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Science teacher-turned-missionary looks back on ministry in Romania

Throughout her years in missions, Roberta Bustin testifies to how God has used her former career to expand the Kingdom.

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Albanian church gives so others can have buildings

Meeting in a building purchased through global Alabaster offerings, the Gorre church is passionate about giving back.

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Meditative prayer offers deeper walk, peace during lockdowns

A UK pastor is recording meditative prayer guides to help people in lockdown develop intimacy and peace in Christ.

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Photos by Jonathan Phillips

Local church

Science teacher-turned-missionary looks back on ministry in Romania

By Nicole Almeida

Editor's note: After serving as a missionary in Romania for 23 years, this summer Roberta Bustin will be retiring and moving back to her first home, the United States.

When Roberta Bustin first sensed God was calling her to missions, she was incredulous.

At the time, Bustin was teaching science at a liberal arts college. During the summer she and her students conducted research for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration in the USA). She also taught at a Navajo Nation school, where she felt called to minister. The Navajo Nation is an Native American tribe that lives in a protected land covering portions of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico in the United States.

On a personal retreat, Bustin was reading through the New Testament when a verse caught her eye.

"I always say that we shouldn't just pick out a verse and say the verse means something. But on that day a verse stood out ... to me. It said: 'Now he is sending us out around the world to tell all people everywhere the great things God has done for them, so that they, too, will believe and obey him.' (Rom 1:5b TLB). And I wondered if it was for me."

As time went by, it seemed like everything she did took her back to that one verse: "Now he is sending...".

"Many things I did reminded me of the verse. So I thought, 'OK, I can't say that I'm sure about it, so I'll try to forget it and everything that has been happening. If it's from the Lord, He won't let me forget. But if it's not, then I simply thought the verse

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was interesting and I can put it out of my mind.”

As the months went by, events repeatedly led Roberta to that specific verse, and many other things happened, confirming the Lord was calling her to missions.

Bustin applied with the Church of the Nazarene’s then program called Nazarenes in Volunteer Service. On 30 May 1997, Roberta arrived at Sighisoara, Romania. She didn’t know the language, but that didn’t stop her from doing what she was called to do: share the gospel.

God makes a way through the unknown

“One reason I was called to Romania was to do environmental work,” Bustin said. “But I knew from the beginning, even before I went, that the Lord wanted me to do church work [too]. In fact, the job description that I was given was: ‘Preach, teach and do a boatload of other things.’”

During Bustin’s first year in Sighisoara, she reached the community through educational activities like an ecology club and resource center for teachers and was able to establish an environmental organization. Sighisoara Church of the Nazarene was a new plant at the time. When the pastors left in 1998, Roberta became the pastor.

“I loved it very much,” she said. “And then, in the spring of 2002, the Lord sent us to a village called Tigmandru, and we started a ministry there.”

Bustin said her years in the village were rewarding. She witnessed many faith-growing miracles, including a new small group that matured into a church plant that today is known as Tigmandru Church of the Nazarene. Bustin pastored that church for many years, as well. At the same time, she taught courses for the Romanian Studies Program, a study-abroad program for Eastern Nazarene College, and taught environmental science

for European Nazarene College.

God never stopped surprising Bustin and the church in Sighisoara. As the new small group in Tigmandru grew, they started looking to buy a property in 2003. They found land for sale by a landowner from Germany, but they had no more than a month while he was in town to pull together the funds.

“We were ready to buy the property. Several people had agreed that the property was fine. At the time it would cost 3,500 USD, and it seemed like a good price,” Bustin recalled. “The property wasn’t exactly what I wanted because it was angled on a hill and was on a major highway which was not a good place for a children’s program. But we really needed some property; so, I started working to get funds. There was a church in America that promised to give us 2,000 USD, but they didn’t have it just yet. I kept praying to the Lord so that we would get the money and buy the property. But the money didn’t arrive in time and the man left the country.”

The congregation gave up on the land and waited.

As months went by, the church kept growing. They met at the community center while still looking for a property of their own. One day, a person told Roberta that a new property was up for sale. It was about a block off the main highway, which was great for the children. It was flat, it was big, and it was on sale for 500 USD.

“We were able to get all the documents with no problem and I suddenly realized God did what He did because He knew that the first property wasn’t what we needed,



and He gave us something much better.”

