

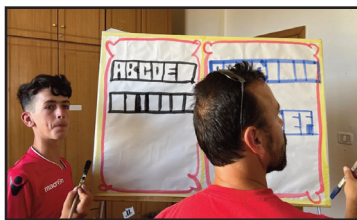
Chapter 3

Albania



Albania was proclaimed independent in November 1912, after almost five centuries of Ottoman rule. After World War II, Albania became a communist state and remained isolationist, during which time it was considered the poorest and most repressive country in all of Europe. Religion was banned, travel was not allowed to its citizens, and ownership of private property was forbidden. Then, with its transition to democracy in the early 1990s, the doors for ministry opened wide, and our OAC staff began walking through!

In 1991, Ian and Caralee Loring were ministering in Greece, taking trips across the border into Albania to minister in the open air. They had previously worked with some Albanians who escaped from communism into Greece and found these folks eager to learn, and they quickly trusted Christ. These folks also had family connections that opened the door to Albania. A short-term bus tour was quickly organized, and the Lorings brought with them the few books of the Bible that had been translated into Albanian. Open-air meetings were held with huge crowds gathering. It was a joy to use the foot of Stalin's statue, which had been pulled down, as a pulpit to preach the gospel in the capital city of Tirana, with hundreds listening. At a meeting held in the stadium in the city of Korca, two thousand attended. With the help of some friends, the Jesus Film



was shown to a packed house in the town movie theater! People were eager to hear what had been forbidden for so long. Reactions of the crowds ranged from welcoming and eager to hostile and threatening, including spitting and rock-throwing. In Erseka, the crowd was particularly hostile as the message on the call of Peter was being preached. Two muscular teens, who spoke a little English, intervened and kept the crowd back, allowing the message to finish. Since our staff could speak some English, these boys were thanked and presented the gospel. Both trusted Christ as their Savior. But, there was a problem. Due to many years religious repression, there were no local churches with which to work with or refer people for follow-up and discipleship. Our early OAC workers in this country found themselves in a situation where, even though our primary purpose is evangelism, planting churches was necessary in order for the work to grow and spiritually flourish in a biblical manner. A church has since been planted in the town of Erseka.

In 1999, California resident Bert Youde found out about OAC through his missions pastor at Shadow Mountain Community Church who promoted building a team to help repair homes in Kosovo due to the civil conflict in that country. Bert was asked to put a construction team together, and by God's grace, ten men spent several weeks rebuilding widows' homes. It was during that trip that he formed a close working relationship with our OAC staff and subsequently, took seven evangelism teams to Albania over the following years to work with our staff and the Korca Evangelical Church. It was in 2008 that Bert was asked to consider helping to officially begin a branch of Open Air Campaigners in Albania by establishing a US-based non-profit mission agency which would facilitate recruitment of workers and resource acquisition. Since that time, God has used OAC staff in other parts of the world to be involved in training and outreach.

Mike and Dawn Getley from OAC Great Britain, along with others have been a great blessing and help through the years. The Lord has also led OAC Albania to establish a girls' safe house and boys' home to meet the needs of those in this part of the world.



TRAINING BELIEVERS HOW TO EFFECTIVELY USE THE SKETCHBOARD

Albano and Fabiola Kadi have three children and in the last 23 years, have been serving God in a variety of ways in the Korca area. In the beginning, Albano was conducting youth ministry and evangelism including working in the church plants of the Korca church. He eventually switched to being the finance person for our church. Eventually, he became a pastor and most currently he is the senior pastor of the Korca church. He also leads the church planting movement in SE Albania which currently is composed of nine churches.



PAUL & ALBANA ALKAZRAJI SERVING AT THE CHURCH PLANT IN VLOÇISHT

Ministry teams have been engaged in the OAC ministry for many years in various capacities, and have included individuals such as Scott and Vickie Anderson, Dr. Fred Beveridge, Plator and Nicole Collaku, Holger & Zhenka Dashi, Petrika Dhimo, Mike Durante, Natalie Mayo, and Ken Yoder. In recent years, Albert Azisllari along with Loren and Aidi Nuri have joined us. Here are some of the staff testimonies illustrating how the Lord has worked through the years in some of the newest staff members. What a great blessing it is to note that many of the following individuals are products of this OAC ministry and are now the ministers!

