

**Do Not Waste the Opportunity Offered by COVID-19  
by Zusell and Simon SZETO**

Zusell and I thank God for leading us to serve the Roma People in Southern Serbia during August 2019. Following His guidance, we successfully led two Marriage Enrichment Camps in Lebane and Jagodina, respectively. In October 2019, we returned to the Balkan as a guest to participate in the 'Roma Network Conference' held in Sarajevo of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the 3-day meeting, we met many Roma representatives from 31 countries around the World. Not only we felt welcomed, God arranged for us to have surprisingly great fellowship with so many devoted Christian brothers & sisters (Roma and more) committing to bringing the Gospel to the Roma communities across the globe. God let us experience His Kingdom among the Roma People and revealed His yet 'Unfinished' work to us.

Upon return to the US, we were so moved and started to prepare the next missionary visit along with Reverend Lee and Mrs. Lee. We have a much bigger scope and plan in mind for this next missionary plan for March 2020. With tickets booked, everything was put on hold upon the arrival of the new Corona Virus (COVID-19) in the beginning of 2020. At the world stage, COVID-19 has swiped over the entire world at such a lightening speed. In the US, this pandemic has devastated and paralyzed ways of our lives far beyond our imagination. To this day, the new confirmed cases across the land and the associated death toll continue to earn news headline. The unprecedented ripple effects have put us all stopped at our tracks instantaneously. Jobs lost and online learning were just a tip of the iceberg of the impact. The known and unknown impacts truly challenge our core and spiritual beings. To plow forward, it demands us to reach for that uncharted inner ability and integrity within the fabric of our minds and hearts. Thank God for His unwavering word. The promises and provisions of the Holy Bible truly revitalize and redirect our purpose of everyday life. We know that it doesn't mean the adversities go away immediately. But God provides a refresh perspective with that untouched vitality within us to handle the chaos. He keeps our path straight and righteous.

As Zusell reached out to Aleksandra (Pastor Danijel Reckovic's wife) in early April 2020, we learned of the fast deteriorating situation in Lebane particularly among the Roma communities. Upon further discussion with

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Pastor Danijel and Aleksandra, we were reminded of pre-existing racial inequity for Roma People within the Balkan Peninsula for generations.

In Leskovac, the major neighboring city near Pastor Danijel's hometown of Lebane, it suffered from a standing 60% unemployment rate. Many of the forgotten Roma people, young and old, were left with little to no care for daily necessity, basic hygienic and healthcare supplies. As we listened, we recalled God's teaching in Proverbs (3:27) - "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it". We immediately reached out to our own ACBC Mission Committee (the Committee) and mission partner, Global Life Enrichment Center (GLEC) for a response to such a humanitarian crisis. Naturally, the Committee and GLEC shared the same sentiment for Pastor Danijel's Ministry. We, acted in one heart, were decisive and quick in providing the needed food supplies and care to many families in Southern Serbia in May 2020.



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In considering the sustainability aspect, we were able to allocate additional resources to support Pastor Danijel and his family. In turn, he can focus in ministering his churches during this critical time. In following our initial leadership and ministry coworker training strategy, Zusell and I have started our weekly online bible message sharing with Pastor Danijel's Ministry across the city of Lebane, Bojnik and Brijanje. In this face-to-face gathering, it gives us a ground zero view of the spiritual being of our Roma brothers & sisters. It also offers an opportunity for Zusell and I to mentor, strengthen and uplift them in God's word. Furthermore, ACBC has started organizing a fundraising event to support some of the young and committed Coworker in Pastor Danijel's Ministry to start their own businesses in Lebane. It aims to alter the local unemployment reality. We realize Pastor Danijel's Ministry can easily be set back as these young coworkers could yield to the current adverse conditions and look for jobs outside of Serbia. The entrepreneurship helps to provide stability and install hopes for a brighter future for Roma People. This gesture can be an effective testimony, and provides hope, knowing that there is support from another cross-culture group of fellow Christians across the world.

As we summarize these activities in this article, Zusell and I realize that we wouldn't have gained so much through all these touch points with Pastor Danijel's Ministry if it is not for the altercation resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. We now have a clearer understanding of Pastor Danijel's vision and initiatives of his church.

### Children Ministry:



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Worship:



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Family Ministry:



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Women Group:

We also foster a lot closer relationship with our Roma brothers & sisters in Southern Serbia. We envision that all of these benefits can only point to an accelerated godly relationship with Roma churches in Eastern Europe and GLEC as Partners in Mission. We thank God for leading every step of the way in this journey to connect with the Roma People in Eastern Europe. Zusell and I are humbly thankful to be part of the 'Great Commission Initiative for Roma' relayed from GLEC and Reverend Thomas Wang. We would like to extend a genuine invitation and encourage all of our beloved ACBC brothers & sisters to be part of this wonderful life-time experience in participating in His work for the Great Commission. One cannot be this close to God when He is leading and totally in charge every step of the way.

In closing, we wish to share God's teaching in the Book of Isaiah (40:8) - "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever". At His Holy Altar, we pray in Faith, Hope and Love. Glory to God in the highest and Peace to His People on earth. Alleluia