



A team of 6 of us headed for Skopje, Macedonia on May 22 and returned home on June 1. The team consisted of Darlene and Gary Maroney, a pastor from New Braunfels, Texas and LeeAnn and Shawn Messer, a pastor from Llano, Texas.

In Skopje we experienced our first earthquake, along with a torrential downpour on Sunday night which caused a power outage in much of the city, including our hotel. We were without electrical power, AC, and hot water for nearly two days, which means that the weather was hot and muggy and the water for washing was cold. The conference started on Tuesday, which was a blessing, because the rain and earthquake occurred late Sunday night. The church where I had spoken that very Sunday morning had several inches of water in it, and had to be cleaned out on Monday before the start of the conference. Many of the conferees had clean-up duty on Monday. Although we operated with generator power on the first night, nearly 120 (all that had signed up) showed up for the conference, plus a large group of 20 or so children. Attendees came from 6 countries including Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and included a missionary couple from Poland. Despite all of the difficulties, God proved Himself faithful in encouraging and equipping those who attended. Encouraging and equipping is the central mission of Shepherds' Support.

Valentina is a family doctor who, along with her husband Jonaton, helped immensely in organizing the conference. Here is a sample of what she wrote concerning our time there: *"I could write long about all the misfortunes that happened during the week, but I will just say that everything worked out for good by God's grace and the most vivid remembrance for me is that during the week God brought me to get to know you all much better (they came to the Croatia conference two years ago) and the events helped me to feel your love and care and sincere effort to encourage me, and of course everybody else who attended the conference, to help us to persevere and to run the race toward the upward call of God despite the adversities and struggles."*



Here are more comments from Sokrat and Lena, who have a ministry to the Gypsies: *"Thank you very much for your encouragement and support during the conference. Before it began, we felt tired and lonely. We thought that we were overloaded with work and that no one understands what we are doing anyway. But, as the conference went on, and as God worked through you and His word, so our hearts were touched, healed and redirected back to the*



source of hope, who is Jesus Christ. The love which flows between you should be an example to us all. In you we could see a real spiritual father and mother. You are special and we thank God for what you are doing. The opportunity for having fellowship with the brothers and sisters from the rest of the Balkans meant a lot to us too."

The most compelling response for me came from another Gypsy pastor who has over 1,000 in attendance on Sunday morning. Pastor Selim and Gordana wrote (I made some corrections to make it a little more readable): *"Through the time that we had together, God really spoke to me and I was very encouraged through the words you were saying which were anointed by the Holy Spirit. My invitation to come was from the Lord. It was the right word at the right time to encourage; and for new visions and plans, new intentions in the work of the Lord. I'm the pastor a long time in the church in which I am today. I haven't gone to conferences recently and I did not think I would go to this one, but that was the trap of the devil to stop me. I thank God that I have heard His voice and that I came and was with you and I heard some new things and new experiences to have with the Lord. I want to thank you again for everything and I cannot describe how much I was touched at this conference. I just wanted to ask you to organize something like this again since you said that you organize conferences like this for several years. Let me know because I would love to come and be present at your teaching again."*



All of the team members were greatly used and ministered both publicly and privately to the conferees. Each of team members were able to connect with different attendees. Connie and I were blessed to have the time to get to know both the Maroneys and the Messers in a much deeper way. God always puts the right people together at the right time.

One final note regarding the attendees – most of these pastors and spouses are first generation believers, many coming from atheistic backgrounds in the old Soviet empire. How privileged we are to have a part in their spiritual development! They are so appreciative of the time in the Word and the time to interact with other brothers and sisters and to make new friends.

All of the prayers that were requested before the conference were answered. We never missed any connections and our luggage traveled all the way there and back with us! God also spared us from any sicknesses. We thank God for your faithful prayers and financial support which makes these conferences possible. Our next trip is planned for the Republic of Georgia. The conference will take place September 8-12. I will update you later on the team that God is putting together for that trip.

On behalf of the SSI Board and our team we say “Thank you for your eternal investment in the lives of many pastors and wives who are often overlooked.”

Pastor Steve, Connie and the SSI Board