marital support

- Trebinje: Lack of community services, health education and resources, modeling of healthy families
- Dubrovnik: Ministering to immigrant workers with irregular schedules
- Orebic: Partnering with Pastor Ico initially, relationship building, ministering to nationals and internationals in area
- Every worker we talked to spoke of the rarity of believers and emphasized that in orthodox and catholic groups there is surface knowledge of God without saving faith or assurance of salvation. There are very few evangelical Christians among the Bosniak population of the region. The phrase “this is a pioneering work/field” was used by several of the missionaries we spoke to (in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro). Every worker we spoke to also emphasized the need for more workers in the region, the missionaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia said “this would be an answer to prayer.”

G for Gifting:

Before

- Liddells

During

- Liddells
- Perseverance, ability to minister even when isolated
- Counseling, especially with secular qualifications?
- Building healthy families
- Ability to give health education and resources
- Education experience
- Reconciliation ministry
- Evangelism
- Discipleship, Bible studies
- Business, digital nomad?
- Bosnian workers mentioned this as the best, if not only, way to get long term visas. Croats echoed, but more to it being a great way to get a visa, but not necessarily the only way.
- Tech skills
- At least two units, one with missions experience. It will take time to figure out best approach to visas and how that will or will not impact ministry focus. Possibly start with language school and student visa for first year or two, in Zagreb (2 year program, poor place to learn culture), Dubrovnik (1 year program, good place to learn culture), Belgrade (2 year program, good place to learn Serb culture, but wrong country) or Sarajevo (2 year program, good place to learn Bosniak/Croat culture). Visa laws in all three countries change frequently.

O for Opportunity:

During

- Pastor Ico said “The fields are ripe for the harvest.” But most people we talked to emphasized that ministry will take a lot of ground preparation and that it will likely take years or decades to see even a small church planted. In Montenegro they spoke of being in the rock picking stage, hoping to reach the seed sowing stage eventually. There is more legal leniency for evangelism in Croatia than in Montenegro. All three countries mentioned the likelihood of resistance to any evangelical work, driven by strong national churches/mosques and the centuries long social

identification with those church/mosques. We were told that we should consider southern Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska) and Montenegro to be restricted nations.

- All the workers listed above among believers, especially the Kavedzics and the Lehns were men and women of peace. Our rental host in Capljina provided us with breakfast. Ico gave much time and traveled distances twice to meet with us so that we did not have to drive hours further. We also formed a surface relationship with a shopkeeper in Trebinje near our apartments.
- We feel that the Dubrovnik pastors, the Lehns, the Kavedzics, and the Crockers were men and women of peace.
- We could coordinate with Ico, basing out of Orebic, focusing on discipleship. In Bosnia and Herzegovina we heard repeatedly that business would be a good way to gain legitimacy among locals, possibly some form of tech work, tourism work or community development in Trebinje. Every contact we spoke to mentioned the need for teachers and educators, but not necessarily English teachers. Discipleship and evangelism are very needed throughout the region, probably coordinated with local partners, as the fruit of developed relationships. There is the possibility of using a “regular” job with secular credentials as an avenue to a visa, especially for skilled workers due to “brain drain” emigration to western Europe. Such a job or business adds legitimacy to presence in the view of locals.

Is this a CAN GO for EFM at this time?

This will be a difficult field requiring long term investment with low expectation of measurable results initially. There are very few, very small, churches in this region, so there are many cities and towns where churches could be planted, once the work of evangelism and discipleship has produced a body of believers.

Which of the five criteria do we see the strongest? Which of the five criteria is yet to become convincing?

“Need” is definite and is the strongest criteria. “Champions” is yet to become convincing.

Describe key points or stories in the process and affirmation/confirmation of God’s call to Evangelical Friends to go to this particular people or place.

The meeting with the Croatian pastors was very helpful and positive, they were eager to help and willing to meet with us again. There were several points where they used phrases that Liddells have been specially praying about.

What steps have you taken since returning from the trip or need to take in further discernment or exploration of this field?

We met with Stan Leach before we returned. Some team members will be sharing/have shared with our local churches and are looking for champions. We anticipate that a further trip will be needed to continue to develop these contacts and look more specifically at ministry details in Orebic and at possibilities for specific types of businesses that could be used as ministry springboards in our various target locations. We can begin this follow up via email with some of our pastor contacts in this region.

Luke 10 Team Recommendation to EFM

We recommend that EFM move forward with opening this field, focused on the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia, possibly in Orebic. With the right giftings, this field could be extended to southwest Bosnia and Herzegovina and/or northern Montenegro. There will need to be ongoing

communication with our existing contacts via email and/or video calls to answer questions about ministry and/or business opportunities. We recommend a followup trip (possibly the prayer trip) for in person conversations, to begin relationships with local believers and unbelievers, and to look specifically at the logistics of getting people on the ground. One big decision will be approach to language learning, language helpers versus language school (and the benefit of having a student visa initially).