



**For God's Children**  
INTERNATIONAL

## a personal note

from joel burkum

FGCI Executive Director

*Joel and Nootsie on the last evening he was in Romania (Dec. 2019).*

March 10, 2021

*"His mercies...are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:23).*

Dear Friends,

Spring is here! Praise the Lord! I am so ready. I'm also ready to get through this so-called "new normal" to a newer and better normal. :) The "new normal" I'm interested in is living in such a way that, regardless of the circumstances, "for me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). This means that each day with its twists and turns, its joys and sorrows, is a normal part of a faithful life surrendered to Jesus. It was in the midst of great sorrow and distressing times in the land of Judea that the prophet Jeremiah remembered the faithfulness of God. Jeremiah's beautiful words in Lamentations 3:23 remind us that even in the middle of the worst of times God provides new, unexpected blessings for His people. As the beautiful



*Nootsie and FGCI worker Nicoleta deliver relief food packages in Eastern Romania.*

hymn reminds us, "Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed Thy hand hath provided; Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me" (Chisholm).

It's been one year now since we've been in worldwide lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic. This has definitely been a challenge for our ministry (and for most others'), as we were unable to travel to Romania/Moldova the entire year of 2020. Already in 2021, we have passed the deadline for booking the flights for our first "regularly scheduled" annual spring trip. It is frustrating and disheartening, but it forces us to look for new avenues for moving forward in ministry. And we trust in God's faithful provision.



*Sergiu unloads one of hundreds of van loads of relief goods he has delivered for FGCI.*

This year, FGCI will be celebrating 25+ years of ministry. We are so thankful that God has provided us with such favor as we have worked in Romania, Moldova and here in the States. During all these 25+ years, God has blessed our ministry through the "gift" of our dear sister in Christ, Domnica "Nootsie" Ristea, and her husband Sergiu. Those of you who have supported FGCI for any length of time know just how much they mean to us. [Nootsie has been the president of our Romanian organization, *Fundatia For God's Children International*, since the very beginning. Sergiu Ristea has been our faithful driver and capable FGCI-RO fleet manager for around 20 years.]

## *Nootsie and Sergiu Ristea prepare for a new adventure!*

Soon after our ministry started in the mid '90s, "Mama Nootsie" became the favorite of all the kids we served. Her love for the Lord and children of all ages is legendary. Her counseling skills and Bible storytelling abilities are amazing. And, for many of the hundreds and hundreds of chil-



*Nootsie and Sergiu Ristea have been serving with For God's Children International since its beginning in the mid 1990s.*

dren we have served over the past 25 years, "Mama Nootsie" is their only mother. She continues to keep in regular contact with many of our "kids" who are now grown adults and, many, parents themselves. Nootsie could have retired several years ago, but she told me, "I want to continue to serve with FGCI as long as I can." [Thanks so much, Nootsie!] Unfortunately, we have known that the inevitable day would come—and it did last week—when Nootsie and Sergiu would let us know that it was time for them to retire from full-time service. During our recent video chat with Nootsie she told Jeremy and me, "I still feel young on the inside, but when I look in the mirror it tells me that it's now time to retire."

Nootsie and Sergiu plan to retire from full-time service with FGCI sometime in 2021. And, while we know that they will always be part of our FGCI family, we will miss having them serving with us full-time. Words cannot express just how grateful we are for the Ristea's many combined years of service to our Lord, to the children we serve, and to FGCI. Nootsie and Sergiu have been faithful partners in Christ and a driving force in our ministry to "the forgotten children" in Romania's orphanages and children's centers where FGCI works. They are among my dearest friends, as well. Their unique and selfless contribution to FGCI is irreplaceable. Things are going to look very different now as we turn the page and start the next chapter of FGCI's ministry to God's hurting children without the Ristea's at the forefront of our Romania ministry. [Talk about your "new normal"!]

## **A CARD SHOWER** of love, thanks and good wishes for Nootsie & Sergiu Ristea!

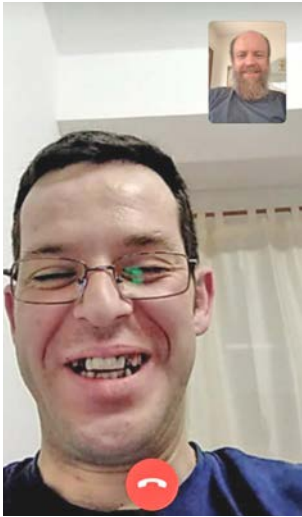
We would like to invite you to join us as we thank Sergiu and Nootsie and let them know how much their faithful service, love and friendship has meant to all of us. **On March 20, Nootsie will be celebrating her birthday.** We would love to shower the Ristea's with messages of love and appreciation for all they have done in Jesus' name for us and our kids in Romania and Moldova. **If you would like to send greetings to the Ristea's, please send them to me ASAP (even after March 20).** I will be sure they get the messages. Send your cards and greetings c/o Joel Burkum: FGCI, PO Box 434, Council Bluffs, IA 51502-0434. Send emails to: [fgci@fgci.org](mailto:fgci@fgci.org). Send text messages to me (Joel) at: 712-310-0077.

