



Joel and Junior Camper Alexis at Camp of the Good Shepherd.



For God's Children
INTERNATIONAL

a personal note

from joel burkum

FGCI Executive Director

July 31, 2021

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2/BSB).

Dear Friends,

So much has happened since April that I don't know where to start. It's been a very challenging four months and I apologize for the lateness of this Personal Note ministry update. But, I'm determined to get it done today!

First, I want to thank all of you regular supporters for your continued faithfulness in financial support over the past year and a half. It's a blessing to know that you trust us and care for us enough to remember us in your regular prayers and giving. It is very humbling. You also make the burden of ministry so much lighter by standing with us in support. Second, I want to assure you that the ministry of FGCI is going strong and that God is blessing us in ways that continue to surprise me and give all of us here at FGCI great joy. For instance...

MOLDOVA: Harvesting in the ripe field of souls



Our Home of the Good Shepherd family: (l to r) Veronica, Roman, Zina, Ruslan, Carolina, Gabriela, baby Emilia, Vlad, Diana, Vlada 2, Vlada 1.

For several years we have been working in Moldova at our Home of the Good Shepherd Christian foster home. We are now seeing the oldest of our second family of kids starting to "leave the nest" and go to work and enter college as young adults. Soon, our oldest girl, Veronica (who just turned 19) will be leaving for college! It has been such a joy to see our kids accept Christ and become wonderful, educated and happy people. They are making a difference for God's Kingdom in Moldova. [Due to the pandemic, I still have not had the opportunity to meet Zina, our newest foster child who's been living in the Home of the Good Shepherd for a year and a half!]

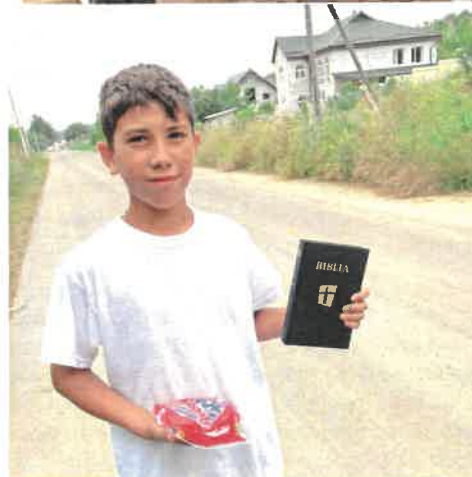
For years, we have been serving among the Roma (Gypsies) in Romania and Moldova. Over the past few years we have seen God at work in big ways



Top: Life is good for our Home of the Good Shepherd foster kids!

Bottom Left: Veronica celebrates her 19th birthday. **Bottom Right:** Making compot (natural fruit juice) to store up for the fall/winter.

among our friends at the Roma village of Vulcanesti, Moldova. Lives have been touched by the Holy Spirit, and we've seen several Roma youth and adults accept Christ as Savior and Lord and be baptized into Jesus' name. We have led Vacation Bible School programs, have called on and served



From an email from Vlad: I want to tell you that lately we have been working intensively with several families from Moldova. We pray with them, consult, tell them about God, etc. I gave several Bibles so that they could discover God better. I rejoice in the miracles that God does in people's lives.

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Vulcanesti Youth Summer Bible Camp 2021 (near the Dniester River in Vadul lui Voda, Moldova): FGCI staff member Vlad Pogor (front row, left) led this summer's annual Bible camp for the Roma (Gypsy) youth from Vulcanesti, Moldova, from July 26 - 31. There were more than 40 total in attendance. It was a wonderful experience for all involved. Several gave their lives to Christ and will be baptized soon. Praise God!



Bravo, Samson! (from a recent email from Vlad): Alleluiaaaaaaaa! Samson came out victorious! He is the first man from Vulcanesti to have finished high school. He also passed the bacalaureate [like our ACT test] well. Thank God for this. I spoke with Samson and he will continue his studies at the University in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova. Thank you so much for your support of Samson. [FGCI's SponsorLink program sponsored Samson to finish high school. We rejoice with Samson at his achievement. And we pray for Samson's future as he follows God's call in his life.

our Roma friends with counseling and visitation, have provided tutoring and English classes, have made home repairs, have provided food relief, etc. All of this has opened doors for conversations about Jesus Christ. Our workers Vlad and Carolina Pogor have been exceptional in their outreach to the poor, to the friendless, to the lonely, to those searching for the answer to life's purpose. And in their outreach, Vlad and Carolina have been wonderful evangelists and disciples. Through the pandemic mess, Vlad and Carolina—with the financial and prayer support of FGCI sponsors—have

I'd like to share part of Vlad's camp report with you (which I received just hours ago).



