

New hope in New Tirana

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Tirana, as viewed from the South

Last November, the nations of the European region were twinned together with one of the communities in Albania. What was then known as the Island Nations sub-region (which at the time included the UK, Ireland, Iceland and Malta) was twinned with the New Tirana centre, a community located in a relatively new and affluent area of Albania's capital. During the European Assembly in March this year I met the centre leader, a sister called Majlinda, and after some brief correspondence over the following months, I arrived in Tirana in early June to visit their community for a few days.

Majlinda is a bright and hopeful sister. Her husband, Matteo, works in the Albanian HQ. They are both younger than me – in fact, Matteo joined CARP in 2004 after being witnessed to by a member of STF Europe – and we connected in heart with each other very easily and very deeply. A number of students also live in the centre, going to university every day and also supporting many of the centre's evangelical and social activities. There are also a number of student members and blessed family members connected to the community; in summary it is a very young and relatively small community.

For a couple of days I was privileged to stay in their centre – an apartment above a grocery shop – where there was also an STF team supporting the community activities. The spirit in the centre was very exciting. Amongst the things I did during those few days, I could:

- speak at a CARP event for guests and members

- share my testimony during a 4-hour evening prayer programme

- be introduced to a Dean of Students at a local university to speak about how CARP could serve the student community

- visit a young blessed couple with their young baby

- participate at a cosmic blessing event in the city of Durrës at which 37 already married couples received the blessing

- have lunch with some local Ambassadors for Peace who admire our community and dearly love True Parents

I felt like I was able to offer some meaningful support, not only by attending these appointments but also by sharing some wisdom with the centre leaders and the members. This was actually quite a humbling experience: Often I am the youngest person attending European level meetings, but in this community

everyone was younger than me, so I simply had to trust that God could speak through me to the members and draw upon any wisdom I could have acquired from my past failures and victories.



Majlinda & Matteo

During a meeting with the European leadership in the Albanian community's training centre in Mullet, which immediately followed my time with with the community, I shared my reflections about the Albanian community, praising the strengths I identified and raising concerns about issues I felt needed to be addressed. Albania is the only nation in Europe that has been designated as a Strategic Nation, identified as a nation in which we can establish Cheon Il Guk in a meaningful way by 2020. I'm keenly aware of the challenges – both within the mission in Albania and in the nation more broadly – that stand in the way of saving the nation in the next three years or so, but I do feel there are also some very special qualities that give me hope that this goal might be attainable:

The Albanian people are very family oriented and in some parts of the country there remains a clan-system of community organisation. There is also a remarkable degree of purity in the hearts and minds of young people in Albania, more so certainly than in many other European countries. There is a high degree of social cohesion within society, especially between the religious communities (primarily Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians) and there is an absence of religious fundamentalism. Albanians highly value the virtues of loyalty and being trustworthy – they have a word for the ability to keep a promise that does not translate easily into other languages – and especially the virtue of hospitality. To illustrate this point, I shall conclude this report with a story I heard during my time there:

Several hundred years ago, a jealous peasant murdered another man at the village bazaar. Brought before the local leader, he was quickly found guilty. The local leader, however, wanted to ask the criminal one question before condemning him to death. He asked, “Has there has been a previous day on which you felt even worse than you feel today?” The peasant replied, “The only day I felt worse than I do today was the day a visitor came to my home and I had nothing to give to them.” Upon hearing this answer, the local leader forgave the criminal and set him free. Such is the value of hospitality in Albania.

Recently [it had been announced](#) that members are being invited to support the New Tirana community, primarily by visiting to support them for some period of time. If you would like volunteer your time, please contact your local pastor or [send an email to the FFWPU HQ](#) expressing your intent. Even though there are changes taking place to the region overall, I feel it would nevertheless be meaningful to fulfil our promise of support to our Albanian family.