more >>>





*"Mama" Nootsie visiting some of her adoring "daughters" on a recent trip to Eastern Romania. These visits are a tremendous encouragement to the girls.*



*Jeremy has been continuing his video Bible study chats with young people in Romania and Moldova.*

Though we ache to see our kids, we know that God will provide the means for us to serve them even in our physical absence. We are so thankful for the "over and above" care that our staff members in Romania and Moldova, Nootsie, Sergiu, Nicoleta, Vlad & Carolina and many national volunteers have been able to provide to our kids. We have been able to continue sending money to purchase food, firewood and other necessities for needy families and friends in Moldova and Romania during the coronavirus shutdowns.

Throughout the first months of this new year, FGCI has been able to continue reaching many of our kids in Romania and Moldova through videos, and via visits by FGCI staff members in both countries. Next month, Jeremy will be updating you on the status of our video outreach. He will also be sharing some wonderful news about our SponsorLink program.



**Left:** *Vlada celebrates her 9th birthday at Home of the Good Shepherd in Nisporeni, Moldova.*

*Vlad writes: The children in our house are doing well. We had a wonderful time celebrating Women's Day [March 8] and Vlada's birthday [March 4]. At the moment we are in quarantine, but we hope that the children will be able to go to school. We try to involve the children in the work at home, and to help us with different things. All the children have grown up. Time is like a king flying very rapidly. The children miss you very much and they all send you warm hugs.*



I was so delighted, last week, to finally get to meet Zina (pictured at left) via video chat. She is our newest family member at Home of the Good Shepherd in Nisporeni, Moldova. [She's already been in our foster home for more than a year!] She was a bit shy, but very polite and happy to answer my questions.

I can't wait to be back in Nisporeni in person with our foster family there under the capable care of Vlad and Carolina Pogor. Vlad and Carolina tell us that they have been keeping very busy with homeschooling the children and keeping them occupied during the pandemic school shutdowns.

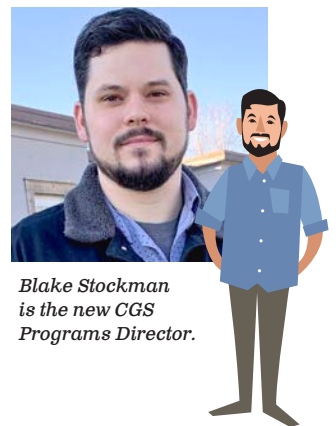


Vlad (pictured in above photo, center) has also been busy with the Roma (Gypsy) youth, including enlisting more young people in English language courses sponsored by FGCI. We currently have 12 young Roma children and teens taking formal courses in English. This will be a big advantage for their future work and educational opportunities. Vlad writes: *"This was the last youth group I led in Vulcanesti. The teenagers are doing well, I have indeed seen radical changes in their lives. I am glad that we have a close and sincere relationship with them. We hope to make our home (Home of the Good Shepherd) a separate place where we can better work with young people from Vulcanesti. To learn to do different jobs. The youth send you greetings and hugs."*

We prayerfully anticipate that flight restrictions will be lifted by summer so that Jeremy Befort and I and other staff and missions team members from the States will be able to travel to and lead Bible camps in Romania and Moldova. Please continue to pray that we will be able to enter Romania and Moldova soon.

### **Camp of the Good Shepherd Summer 2021 Update**

In March we begin to ramp up our preparations for Summer Bible Camp at our Camp of the Good Shepherd near Louisville, Nebraska. Last year we were not permitted to hold Bible camps. We are hopeful that this year our campgrounds will be allowed to open as scheduled, starting with our **Rally@theCamp!** on **Saturday, May 29**. We are excited to introduce our new CGS Programs Director, Blake Stockman. He began working with us in February. Blake is a very capable and promising young man from the Omaha area. We are excited to have him onboard our ministry. Be looking for some great things to come this year. Also, Brian Montieith and crews of volunteers have been getting a lot of great work done on our camp facilities. You will be happy to see all of the improvements we've been making over the past year.



*Blake Stockman is the new CGS Programs Director.*

Love in Jesus,

*Joel Burkum*  
brother joel



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**You may donate online by visiting [www.fgci.org](http://www.fgci.org)!**