

Vlora

Our Sister City in Albania

Interview with Lubin Argjir - City Leader

by Peter Zoehrer

June 9, 2017



The European Leaders Assembly was held in our European strategic nation Albania this time. The reason was quite pragmatic: Before the assembly, leaders could visit their respective sister cities and meet the local communities, see their situation, listen to their testimonies and learn to understand about their needs. Since Austria's sister city is Vlora, I too took the chance and to visit some days ahead of the leaders meeting. It was a very enriching experience.

During my stay in Vlora, I took the chance to do an interview with Lubin Argjir, the church city? leader of Vlora. Hopefully, this will help you understand the situation of our Albanian brothers and sisters better. The potential of our strategic country is great, but our communities really need our support. We can help in many ways, e. g. through sharing our experiences, through material offerings (things they would need but cannot afford), by giving financial support (so they can sponsor full-time staff), but most of all through our prayers.



PZ: Can you tell me a bit about yourself? When and where were you born, what is your religious and educational background,?

LA: I was born in June 1988 in the city of Korca, in a rural area, where there was a Mazedonian minority, in the South East of Albania. My religious background is Christian Orthodox, and I used to go to church every weekend when I was living there. Later, when I graduated from primary school I began studying electricity. So I am an electrician and I lived in the dormitory. In the end of my second year of high school , 27th of April 2004 I got witnessed by an STF brother from the Netherlands.

Then I went to a 5 day and a 15 day workshop and in October I moved into the center as a part-time missionary. Since then, I always did missionary work - part-time or full-time, depending on my school schedule; mostly I did fundraising or witnessing. Some years ago, in 2014, I became the church leader of Vlora city.

PZ: How and why did you join? Have you been searching for the truth?

LA: Actually, when I finished primary-school I went to an orthodox cChristian camp where they were teaching us the bBible. Since I was religious and I believed in God, I had a great desire to study the scriptures. Soon I faced questions. I asked the priest and the teachers: „How can we defeat Satan?“ The only answer they would give was „Isolate him!“. Later, when I got an answer by the Divine Principle, I heard that even Satan can repent and return to God... That really hit me. From my childhood time

until my high school I was searching for the truth. The Divine Principle really hit me, when I heard lectures given by Robert Stefanc

PZ: Robert Stefanc?, Mariela's husband? Is he your spiritual parent?

LA: No, my spiritual father is from Netherlands, but somehow Robert is also my parent. Even my father said before my brothers' wedding: „You can also invite also Robert, the second parents of Lubin...“

P: So what are your hobbies, your interests? I discovered one already: swimming, right?



LA: Swimming, yeah, diving. If you ask my members they will say he loves doing everything. I really enjoy trying new things. But what I enjoy most is woodcraft, I like building things I love reading a lot, even I tried writing once, but ever since I joined the mission I don't have time for that. I love swimming, diving, woodcrafting, especially lecturing the Divine Principle. It is a good thing that my job is at the same time also my favorite hobby.

PZ: You are a lucky man indeed. Tell us about your activities and your experiences in the unification movement since you joined.

LA: If I can put it in one sentence, I actually did everything what a missionary can do once he joined the church: witnessing, fundraising, conferences, reports, all of those things which we do in Albania, lecturing, organizing and coordinating workshops, planning projects, realizing projects, meeting VIPs, giving internal guidance to members. Also, when I was studying at university (for my bachelor's degree, I was part of the students-council for two years. At first vice-chairman and later even chairman because the previous one left, so I had to substitute. I have many mission-experiences. Last year it was great to attend Top Gun in Korea with True Mother.

PZ. So you are a graduate of Top Gun

LA: Yes, I am a Graduate of Top Gun. From the mission point of view I have been almost everywhere and did so many things...

P: Since when are you churchleader here in Vlora? Church leader or city leader?

LA: October 2013, already 4 years.

PZ: Briefly, how many members have you got here in Vlora.

LA: Sorry, I cannot give you an exact number, because the core-membership who take care of the members is limited and sometimes we send them for mission to Korea or other places, so the numbers are fluctuating, but generally in the latest official report it was 40. Their faith, however, is on very different levels.

P: So, what is your daily schedule on an average day?

LA: Well, the daily mission schedule is waking up at 6:00 o'clock, doing HDH, breakfast, all the household until 9:00 o'clock, then walk to the center from 9:00 AM until 7:00 in the evening. And what am I doing during this time? Basically, the whole day I am lecturing, giving internal guidance, attending appointments and so on... It's sometimes really crazy to follow this schedule. After coming back home at 7:00 o'clock, the program continues: meeting with home-members, doing conditions, offering devotions and we close the day 10:00 PM. So, it is easy to fall asleep at 11:00 o'clock... This is my official schedule.

PZ: What is your weekly schedule? Do you have special days?