Vlad (left) helped to lead new friends Sasha and Cristina to Christ at our Summer Bible Camp in Moldova.

Vlad writes:

Peace, dear brothers and sisters. I want to tell you how wonderful and powerful God worked in this camp. Sasa and Cristina (a young married couple) received Christ in their hearts and they want to enter the water of baptism. They want very much to go to church. God touched their lives. Sasa (Cristina's husband) was crying with joy that he received Christ. The young people were encouraged and confessed their sins before God—they were determined to follow

reached out and blessed hundreds of families and individuals with food and other necessities and with the hope and purpose that only Christ can give. This has led to some wonderful opportunities for God to work in people's hearts and lives in exciting ways.

One of the exciting ways in which God has really been working among our Roma friends is at our annual Vulcanesti Youth Bible Camp. Unfortunately, we were unable to lead camp in Moldova last year due to the pandemic. But, this year we were able to sponsor a camp for more than 40 youth and families at Vadul lui Voda (near the Dniester River in eastern Moldova). Sadly, I was unable to attend this summer due to travel restrictions, but, all week, I received a lot of great communication from Vlad and our kids and adults who had a wonderful camp experience from July 26-31.



Carolina (far left) leads a class on being a godly woman at Bible camp.



Bible dramas teach important lessons about faith.

«« Roma leader Alic and campers enact a Bible story about the life of Jesus.



«« Silvica reads the story from the Bible.



«« Singing songs of praise and worship at camp with our Roma kids is always an uplifting and enjoyable experience.



«« Exercise and fun, competitive games are always part of our Bible camps.

the Good Shepherd], because it will be a big job. On the street [where our home is located in Nisporeni], we will start working with some families. God is wonderful.

Praise God! We look forward to what lies ahead for us in Moldova. Please keep Vlad & Carolina and our work in Moldova in prayer. Pray, also, for those who made decisions for Christ at the Vulcanesti Youth Bible Camp.

ROMANIA: Big changes ahead!

The ministry of FGCI began with a call to serve hurting and abandoned children trapped in squalid and dismal government institutions in Romania. We have been faithfully ministering to institutionalized kids in Romania for more than 25 years. God has sent us dozens of wonderful, sacrificial workers to serve the hurting children, mothers and adults with special needs to whom we have ministered during all of those years. We have seen the positive, life-changing difference FGCI's influence has made in the lives of those we've served, and we have seen God work in amazing ways.

In the past two years, we have experienced some major staffing losses and changes that are forcing us to look at how we will continue ministry in Romania. In 2019, FGCI's American missionaries serving in eastern Romania Eli and Sheena Davidson felt called to return to the States for the benefit of the educational development of one of their sons. Later that year we lost two Romanian employees (Mihaela and Doina) to higher-paying government jobs. This February, we received news that our beloved "Mama" Nootsie Ristea and her husband Sergiu (our FGCI-Romania president and driver, respectively) thought it was time to resign, as Nootsie just celebrated her 70th birthday.

Jeremy Befort leaves FGCI to begin a new ministry



Jeremy (left) with Maleesha Muston (FGCI SponsorLink Ministry Assistant) and Roma kids at Bible camp in Moldova in 2019.

In April of this year at our quarterly FGCI Board of Directors meeting, Jeremy Befort announced his resignation, feeling called by God to leave FGCI to start his own ministry of one-on-one discipling of Romanian and Moldovan kids. Jeremy's resignation went into effect on June 17, 2021.

Jeremy writes:

By God's grace, I have been truly blessed to serve alongside FGCI's wonderful staff and volunteers these past 17 years as we worked together to provide hope, dignity, and love in Jesus' name to hundreds of children in Romania and Moldova. In 2021, after months of praying and seeking God's will, I was convinced that God is calling me to develop and lead a ministry focused on providing long-term discipleship and mentoring to young adults in Romania and Moldova. In June, I joined New International to follow this calling and begin this ministry. As I look back at the last 17 years, I am filled with joy remembering all of the wonderful things God did and the lives He changed through FGCI. I will greatly miss everyone I served with at FGCI; they have become life-long friends and family and are all very dear to my heart. I look forward to the future and seeing the lives that God will continue to change through FGCI and the ministry God has called me to do. As I move

Christ. Some young people's hearts were stirred, and they (Artur, Petru, Moscoveanca, Renata) made the decision to be baptized. I had frequent meetings with men on the subject of "how to be a man according to God's will." Many asked for forgiveness because they understood that they have not been a man according to His will. Others have understood what it means to be a true man, and we have all come to the conclusion that we must look to Christ as He is an ideal example to us. Carolina often met with girls and talked about how to be a woman according to God's will. It was a wonderful time. We all cried when we parted. God touched each of us. We saw changes in the eyes of young people. If we had a place here at the Home of the Good Shepherd (facility) to have a meeting with them once a week, I think it would be great. The Roma kids are eager to change for the better. We had many beautiful moments at camp. All the young people wish to greet you and tell you that they love you. Serving with families is growing more and more. I think we need to repair the basement under the garage [at Home of