God calls everyone, no matter their background

During her 23 years in Romania, Bustin reached children, teenagers and adults in ways that wouldn’t have been possible if it wasn’t for her background in science and love for teaching. God built on her expertise in new and creative ways to preach the gospel.

“God used my science background in many ways, not just teaching. I once spoke with a high school group about science and faith, because many think they don’t go together, but they do. I was also able to reach students and parents through science.”

Through the Ecology Club formed soon after she arrived, Bustin had the privilege of seeing young men and women visit the church and give their lives to God. This was a time of growth and of seeing God’s hand at work. During moments of doubt and trials, Bustin kept seeing how God fulfills His plans.

“God is faithful and knows our needs. We do have to step out in faith a lot of times when we don’t see how it will work, but God works it out right. It’s a real privilege to be called to ministry. The Lord can use us all. Whatever our background is, He has a way to use it. I have certainly seen that over and over.” ♦

As a beneficiary of global Nazarene Alabaster Offerings in the past, the Gorre Church of the Nazarene gives generously every year to the fund so other Nazarenes globally can have buildings, property and expanded ministry. Nertila Gjermeni (pictured) helped lead the offerings as a district missions president.



Alabaster

Albanian church gives so others can have buildings

By Gina Grate Pottenger

The Church of the Nazarene in Gorre, Albania, worships in what was formerly a community center built in the Soviet era as a lunch space for laborers. Pastor Ermal Gjermeni remembers eating meals with his father there when Ermal was still a child.

Today, this building offers the far more lasting spiritual food of God's truth and love. The church owns this building thanks to the Nazarene denomination's global Alabaster offering.

Nazarenes around the world sacrificially give to the Alabaster

Offering once or twice a year so that land and buildings can be purchased for churches, schools and other Nazarene ministry. Often, people save their spare change throughout the year by slipping it into a specially designed "Alabaster box," and then "pour out" their offering on their local church's Alabaster Sunday when the offerings are received.

When Nertila Gjermeni, Ermal's wife, agreed to become the church's president of Nazarene Missions International, she was unfamiliar with the annual Alabaster Offering.

"I discovered that the church building, where we are also living, was built from these little coins that have come from the bottom of everybody's heart. This touched my heart so deeply," Nertila said. "I was so happy that I am living in a building that is built from a generosity offering."

Gorre is an agricultural village in west-central Albania. In 1993, Gorre was the

*"I was so happy that I am living in a building that is built from a generosity offering."
-- Nertila Gjermeni*

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GORRE: ‘Sometimes they can’t wait to give to Alabaster’

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community chosen for Albania's first Nazarene mission. The Albania-Kosova District purchased the building in part through the denomination's Alabaster fund.

In gratitude for this gift, Nazarenes in Gorre are passionate about giving to the Church of the Nazarene's global Alabaster offering so that other churches around the world may have their own land or building, too.

The Gjermenis know many other Albanian congregations of several denominations who do not have their own church buildings, nor are they able to rent adequate space. Rent prices are beyond many churches' ability to pay, and likewise buying land and constructing a building.

As a result, when Nertila served as the district president, she promoted the Alabaster offering for a full month. She purchased small, heart-shaped boxes in which members collect their offering over the course of the month before they bring it to the church on Alabaster Sunday.

"It's a very simple box, but it means a lot in our church. They give beyond their incomes," she said. "Sometimes

they can't wait to give to Alabaster."

Nertila said that an 84-year-old woman in the village, who has not yet given her life to Christ, gives to the church's Alabaster offering every year. She has seen the central role the church plays in the community, through caring for and discipling young people, and encouraging young people to trust God to stay in the village and start small businesses, rather than emigrate for work.

Gorre's one-story lunch hall-turned-church has expanded over the years.

On the ground floor is the sanctuary, a sports room, a library, and storage for the Gjermenis' beehive equipment. As a bivocational pastor, Gjermani discovered he had more time for ministry if he quit his job as a school teacher and ran the small business of beekeeping and selling honey to



Next to the traditional, rectangular Nazarene Alabaster boxes, Nertila Gjermani distributed heart-shaped boxes to collect offerings for Alabaster because the offering is given from people hearts.

supplement their income from the church.

