



Hoppe Family

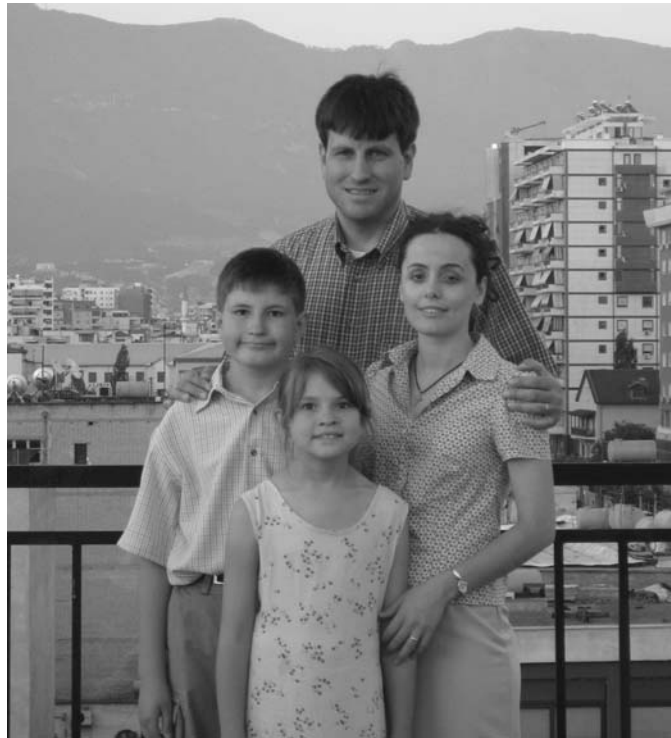
Missionaries Serving in Albania

July 2008

10 Years of Ministry in Albania

March 22 marked 10 years since our arrival in Albania. It was a raw cold day with snowflakes scurrying across the tarmac driven by the sharp wind as we emerged from the airplane onto Albanian soil for the first time. There was no jetway or bus to take us to the terminal. Lynette was disconcerted by the unexpected cold and had to borrow a blanket to shelter 3 ½-month-old Tristan. So very much has happened since then. We have been tremendously blessed to live and work in Albania which has truly become our home. The road has been filled with many joys and sorrows starting with our initial struggle to learn the language and figure out how we could contribute something in Albania. We did not know then that this land would become Lynette's final earthly resting place, and we cannot imagine what else God has in store for us.

I have spent a quarter of my life in Albania, and Tirana is the city in which I have lived the longest. It has been a tremendous blessing to be part of the resurrection of the Church here, and I have grown tremendously through seeing God's hand at work and the ways in which he has consented to use even me. I am increasingly humbled to realize how frail I am and how completely I must depend on Him if I am to accomplish anything. Thank you for your faithful partnership with us through these years. It is only through the power of your prayers that we are able to accomplish anything; and without your financial support we could not be here. By God's grace, we hope to continue serving in Albania for many years to come.



From left to right: Tristan, Katherine, Nathan and Gabriela Hoppe overlooking the capital city of Albania, Tirana, from their apartment.

As Lynette's illness progressed, and after her death, many of you prayed faithfully for the children and me and our life without Lynette. Lynette and I often shared the conviction and our firm faith that God is good, and that He would take care of all of us if He chose to either heal her or take her home. The months after Lynette's death were very challenging for us but were also a time of healing as we learned to be a family of three. As the months turned into a year, I began to realize that perhaps God was preparing a new blessing for our family. Gabriela had been a close friend of our family for many years and a treasured coworker in the children's ministry. She was a dear friend to Lynette and an established favorite of Tristan and Katherine.

Last fall, in a conversation between them which I overheard, they discussed the fact that they would like another sister and brother, but this would entail Daddy getting married again. They discussed it together and decided that they wanted Gabriela as their new mother. They asked me how I was going to accomplish this for them, not knowing that God had already begun to lead Gabriela and me together. We were married by Archbishop Anastasios on January 10, 2008 in a small but beautiful ceremony at the Annunciation Cathedral in Tirana. Gabriela is a native of Albania and a graduate of The Resurrection of Christ Seminary and the University of Tirana. She has a tremendous gift of love for all children and feels very blessed to be a mother to Tristan and Katherine. She is also a wonderful companion and partner in ministry. We truly thank God for bringing us together and we ask for your prayers.

Tristan and Katherine

Both teachers were glowing with their excitement about Tristan and Katherine's progress at our spring parent-teacher conferences. As many of you know, Tristan has struggled academically over the past several years but in the spring semester of this year he has made amazing progress. He went from being below grade level in reading, writing and other areas to being at grade level or above throughout. His teacher was very enthusiastic about his progress and awarded him a certificate for "the most improved student in fourth grade" at the year-end assembly.

Katherine has always done well academically but her teacher was equally enthusiastic. Tears of joy came to her eyes as she related how Katherine has transformed socially over recent months. She said several times that Katherine has come out of her shell. She has come alive again in her relationships with friends and fellow students. Both children have coped very well with the loss of their mother, and all have seen how they have been blessed with the new mother God has provided.

Tristan and Katherine continue to be best friends. They love to play with other children at every opportunity but spend hours together each day. One of their favorite activities is listening to audio books. Among their favorites are *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Treasures of the Snow*, and *Despereanx*. If you have any suggestion of favorites in your family, we would love to hear about them.

Both children also continue to love art projects of all kinds. Katherine is particularly artistic both with visual arts and music. We would very much like to find ways for her to receive training in these areas.

