

DECEMBER 2016

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 3:20

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:20

Dear Friends,

At the 5th Advocates Caribbean Conference in Georgetown, Guyana last month, we were reminded that we have been given a special charge by our King: that is to be His ambassadors, especially to the legal profession. As advocates and lawyers, we are specially trained to interact in legal settings: courtrooms, etc., and we speak a different language: legalese. And although we hail from different countries, we are first and foremost, citizens of Heaven.

The conference itself was a tremendous success, attended by almost one hundred lawyers, judges, law students and pastors. We addressed the theme *“The Role of the Church in a Changing World: Steadfast and Immovable,”* and were treated to excellent talks from a variety of speakers including the Chief Justice of Guyana, Yonette Cummings-Edwards, who winsomely reminded us what it means to be steadfast and immovable; the Honorable Madame Justice Maureen Rajnauth-Lee, now serving on the Caribbean Court of Justice, who brought our Sunday devotional on being ambassadors for Christ; and from a young law student who had written his own poem on being in the legal profession.

Getting to know these amazing advocates is a great encouragement, and knowing that they represent a bright future for their nations is a blessing. Please continue to pray with us for Advocates Guyana and the other fellowships around the Caribbean as they face the challenges of a changing world, relying on their faith in Jesus to be steadfast and immovable, true ambassadors for Christ.

As 2016 comes to a close, I’m reminded of other ambassadors for Christ with whom I was blessed to break bread this past year. In February, I attended the World Without Orphans Global Forum in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where over 600 believers gathered from 90+ nations. I led workshops on the legal aspects of working with orphans and foster children. I then joined Mark Mudri in Adelaide and Melbourne, Australia for meetings with advocates and Christian leaders from across the great southland. In March, I traveled to Europe where I met together with advocates fighting for the persecuted church at both the Religious Liberty Partnership Consultation in Oxford and the GKPN in Lisbon. In April I joined fellow ambassadors to the legal profession at the Christ und Jurist Congress in Stuttgart.

In June, Advocates was honored to send as ambassador one of our board members, Dean Jeffrey Brauch from Regent Law School, to the Advocates Asia regional conference in Krygyzstan, where he met with fellow lawyers and judges from across Central Asia, Korea, Russia and Singapore. In September, it was back Down Under for the 3rd AustralAsian Christian Legal Conference in Brisbane, where over 160 legal “ambassadors for Christ” from 18 nations pursued the theme of *Redeeming the Law*, and the Global Council held its annual face-to-face meeting.

And throughout the year, we have celebrated our 25th anniversary of encouraging, equipping and enabling advocates to do justice with compassion, remembering the legacy of Sam Ericsson and his vision to see Advocates International become “A Worldwide Fellowship of Advocates Bearing Witness of Jesus Christ Through the Legal Profession.” One can hardly find a better definition of being ambassadors.

We covet your prayers as we move into 2017. Like the theme of the conference in Guyana, we face many changes, yet resolve to remain steadfast. With Romi’s retirement after 14 years, we will be bringing on new staff. The Global Resource Teams, under the direction of the Global Council, will be tackling new projects.

At least three regional conferences are planned: Advocates Europe will gather in February in Tenerife, Spain; Advocates Africa will gather in August in Accra, Ghana; and Advocates Latin America (FIAJC) will gather in November in Rio de Janiero, Brazil. I invite you to join me at any or all of these three conferences to meet with these wonderful ambassadors to the legal profession. In addition, Advocates partnerships with the RLP and GKPN will have me traveling to Brazil and Peru for meetings that impact the Church around the globe.

We are grateful for the prayer support for Advocates. As I say every month, we couldn’t do what we do without it. We are also incredibly grateful for the regular support of faithful donors—both monthly gifts and year-end gifts. The end of the year is almost here. If you have not yet given this year, or ever, we ask that you would prayerfully consider including Advocates International in your year-end charitable giving. Your gifts allow us to continue to further the vision of encouraging ambassadors to the legal profession. Those advocates, like Justice Yonette from Guyana, are winsome and engaging, impacting their nations for the better. We are honored to serve alongside them as fellow ambassadors.

A Merry Christmas to you and yours and may the Lord bless and keep you in His perfect . . .

Grace and Peace,



Brent McBurney
President and CEO



ADVOCATES IN ALBANIA: FROM 1992 to 2016

This is a report from Roger Sherrard's 50th Albanian trip to Tirana since 1992 when he and Sam Ericsson made a "needs assessment" visit.