Jeremy starts work with FGCI in Romania in 2004 as American Liaison. Here is Jeremy (back row in dark blue t-shirt) at Bible camp for boys with special needs in Babadag, Romania, during his first summer working full-time for FGCI in Romania.

forward with the Lord, I would like to ask for your continued prayers. Thank you for all of your love and support these past 17 years; I am so grateful for you and FGCI! Your brother in Christ ~ Jeremy Befort



I am always sad to lose a partner in ministry, but I realize that we are each called to faithfulness to God and His Eternal Kingdom; not to perpetuate any man-made organization or foundation here on earth. So, with some genuine feelings of grief, but hope for moving forward the Kingdom of God, I am looking

forward to what God holds in store for FGCI-Romania. We praise God for the wonderful contribution that Jeremy made to FGCI's ministry over the past 17 years. We pray that God will continue to bless Jeremy's service to Him in the coming months and years. [We will miss you, Brother Jeremy.]

Currently, we are seeking American missionaries to serve in eastern Romania (Babadag area), and have our eyes on a couple of Romanian candidates to take the reins of leadership in Romania as President of Fundatia FGCI-Romania. We have a full-time employee (Nicoleta) serving in Zebil, Romania, as our Sunshine Room Activities Director. Nicoleta tells us that work continues in the Sunshine Room, and that we continue to see progress among the adults with special needs whom she is serving daily.



Nootsie and Nicoleta in FGCI's Sunshine Room in Zebil, Romania.

Nootsie Ristea continues to serve as Fundatia FGCI-Romania President until we find her replacement. In a recent call I made to Nootsie (in Romania), Nootsie told me about her recent visit to our kids in the eastern part of Romania. Nootsie said that FGCI needs to continue its ministry in Romania, stating that FGCI has made a "big difference" in the

lives of the children we serve, and in Romania in general. The children who are now growing into young adults continue to ask when FGCI staff and volunteers are going to come and visit them. They need continuing parental guidance, tutoring, financial help, counseling and Bible education. Romanian government workers often tell Nootsie about the differences between the FGCI kids and the other kids in centers. One of the government department heads told Nootsie that she was happy that two of the kids in her jurisdiction had successfully graduated from high school. Nootsie laughed and told me, "They were two of the kids for whom we (FGCI) have sponsored one-on-one tutoring this year!" Praise God! We want to continue to help kids with their educa-

tional needs. But, more importantly, we want to help our kids know Christ and the hope of salvation through faith in Him.

Finally, I want to tell you about some great news from our Summer 2021 CGS Comeback!

Camp of the Good Shepherd (Louisville, Nebraska) is back open for ministry!

It did my heart such good to be able to open up our camp facilities for graded Summer Bible Camps at Camp of the Good Shepherd (CGS) this summer. I sure was happy to be with my Junior Camp kids (fifth and sixth-graders) this summer (my 14th year of leading as dean at CGS Junior Camp). Overall, we were down a bit in attendance at our camps this summer, but we still had some great camps with right at 200 campers total attending our six graded Bible camp sessions. This year's theme was "Jesus Is The Answer" (based on John 14:6). One of the most exciting aspects of camp sessions this summer was the number of kids who surrendered their lives to Christ in baptism. Among our Junior, Junior High and Senior High Bible camps, we had a total of 16 baptisms! Praise God!



Pictured above: Camp of the Good Shepherd 2021 Junior Camp. This summer we had 198 total campers and around 100 workers. Many young people made decisions for Christ this summer, including 16 who surrendered their lives to Christ in baptism. Praise God! Camp is back!!

We enjoyed having Blake Stockman as our new CGS Programs Director this summer, joining the CGS management team of Brian Montiethe and me (Joel). Blake started working with FGCI in February. He is still learning the ropes (and doing it well). I certainly appreciate and enjoy his leadership gifts and winsome personality. I believe that his positive leadership will go a long way toward making CGS's goal of "having fun learning about Jesus!" a more effective tool for the Kingdom of God.

Thank you for your financial and prayer support that is keeping FGCI's ministry alive and well even during this pandemic strangeness. We appreciate you so much! We depend on God's blessing through your support in order for FGCI to fulfill our goal of "providing hope, dignity and love in Jesus' name" to God's kids. You are loved and appreciated!

Love in Jesus,

Joel Burkum

brother joel



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