Tristan is particularly interested in machines and living things, especially insects. He spends hours building and creating new things with Legos, K'nex and Bionicles. But his true love is all living creatures. One of his favorite videos is the



Tristan with a new friend at camp

Planet Earth series from the BBC which he watches over and over again, learning in detail the lives of God's creatures from all over the world.

The other day Tristan said to me, "You know, Daddy, most people just don't know how to treat bugs right." Wherever we go he catches interesting insects and keeps them as pets for a while. At camp last week I caught a giant grasshopper for him which he kept for the time that we were there. When it was time to go home, he let it go because, according to him, "The city is not a good place for a grasshopper to live."

We are continuously overwhelmed by the joy and responsibility of nurturing these two young lives. We ask your prayers that we would guide and train them well, that they would grow up to love God above all else and to love all those around them.



Left: Katherine as a flower girl at the wedding.

Above: Fr. Luke Veronis, concelebrating at the wedding, leads Nathan and Gabriela in procession.

Kosovo Camps and Other Ministries...

Late in April we sat in a smokey coffee shop in the small city of Malisheva, Kosovo, with a former KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) officer drinking coffee and talking about the children's camps we are planning for this coming year. Idriz Hoti is now the director of one of the schools in the village of Caralluk which has approximately 500 pupils. Our team of about 25 Albanian young people had led a camp at his school for the first time the previous August. He shared with us the incredible gratitude of the community for our work and told how the whole climate of the school year had been transformed via the camp. "It was like everyone started off the academic year with fully charged batteries ready to go and ready to learn after the stimulating experience of the camp," he said. We held a festive dinner for the staff and faculty of the school after the closing ceremony of the camp. *The Kosovars and Albanians danced, sang and ate together.* He shared with us the feelings they all had after our group departed. "We all sat in complete silence for a long time. We said to one another, 'Say something,' but no one had anything to say. It was the way you feel when a family member who lives far away comes to visit for only a short time and has to leave again before you are ready for them to go."

We will be returning to Kosovo again this August to lead five camps involving approximately 2000 children. The theme of the camps will be freedom. These camps are nonreligious and are carried out as part of the humanitarian work of our church. In a four-day program filled with skits, games, crafts, songs and all kinds of fun, we teach the children citizenship skills and the basic values that they need to be productive members of their society. We use methods that are fun and interac-

Below: Albanian staff performing at camp in Kosovo. Right: Children enjoying camp games at the Caralluke School where Idriz Hoti is the director.



tive so the children do not even know that they are being shaped by this experience; but the directors of the schools and the local government have repeatedly affirmed the tremendously positive impact that our work has on the whole environment.



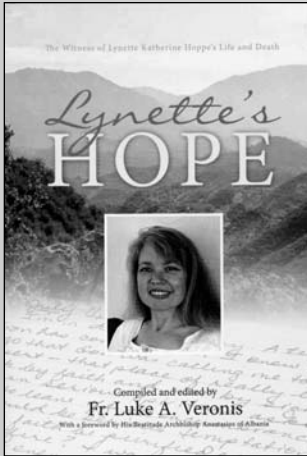
Campers listen to a teaching during a camp in Kosovo.

Please pray for us and our team that we would be filled with God's love which would shine forth from us and help to heal the wounds and brokenness of this community. As Orthodox Albanians, we are in a unique position to help heal the conflict in Kosovo. In addition to our work in the Muslim Albanian villages, we also treasure our relationships with a number of Orthodox Serbians.

"...the whole climate of the school year had been transformed via the camp."

We are involved in numerous other ministries including: field leadership, directing the Central Orthodox Children's Office, the Ministry to university students, teaching at the Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy and representing the Orthodox Church of Albania in international dialogues which space does not permit us to update you on now. Please keep these ministries in your prayers and we will try to share more with you about them soon.

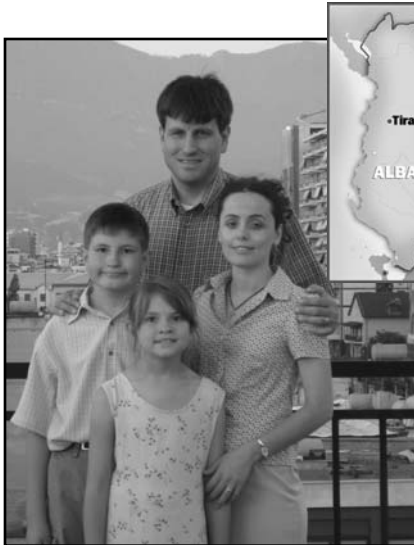
We would like to express very sincere and heartfelt thanks to all of you who have supported our ministry over the years. Your prayers and financial gifts make our work possible. I would also like to ask those who have not been part of our support team to consider taking a more active role. We are desperately in need of your prayers. It is only through them that we can be fruitful. I would also like to ask your financial support. As many of you know, the value of the dollar has dropped dramatically around the world. This, combined with significant inflation, means that dollars are worth less than half of what they were in Albania five years ago. Gasoline is now more than eight dollars a gallon and other basic commodities are also very expensive. Therefore, our monthly financial need is significantly greater than it was a few years ago. Please consider making either a one-time gift or ongoing pledge using the enclosed envelope to help us meet this challenge. **Please make checks payable to "OCMC" with "Hoppe" in the memo line.**



Lynette's Hope by Fr. Luke Veronis

Many of you followed our struggle with Lynette's cancer through her writings on the web-site. These have now been edited together with a number of other things that she and others have written to give a fuller picture of her life and ministry and her final battle with cancer. Father Luke, a dear friend of our families and a co-missionary in Albania for six years, has done a beautiful job putting this book together. We have already heard from many people, both those who knew Lynette and those meeting her for the first time through the book, how blessed and challenged they have been by it. Editions are also in progress in Greek and Albanian.

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