Several Work & Witness teams built a second story. One half is dedicated to group accommodations and a kitchen. That space is used as a Learning Center for local students enrolled in European Nazarene College (EuNC). The other half is an apartment that serves as the parsonage.

Behind the church is a football (soccer) field dedicated to the church's thriving sports ministry with children and youth. In the winter, when playing outside is not possible due to inclement weather, the youth use the indoor space to play games.

Nertila noticed the irony that the sanctuary used to be a dining room for laborers.

"At one time we came here to eat food, but now they come to eat something that is spiritual," she said.



Meeting in a former Communist-era dining hall, the Church of the Nazarene Gorre now offers the bread and water of life to their community. Gorre is where the denomination first established its presence in Albania.



Prayer and discipleship

Meditative prayer offers deeper walk, peace in Christ during lockdown stresses

By Gina Grate Pottenger

Pastor Helen Lawson said the practice of Christian meditation has given her life, and that's why she's teaching the practice to others during the United Kingdom's coronavirus lockdown.

Throughout the pandemic, Lawson has made weekly audio recordings to guide listeners through a Christian meditation practice, posting them to her churches' Facebook pages. Lawson is co-leading two innovative pioneering works in northeast England: Outdoors Church, a hiking church based in Sheffield; and Church Around the Table, a community that has formed around a food bank ministry, and meets for services over a hot meal.

This spring was the first time Lawson has widely shared a form of prayer that is deeply meaningful to her.

Lawson describes this meditative prayer as an "ascetic spiritual discipline, which faces and embraces pain rather than running from it. It's quite cross-shaped, in that it's all about little deaths leading to new life on new life on new life. In terms of the theology of it, I would talk about being transformed, becoming holy and being drawn into the love and presence of God in a way that leaves you changed and enables you to live differently."

However, not everyone may be ready to engage in the practice.

"You let the thoughts rise up, you face them, you don't hide from them," she said. "And then, in the presence of Christ, you let them go, because everything is done that needs to be done. It's a change

of gaze that requires discipline, because the world we live in doesn't make it easy for that to be natural. And it's not natural for us because of the way our minds are very loud."

The first recorded session had 78 views, and the engagement has gradually decreased over the weeks of the pandemic, as new habits are hard for many people to cement and sustain. That is why she recommends people find others to commit to the practice with them for purposes of accountability.

"Doing it in a group could make a difference. The times when I've done it with other people have been so helpful."

For those who are interested in learning more about this spiritual discipline, Lawson recommends the book, *Into the Silent Land*, by Martin Laird. ♦

Who are Nazarenes?

We are a Christian people

As members of the Church Universal, we join with all true believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in affirming the historic Trinitarian creeds and beliefs of the Christian faith. We value our Wesleyan-Holiness heritage and believe it to be a way of understanding the faith that is true to Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

We are a holiness people

God, who is holy, calls us to a life of holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, called by various terms including "entire sanctification" and "baptism with the Holy Spirit"-cleansing us from all sin, renewing us in the image of God, empowering us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, and producing in us the character of Christ. Holiness in the life of believers is most clearly understood as Christlikeness.

We are a missional people

We are a sent people, responding to the call of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world, witnessing to the Lordship of Christ and participating with God in the building of the Church and the extension of His kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Our mission (a) begins in worship, (b) ministers to the world in evangelism and compassion, (c) encourages believers toward Christian maturity through discipleship, and (d) prepares women and men for Christian service through Christian higher education.

Learn more at: www.nazarene.org/articles-faith

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

—Romans 8:9

Prayer requests

Please pray for Nazarenes and their neighbors in Beirut, who are suffering the combination of a city-wide destructive blast, government corruption, millions of Syrian refugees requiring assistance, economic crisis, and the coronavirus pandemic. Pray for hope, healing, peace, economic recovery, and for the society to work together to rebuild Lebanon and Beirut.

Pray for Roberta Bustin as she retires after many years of investment in mission work in Romania. Pray for God to bless her next chapter, as well as the seeds and planting work she leaves to the church in Romania to continue nurturing and growing.

Pray for Pastor Ermal and Nertila Gjermeni and the Nazarene church in Gorre, as they minister to their community, share Christ with the lost, and generously give to Alabaster so that other Nazarenes around the world are blessed with land and buildings for ministry.

Where Worlds Meet

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