

A Letter from the Callas' serving as St. Paul's missionaries in Albania/July, 2002

Dear Friends at St. Paul's,



In the midst of all that has happened since our last newsletter clearly the most startling were the events back home in early September. We have received many inquiries of concern from friends and family to see if we are alright; rest assured that we are. In general, Albanians love Americans and have expressed deep regret and sorrow for the attacks on the US. Officially, right after the attacks Albania joined the whole of Europe with a march of peace followed by 3 minutes of silence with flags at half-mast in the center of Tirana. Throughout the various terrorism alerts, in Albania the American embassy has remained calm and has expressed no immediate need for alarm, but only to be prepared. This being said, ultimately our security is in our faith and the seriousness of these events, as well as the conflicts occurring in Israel and Palestine as well as India and Pakistan, only reminds us more that missions of peace hold the hope of the future.

We just participated in our second Paschal season in Albania. This year again we were struck by the joy and exuberance of the Albanian people in celebrating Pascha. I was one of the bodyguards for the Archbishop during the Paschal procession - not to protect him from violence but rather from all the people desperately seeking to have him light their candles. This year there were probably 10,000 people in the street in front of the Cathedral for the Resurrection service. We were also very blessed to spend Good Friday in a city in the south of Albania called Korça where 80% of the people are Orthodox. The five main churches in the area all brought their epitaphions together in one procession that circles through the streets of the city - in this procession there were probably 30,000 people who were quite strangely lead by three long-haired young men on motorcycles. The event was quite breath-taking. Clearly this is a very special city in Albania; in the last decade they built a 26 meter concrete cross as a way to proclaim their joy in their faith.



*Lara with Sister Berta (center)
and a friend*

We also had the privilege to meet one of Albania's strongholds, a woman named Sister Berta who throughout the communist period helped a priest in Korça perform secret baptisms.

Since our last newsletter a year ago, a great many things have changed in our mission work. At that time, Lara was struggling with issues of productivity and how her legal experience would be useful. Initially, Lara attempted to work in the legal office of the Metropolis (Archdiocesan Office) to help the church in its efforts to reclaim properties seized during the communist period from 1945-1991. The vast complexity of the issues revealed to her that we should create a detailed and

comprehensive database that itemizes all the parameters of each property. A new job has been created for an Albanian lawyer and a year long project has begun. Also, Lara saw the need to research what others were doing in this area. During her search she contacted NGO's (Non-Governmental Organization) and international organizations in Albania and came upon the OSCE



30,000 people gathered for Resurrection services in Korca on Pascha

Advisor, and after her first month-and-a-half she was elevated to the position of Legal Counselor. This means she oversees the function of the entire legal department (2 internationals and 7 Albanians) as well as has more impact on the direction of the office projects. One of the main projects Lara is working on for the OSCE is to instigate reform and progress on the restitution of and compensation for properties seized in the communist period prior to 1991 to former owners. Because restitution and compensation has been a process full of problems and corruption it not only results in injustice for former property owners, including the church, but also continues to keep title to property in a state of uncertainty which hinders Albania's economic development. Lara has succeeded in obtaining funding to bring foreign experts in to advise the Parliament in drafting new laws and is serving as the project coordinator for this assistance which means she is working very closely with the parliamentary representatives responsible for this reform.

Another project she is involved in is the creation of witness protection mechanisms and laws in Albania - as it is now, most people are afraid to testify against serious criminals, including human traffickers (those who traffic women from poor countries into Europe to serve as prostitutes), because there is no way to protect the witnesses from retribution for their testimony. As Legal Counselor she is also participating in important efforts for reform and institution building in the legal sector of Albania. These particular efforts are key because judicial corruption is rampant and many criminals go unprosecuted and unpunished. We all hope that Lara's work is productive and helpful for the development of the rule of law in Albania especially as to the very destabilizing issue of property restitution. For me, I also feel blessed and challenged with the opportunities that are being presented. When we were first here, I was given a few projects to handle including an orphanage, the Archdiocesan website, generating architectural ideas for the Cathedral as well as assisting in the architectural competition. Well, I'm happy to say that all are going well: we are finishing construction of the orphanage, the Archdiocese web site is still under reconstruction and should be ready soon; and the competition for the Cathedral finished with architect Stephen Papadatos Associates from New York emerging as the winner. The orphanage is particularly exciting because another of the missionary families, the Lindermans, will be moving into this building soon to begin welcoming orphaned Albanian children.



Archbishop Anastasios (Yiannoulatos) of Albania

These projects alone kept me very busy, but in early October my work life changed dramatically.

The Archbishop appointed me to be the new director of the Technical Office (Archdiocesan Architectural Office). The appointment was an unexpected honor and these months have been a very humbling experience. With approximately seventy active projects and a staff of 10, we oversee work that ranges from: the aforementioned orphanage, the renovation of buildings into schools (from elementary to professional), the construction of new churches, the preservation of historical church monuments, and the restoration of centuries old churches and monasteries. In one of the restorations in the South, we discovered under the ruins of one church, the ruins of an even older church which the experts believe may date back to the Fourth or Fifth century. Such discoveries reveal Albania's Christian heritage the recognition of which is important to the efforts to bring Albania's people back to Orthodox Christianity. In terms of the Cathedral I am serving as the interface between Mr.



The new orphanage is almost complete.

Papadatos and the Archbishop to finalize the drawings necessary to submit to the municipality to obtain permission to begin breaking ground. On a more pragmatic note, I have been working to make the office function more professionally and efficiently by establishing documentation systems, job accounting, time sheets, etc. as well as training the other architects on the latest architectural software. This job also requires me to travel all over Albania to check the status of each of our projects. The beauty of the mountainous countryside of Albania contrasts sharply with the poverty and lack of infrastructure; this country has tremendous potential and extraordinary need. Honestly, for Lara and I, the enormity of the work is overwhelming and we ask for your continued prayers for wisdom, strength and guidance for the trials that lie ahead.

You are in our prayers. God Bless you always.

Love,

Anthony and Lara Callas

*(Anthony and Lara Callas were commissioned by our parish
to serve as missionaries in Albania in March, 2001.)*