Paul Alkazraji began his association with OAC in 1997. He was living in the UK and working as a press officer. Paul traveled to Albania in 1998 to write a newspaper report about the work of OAC, which led to a book entitled, “Christ and the Kalashnikov” in the year 2000. Paul met and married his Albanian wife, Albana, and returned to live in the country that same year. They came on staff with OAC Albania in 2003. He developed and ran a magazine for churches in the southeast of Albania called 'Ujëvarë' until 2010. In 2012, he began a new role as team leader of a church plant in the village of Vloçisht, where Albana had a ministry among children. Albana now leads the women’s ministry there, and Paul is pastor of Vloçisht church, also supporting a church plant out of Vloçisht in the nearby village of Bulgarec. Paul is incredibly creative in coming up with new ways to bring people to Christ and leads a team that is reaching out to the surrounding villages. He has written two Christian novels based on his experiences of living in Albania: ‘The Silencer’ (2012) and ‘The Migrant’ (2019). They have one son, Hannel.



XHONI WITH THE TEAM AND IN THE OFFICE

Xhoni Bacellari is located in the city of Korca. He is married to Rudina, and they have two boys, Joeli and Daeni. He works in the church which was established by OAC in 2009. His ministry duties in the office entails handling a wide range of roles and responsibilities.

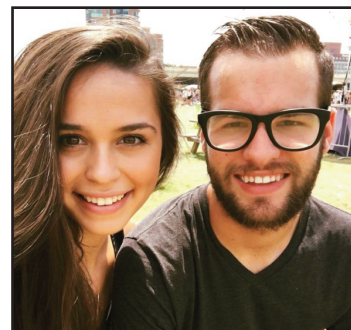
Overseeing the finances for church plants is his major responsibility at this time, but he also takes care of legal affairs and works with the government to obtain any permits or any licensing which OAC needs. He helps our missionaries with housing and living permit details.

Meet Sokol Bori. He is from Durrës and moved with his mother to the village of Sheqeras when he was young. He has been a believer since he was a teen and was baptized at eighteen to show his true commitment to serving God. He has worked for the church since 2016 and, in 2018, came on full time as a pastor in training in Sheqeras after graduating from Bible school. Two of his favorite things are having fun and sharing the gospel. He is married to Sara Kaimaku, and they have served full time in the church and village since 2021.



SOKOL BORI

Thomas Bourke is the son of American missionary parents working with The Navigators. He spent his early adult life in the U.S. Air Force and chose to transition to full-time ministry in Korca after his wife's trip in 2019. Arianna grew up in the U.S., the daughter of an Albanian and an American. Her first trip to Albania occurred in July of 2019 with OAC. The Lord quickly captured her heart for the country, and upon her return, Arianna shared the vision with her husband. With her background in social work/child welfare and his mechanical and musical experience, it was easy to see the ways God could use them in Albania. They served faithfully with OAC until June of 2022.



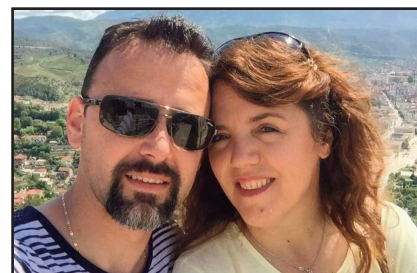
ARIANNA & THOMAS BOURKE



ERION & MELODIE DIELLI

Erion Dielli is from Korca and has been with the church for many years. His wife, Melodie, is from the San Diego area, and she first came to Albania in 2004 with a group from her college. To answer God's call, she moved to Albania in 2005 and began working with OAC. Her first big project was creating the middle school program that we now call Shqiponja. Erion and Melodie were married in 2008 and now have three children. In 2013, they moved to Pogradec to assist in reviving the church plant there. Erion and Melodie now reside in the USA.

Suzana Dumka is from Korca and has been involved in the church for seventeen years now. In 2006, she began volunteering in the village church plants and has been on staff for the past two years. She works in the village of Kamenice with her husband, Altin, who also works in the kids' day center. He is from Korca and has worked with the church for many years. Together, they have built up strong ministries in Kamenice that work with all ages.



ALTIN & SUZANA DUMKA



HEKTOR & ERFIOLA

Hektor (Tori) is from Korca. His grandfather is one of the pastors at The Evangelical Church of Korca which was planted in 2017. Tori has been working with the church since he was a teenager. When he became an official staff member with OAC, he began helping with programs in Vloqisht and later in Bulgarec. He also plays guitar in the worship band in Korca on Sundays. Erfiola is from the village of Libonik. When Erfiola first began with OAC, she was working in the Girls' Home, and now she is spearheading the integration of music therapy into our special education care plan.