LA: Yes, we have special days. Monday is movie-day, where we try to choose a movie with a message for the guests, because if we only would give lectures they surely will feel bored. Movies are good, so we can discuss the content afterwards. On Tuesdays, we have HDH day to which we invite all the guests who already received the 2nd

coming. We try to implement the HDH tradition, Next we have Wednesday service,. On Thursday, we always have a CARP meeting to which we invite a minimum of 25 to 30 students from different university campuses and we give core value lectures, the Divine Principle in social language. On Fridays, we have a certain amount of guests who do HDH or lecture-practice. On Saturday is fundraising and on Sunday is of course Sunday-service. Lately we focused more on witnessing, and we did instead of fundraising a one day workshop for the guests. This was very successful.

PZ: Who is preaching during Sunday-services?

LA: I am giving most of the sermons, because the attendees are middle age, young age, high-schoolers and students and I need to prepare a content that fits to all of them and then give the speech that can satisfy the entire the community.

PZ: How many are coming?

LA: It is not a stable turn out. The numbers are always changing. But generally speaking 15 to 20 people. Those who cannot come this week may come the next and those who were here this Sunday will probably not be able to attend next time. At least they try to attend a service once a month.

PZ: Yesterday at the Wednesday service there were about 20 people, right?

LA: Yes approximately

PZ: My next question is somehow delicate: how many capable lecturers do you have?

LA: Reflecting on how I learned lecturing I do now the same with my members: I push them to practice. Even though, the quality might not be that good, but this contributes to their spiritual growth. My best lecturers are Julian and Italia. But they are not here. They are now fundraising in Asia. They were dealing with the top guests. Generally, I have two or three that can lecture but they are limited to the chapters of the Human Fall or the Mission of the Messiah.

PZ: I can see that your main focus is witnessing to young people. Do you also have peace ambassadors here? Are you registered as Women's Federation or UPF?

LA: Yes, UPF is active. For example, just a week ago we had UPF conference on family values as a part of the UN - International Day of Families. In our city Vlora, there are over 100 appointed Ambassadors for Peace, but to us it is still the same challenge as managing our guests. So, what they need is to be constantly contacted and given attention to. Additionally, we have our regional Peace Council which consists of twenty Ambassadors for Peace.

PZ: That means that you have a city peace council here?

LA: Yes, we have a peace council in the city and the chairman is also Ambassador for Peace.

P: Oh, that's very good.

LA: And the WFWP is of course registered. In the past when we were a little bit more free (now we are mostly occupied with events), one sister tried to take care of women, „mothers“. They organized simple events.

P: Ok, and then you have CARP. Is CARP registered or is it just part of the FFWPU?

LA: Yes, CARP is part of FFWPU. Legally on the local level only Family Federation is registered and everything else is part of it.

PZ: Is CARP doing some activities at the universities?

LA: At the university? Not that it is impossible, but strategically we have not considered that option yet. We do not want to use our name in front of the students. Once they get used to it they will lose interest, just as happened to other organizations. So, we want to witness slowly to the university students.



CARP Meeting at the center in Vlora

PZ: Okay, this is very informative. What are your hopes and visions for the future?

LA: One of our weak points in our city is that we don't have blessed families and this happened because most of the guests witnessed in the past were not coming from Vlora or they were coming from Vlora but they were sisters. For example, Marinela. She got married to a Slovenian and therefore she could not substantially be in Vlora. So my hope is that I can really build the foundation for a blessed family here in Vlora. I want to focus on witnessing. Of course, ultimately we need to strengthen UPF, WFWP and other organizations of our movement. Everything can be really successful if we invest into it. But for now, I think it is most important to have a strong foundation of Blessed Families. Therefore, my focus in witnessing is finding a minimum of ten brothers, boys from Vlora, who really love their city and True Parents, so that in the future they can go to the bBlessing and that they can build their lives here. If that will happen I can consider that my mission is accomplished. In the past many were witnessed, but they had to move to their hometowns. Of course, we take care of everyone that comes to the center. Everyone is important in Gods eyes; especially when they can contribute to God's Providence.

PZ: In other words, the FFWPU needs local roots, Tribal Messiahs, right?

LA: Yes, I am really looking forward to establish this foundation here, then Tribal Messiahship will work out, too. Now we are still a youth movement but we want to reach that level. For example, in Tirana, the capitol city, they have blessed families, roots. I will accomplish that here in Vlora, too.

PZ: And what do you see as greatest obstacles / challenges in witnessing and in fulfilling your mission? Is lack of finance one of them?