In 1992, as the Soviet-built Tupolev 34 circled to land at the Tirana Airport, we could see what appeared to be dozens of reinforced concrete bunkers, placed to repel the U.S./NATO invasion which was "sure to come." Our bags were off-loaded from the propjet, placed in a horse-drawn cart and shoved through an opening in the wall with rubber strips hanging down to secure the opening in the wall and taken to the luggage room where passengers waited.

Albania was then the poorest nation in Europe and also the most repressive. In 1967—after over 20 years under a communist dictator and few friends—its Parliament passed a law banning religious activity. The law provided that possession of a Bible, Koran, or even possession of a religious artifact, such as a crucifix, was a criminal offense. 25 years was a light sentence. It was reported that more than 30% of the adult population of Albania had been in prison.

Sam and I were there because of two letters I had received at our small law office in Poulsbo on the Olympic Peninsula, west of Seattle. Two different visitors to Albania, who did not know each other, had written and faxed letters encouraging American lawyers to assist Albania in its transition. The letters came on the same day, March 24, 1992, with the same request. Then, as if someone was worried that I had not gotten the message, a new client called to change the subject of our conference to a small Balkan country where he had just visited and he wanted to redirect his efforts. Plus, he had video of the poor conditions of, you guessed it . . . Albania. We did not need a fourth invitation.

In the nearly 25 years since then, we have heard many accounts of the courage of what the underground religious leaders of the city of Shkoder, Albania, did. Knowing that the Berlin Wall had come down—but that it was still a criminal offense to participate in religious activity—the Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics agreed to work together to rebuild each other's places of worship. In the process they won the respect of their fellow Albanians.

They not only worked together, but they became friends. During the Balkan conflict reports arrived in Shkoder that the Serbs, using the tactics which had been successful in the former Yugoslav countries, were going to the Catholic Cathedral to destabilize Shkoder by having Serb soldiers dress up as Muslims and attack the Cathedral. The leaders of Shkoder sent a message back that the religious communities had an organized defense and were guarding one another's places of worship and that an attack on one would be an attack on all.

The respect which the people of Shkoder have for one another goes far beyond their city!

Following the terrorists attack on the Hebdo journalists in Paris in January of 2015, 3.7 million people marched in Paris to protest the violence against the journalists. The leaders of Albania's religious communities marched arm in arm down the Champs-Élysées with Prime Minister Rama, in support of religious freedom, freedom of speech and freedom of conscience. When I shared the Shkoder story with a dear friend, she became very interested and suggested that this story needs to be told to the world. It is one of religious tolerance blossoming to respect. She then made as substantial bequest from her estate, which should help.

My wife Katoo and I, with the help of many friends, planned a trip to Albania to kick off the project. We've found an Albanian videographer and with the help of friends, met several people in Shkoder and Tirana. We met the videographer when we arrived and sought the Lord's guidance. We then received three "nudges." The first, when I was trying to go to sleep that first night (with a nine hour time difference), the idea came to mind that a good start to the video would be to find a copy of the statute banning religion and narrating what it did while zooming in on the text.

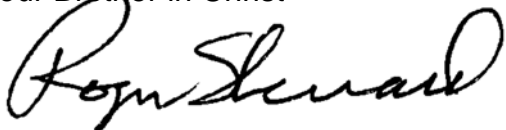
The second nudge came at breakfast in the dining room of our hotel. After sharing the idea with Katoo along with my own reservation that we should be sensitive to the creativity of the videographer, he arrived at our table, about an hour before we expected him. He shared, with excitement, a vision he had had during the night of how to begin the video story. He then recited almost verbatim what I had just shared with Katoo a few minutes before he arrived.

The third nudge happened on our final day in Albania. We met with the leader of the Bektashi—a Muslim sect with at least 7,000,000 followers that hold the New Testament as a sacred text and that women have equal rights—who marched in Paris with the Prime Minister and the other religious leaders. After a lengthy meeting, he took us on a tour of their museum. As we all spread out Faubi, our videographer, let out a war whoop. He had just found a copy of the statute criminalizing all religious observance, including even possession of a Bible, Koran, crucifix, or religious painting. With this third confirmation, we were once again humbled that God coordinated even the smallest details of our trip.

One of the most important aspects of this project is the potential impact on the fight against corruption in Albania. The new Dean of the law school is a close friend whom we've known from our earliest trips. The Prime Minister's legal advisor is likewise a long-time friend. Both grasped the concept of introducing the religious communities to the battle against corruption. The leader of Bektashi also wants to join us in the battle against corruption. We plan to assist our friends to develop long-term connections amongst the religious communities, the government and the Albanian citizenry.

Although AI received designated funding for the video project, we are not certain of the final cost, and will happily accept your support. This is not only an exciting opportunity but one which can influence a whole country, albeit small, but literally at a crossroads.

Your Brother in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.