Eris Duro is also from Korca and has grown up in the church; his grandfather is one of the pastors at The Evangelical Church of Korca. In 2013, he was baptized and began volunteering with the church. He works with the pre-teen group in Korca called Shqiponja, and he works with the youth. He has created many games for the kids to play, and he often leads the devotional time. He completed his Master's degree in Agronomics at the university here in Korca. During the fall of 2019, he coached a group of boys from Shqiponja in our organization-wide football league.



ERIS DURO



FLORI & ASHLEY

Ashley Henderson first connected with Open Air Campaigners in July 2018 when she came to Albania on a mission trip with her church. She then entered a one-year internship commitment with OAC Albania in June 2019 when she moved there. She felt God leading to extend her stay, living in Korca, and working with the Kenedi Foundation and The Gospel Church of Korca as the media manager. She has served as the administrator for the Instagram and Facebook pages for Open Air Campaigners Albania and maintained

kenedifoundation.org, which has a history of working closely with OAC. Ashley has also been involved with the junior high ministry at the Gospel Church of Korca. She assisted Flori Adili, the coordinator, with logistics and planning; the Lord led them to marry in April of 2020. She and Flori transferred in-house from OAC Albania staff to OAC Great Britain staff in 2024 but continue to have a thriving ministry in Albania.

Sara Kaimaku is from Metro Detroit, Michigan. Both of her parents are from Korca. While visiting the land of her family in 2019, God called her to Himself and to missionary life. She arrived, again, in May to work at the Girls' Home and to do ministry in the village of Sheqeras. That ministry includes meeting with girls (teens and younger), pre-teens, children, and the whole church.



SARA KAIMAKU



PETRINA KALAVESHI

Petrina Kalaveshi is from Korca and has been a part of church programs since she was a little girl. She started volunteering when she was seventeen and began working for OAC in 2019. She is a part of the Shqiponja staff. She leads worship and works with the girls in the group. She helps develop programs and lessons for the group, as well. On Sunday mornings, she sings with the worship team at church.

Xhentil Kora is from the village of Plasa. While attending the church plant programs, he became a believer. Immediately, he began volunteering at the church and eventually became full staff. He graduated from Bible school in March 2019. Throughout the week, he meets with the children, teen boys, and the men of the village for Bible studies and fellowship. He also preaches once a month for Plasa's big group meeting. In addition to all of this, he plays the keyboard during worship for these meetings. Xhentil is married to Victoria and they have one child, Michael.



XHENTIL KORA



AMBRA KURTI

Ambra Kurti is from Vloqisht, and she began taking part in programs when she was three! At the age of ten, she became a true Christian, and now her brother and parents also attend the church. All through her youth, she attended programs, volunteered, and eventually became staff with the church. She creates and facilitates children's programs in Korca and girls' meetings in Plasa.

Mikel (Keli) Kycyku is from Plasa, and also works there. He accepted Christ as his Savior while attending church programs in Plasa. In 2019, he began as staff for the church and is planning to attend Bible school in Erseke for six months. His responsibilities in the village include meeting with the teens and running the men's Bible study.



MIKEL KYCYKU



EGLA & TONI LIKA

Toni (from Korca) and Eglia Lika have two children, a daughter named Ester and a son named Elias. Toni trusted Christ in 2003. He began working for The Evangelical Church of Korca around 2009 and Eglia in 2011, after they got married. In 2016, he and Eglia began to work in the Pojan church plant and moved to Pojan full time. They work with their volunteers to put on programs for all ages, provide care to the people of the village, host summer teams to preach in the open air, and conduct VBS programs.

Ryan McDonald is from the San Diego area of California. His sister, Melodie, came to Albania in 2005, so he came to visit many summers before moving here. Ryan's wife, Kayla, is from Canada and moved to Northern California when she was five. They were married in June 2017 and visited Albania together on their honeymoon. In 2018, they joined OAC and moved to Pogradec in March of that year. They work with the church plant in Pogradec, and their main focus of the ministry is running a coffee shop and Bed and Breakfast.