LA: I will come to that also, but I want to bring out this point, starting from myself. Being missionary since 2004 I know very well what members experience when they are in growth process. I was lucky to have wonderful leaders, like Robert and Mariela. They skillfully and heartistically educated me so whenever I had my ups and downs they were there to support me. Perhaps I cannot have that level of heart, but I know members challenges. Many times I pray even in tears because I see so much potential in the youth of Vlora. Many good young people, but I see the lack of potential in our center to take care of them. We are simply understaffed. At least I would need an assistant. This would be terribly necessary, because I cannot focus on everything, like lecturing and all other things. Whenever the sister to who I am matched comes for one or two weeks everything goes amazingly well. She would take the role of my assistant and having the same worry that I worry about and things would turn out well. So strategically speaking, to raise new members it is very important to always keep up

projects in which they can get involved. For example, the camping we organized lately or the children's day event, or the orphanage day event. Every time when we do this events, they substantially feel the love of True Parents. Unfortunately, because of financial reasons, from time to time I have to send good and capable members fundraising. I am not saying this is bad for them. Like this we can teach them ownership and responsibility.

Sundays we have Sunday-service and we cannot include this for our public activities and Saturday is closed because we go fundraising. Unfortunately we are forced or let's say I am in the position to ask them „let's do fundraising today“, because for every project, every event we want to organize, we have to fundraise.

So, finances are important, but also, as I already mentioned, an assistant is very necessary. Let me mention another challenge: The youth of today is into social media and every time we have our staff meeting with the core members we discuss how the young guests are attracted by this social media. Our own equipment camera, laptop, external hard disc and quite outdated. Most of our computers get stuck from all our things. We have many technical and practical drawbacks. Of course, we are capable of upgrading our technology and ourselves but it will take time. So, time does not seem to be our best friend. We don't have time for so many things. How can you provide time for us (smiles)?

PZ: I will ask Austrian members if they can provide some time for you.

LA: I don't think that that is possible!



Dr. Wolfgang Czerny with members of his family & Vlora members

PZ: Regarding the fundraising I have one more question: The main reason why refrain from fundraising in European countries is because for Albanians (outside the EU) legally prohibited, right?

LA: We can do it, but then we can get kicked out, it is really dangerous and we will have many issues also with our own government.

P: Yes, I understand. But generally you have the hope that some time in the near future also Albania will join the EU.

LA: If that will happen, then maybe. Personally, I experienced fundraising only in Croatia.

PZ: What you have described is the main reason why some of your members go fundraising all the way to Korea?

LA: Yes! I had to send some of my best members across the globe to Korea.

PZ: Right, the flight is very expensive, (\$1200 a ticket), and then they can only stay there for one month.

LA: This is, how it is.

P: Ok, now the final question: How can Austrian brothers and sisters help you. Give us just four points:

LA: Referring to the latest experience. Being in the position of a pastor, or let's say Gods representative in Vlora, I really feel the need of spiritual support.

P: Like prayer?

LA: Previously I told you that were expected to move out of our center because the contract was running out. But just during this unstable period MDr. Wolfgang Czerny and his family came here. He saw the situation and I am sure he mobilized some spiritual prayer help... Suddenly something like a miracle happened: the owner changed his mind and decided not to sell the apartment. Now the problem is solved! We can stay. You told me, that our center is really in a strategic location. I agree. We found it through spiritual guidance.

PZ: that was the center?

1. **LA:** Actually, our witnessing improved because of that center. The quality we offered to our guests, yes, I think that came from that **spiritual support**. So I know many members can do that. They can offer prayers for our community and projects here in Vlora. We write our monthly goals and they

can pray for these points by joining our condition. We can also report about who needs what support, etc.

PZ: Yes, many Austrians can do that. They can put Albania, Vlora on their prayer list. So, it would be good if you could provide us with a clear prayer list.

LA: Yes, we do 21 day conditions and monthly conditions because we have a meeting, we set the goals, the projects which we want to achieve and then we set the prayer condition list.

2. Also, I recall our latest experience when Austrian brothers and sisters visited us. Because there are so many things to do and I don't have enough time like giving attention to members and so on... and Mrs Ridi Wurzer, she is doing Body-code through Skype-meetings with some members. They really feel a lot of love and a lot of care through her; so if any of the Austrian brothers and sisters are planning to have some holidays, they can come to Vlora any time. We can really offer a good holidays here. As you can see, we have beautiful crystal clear sea, and even to be in the center for two days, creating a contact, they can continuously guide them through Facebook and internet. This is very important. I know that if I have not time doing that thing I am in peace that somebody is doing it, like Mr. Wolfgang Czerny with his family and Mrs. Ridi Wurzer. They are somehow doing it, sending messages to the members. Then they would come to me with a smiling face, telling me about Wolfgang's or Ridi's correspondence. I know that during summer holidays people could be able to come here. They can stay in the center of the city in a house. Or we can easily find a cheap place close to the beach where they can stay enjoy the sea, do there holidays and their mission at the time time.

PZ: Okay, this was the second point. mobilizing by coming here and helping to take care.