RYAN & KAYLA MCDONALD

Due to the high unemployment rates in the city, the church felt a strong need to provide opportunities for jobs for the members of their church and community. Ryan and Kayla, along with a team of others from the church, oversaw the renovation and design of the new coffee shop and Bed and Breakfast, Garden Villa, on the recently purchased church property in the center of town. They transformed the three-story, hundred-year-old Villa and its large yard with multiple gardens and patios into a beautiful, classic, and vibrant location. Since the coffee shop's grand opening in August 2018, they have employed over 21 people, and the influence this has had on the church and the families of those employed has been incredible to see. The main goals of Garden Villa are Christ, Community, and Church. Through the training and daily discipling of employees in a Christ-centered work environment, the community is reached, with the ultimate goal of growing the church. The Bed and Breakfast portion of Garden Villa opened in the spring of 2020 as an extension of the same mission with more job opportunities and chances to reach the community while meeting a real business need of the city.



JETNOR MEHMETI

Jetnor (Nori) Mehmeti is from Korca. He became a Christian when he was sixteen, and at the time of this writing is twenty-four. He has two major roles within the church. He is part of the Shqiponja staff, and he works in the kids' day center. During the summer, he facilitated a football (soccer) program for the boys at the day center. Their team is called Korca United. Currently, he is obtaining his degree from Bible school.

Luke and Lydia Valenti have served with Open Air Campaigners Albania church planting in the village of Plasa. Luke was first introduced to the work of OAC and Albania when he went there on a mission trip in college. Touched by the great need of the Albanian people to hear the gospel, God captured his heart for missions. Luke later joined OACA in 2009 to pioneer ministries in unchurched Albanian villages.



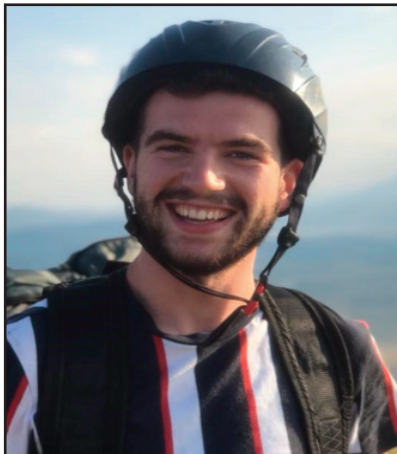
LUKE PREACHES AT THE FIRST CHURCH MEETING OF THE PLASA EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN 2016

During a summer outreach, God led Luke to the town of Plasa, where some youth responded positively to the gospel. Leading a team of Albanian workers, Luke began working with the children and youth of Plasa, eventually ministering to their families as well. Three years into the work, Luke reconnected with his friend Lydia, who also had a heart for missions. They married and returned to Plasa to continue the work of planting a church in the village, serving the needs of the community. Many Albanians believed, and several were baptized, and the Plasa Evangelical Church began services in 2016. Medical issues forced the Valentis to return to the States, and leadership of the Plasa church was transferred to Xhentil Kora and other young adults in the Plasa church. The new and young Albanian leadership grew greatly and continues to lead the Plasa church to this day. The Valentis continue to encourage and fundraise on behalf of the Plasa church from their home in Oregon.

Mesina Vitollari is working in the Tirana area. She came to faith through outreach conducted around 2014 in her home town and has been an active volunteer helping in the Pogradec area. She has finished university in Tirana.



MESINA VITOLLARI



RIZA MYFTARAGO

Riza (Xake) Myftarago is from Korca and has been attending church programs since he was eleven, when his brother invited him and his friend. After attending for a while, he became a Christian and immediately began volunteering to help with programs and games. In 2018, he became an official staff member of the church. He is one of the three core people who organize and orchestrate children's ministry at the church and the three

other zones in Korca. On Sundays and for special programs, he is a part of the drama team, writing and acting.

Mariglen (Geni) Zenga is from Korca, and he has been working with the church since 2017. He is part of the Shqiponja staff and works each week at three or four meetings with the teens and develops programs and lessons when they are not meeting. He often leads worship for those meetings and uses his musical gifts by playing his guitar. On Sunday mornings, he plays piano for the worship group.



MARIGLEN ZENGA

Jonada Ziso is from Pojan, a village just outside Korca. She has been a believer since 2017 and began working for the church in May of that year. She is involved with a handful of things, including the kids' ministries in Korca and in Plasa. She also helps with the girls' ministry in Plasa. She played an important role in translating and building the VBS curriculum used in many of the churches in the summer of 2019. Jonada and Visi have since married. Visi is one of the chefs up at Vila Kenedi.



JONADA & VISI

OAC Albania believes in the OAC motto: "Presenting Christ By All Means Everywhere" and uses every means possible for ministry outreach. God has done a great work in the country of Albania through the years using the OAC staff He has provided. There have been challenges and setbacks along the way, but we continue to look to Him who overcomes and has the final victory!