3. **LA:** Luckily, when I came to this center, I realized, that the previous city-leader did quite a good job in saving money. I invested all the saved money into witnessing and as a result the situation improved. We were also investing in members blessing, i.e. in workshops and their training. Last year when I was at the Top Gun workshop in Korea, I also took one member with me, who is now the CARP leader. Looking back I can see now the substantial results of all the investment. However, because of the difficult

financial situation of young Albanians, many guests or even members abstain from activities due to workshop fees, travel expenses, etc. In spite of all this I know of course also the reality of blessed families, so I don't want to ask anything from them. Therefore, please don't misunderstand my words.

PZ: If Austrian brothers and sisters want to donate something, can they get a list of the things you need?

LA: Thank you for asking this question. Currently I don't want things to be sent. I want to create different projects and then send you the description with a budget proposal. Afterwards I will send a report on what we could achieve through the projects with your help. Recently we had a UPF conference it cost quite a lot because we had high VIP's there. In future every project, including workshops, conferences, etc. will be proposed in written form and afterwards we will give a report in eEnglish language. Through this brothers and sisters, who offered their support, can see the fruits of their help.

PZ: You mentioned that Wolfgang brought some outranged laptops, right. He could not use them anymore, but you managed to repair them.

LA: Right.

PZ: I am quite certain that Austrians have some outranged laptops. Do you need more of them? In case you don't need more, you could just repair and sell them, right?

LA: Of course, yes that is quite possible. If something is just dusty and cannot be used, that is possible...

4. We really want to develop our media department. This year our Korean missionary witnessed an amazing brother who is really a professional media expert, capable of making great videos, etc. But we have a lack of technical equipment. So, I want to mention a short list of items we would need. As I told before, young people like social media and the cooler the video is, the more attractive it is, the more they want to watch it. We could produce great videos to promote CARP and our movement. we could make use of

- a digital camera for quality pictures, through which can also support our reports,
- a go pro underwater camera (maybe I am pointing to high but I am just telling what we can make use of).
- a good computer. Although we have a good one, but could see the broken screen...
- external storage (hard-drive) where we can store all our archive of events.

I want to make a media-corner, where one or two brother(s) and sister(s) are working. Their main mission will be dealing with that. And I have a brother that is good in typing, making perfect reports

This is a way to give responsibility to them and they feel honored and feel ownership. When they get the sense of ownership they connect so much more to our movement.

In this 21 day condition we have 3 times a 4 hour vigil prayer. For that we gather all our core members at our house and we have HDH, meditation and prayer, because being on the frontline sometimes you forget to pray or you loose your vertical and spiritual focus.

The main reason why I want to create a media department, is because the society is advancing while we are still lagging behind.

Major Challenges ahead

- **After Care - Sustainable Witnessing**
- **Spiritual Support - Austria will join Vlora Prayer conditions**
- **Strategic Overstretch - Assistant needed**
- **Fundraising - shift from necessity to educational activity**
- **Material support**

PZ: Sounds good! Do you have any more points?

LA: The assistant that I mentioned...

P: The only problem with this is..

LA: I can find somebody from the current membership. Someone with a good potential and train and train/educate him or her. But the point is this: when they finish with their studies, they have to work and provide for their families, like Italia, one of the very capable sisters. I lost her for one year, because she had to work in a company for a ridiculous amount of salary. Meanwhile she could have done an amazing job in the center. The same happened with another good brother too. When they were here I was in peace and I could meet Ambassadors for Peace, or members, follow up on good contacts and so on, but then I had to send them fundraising.

PZ: So in other words, if we create some fund for financing a sister, she does not need to go FR somewhere. Okay, how much would an assistant cost monthly?

LA: Maybe 200 Euro referring to the minimum wage in Albania,

P: Any other points?

L: Other points? Give some advice. Many times when you are at the frontline you don't have time to think, there are times because of the exhaustion through the mission work, I sometimes don't have time to think.

PZ: Alright. I want to really support you and I am sure also Austrians like to support you, once they know your situation and that of your brothers and sisters. In Austria we have many faithful, dedicated and experienced members.

LA: I could see that when I came to Austria during the time of True Mothers visit. Amazing!

P: I am sure the Austrians have the heart that they want to make their sister city Vlora most the successful city in Albania. I think that would be their goal.

LA: Thank you very much, Peter! I would just like to mention one more point regarding the UPF. We do not make many conferences. Only a few per year: i.e. on the occasion of the International Day of the Family, other international days related to the UN and the Peace Road project. We really want to keep this program going and through that we can also increase our foundation with the Ambassadors for Peace.

P: So you are asking if members of UPF Austria could support some of your events?

LA: Yes, exactly! Thank you!

P: Thank you for the interview, Lubin Argjir!

LA: Not at all! I have to thank you, Peter! Please give our heartfelt greetings to the brothers and sisters of Austria!

Lubin Argjir: lubeargjirofski@gmail.com