

Peter Stonelake – Montenegro

August 2020

Name Pete Stonelake
Work Proofreader and translator

Non-work responsibilities

- Helping out with EUS CG (IFES Montenegro) student work in Nikšić, and keeping in touch with graduates.
- Helping with the church's outreach work in Nikšić, with music in worship services and occasionally preaching.
- De facto "tech guy", putting the church's activities online during the Covid pandemic, with a view to this online presence being permanent.
- Generally being active within the local Christian fellowship in Nikšić specifically and also Montenegro as a whole. As Christ's ambassadors, people scrutinise our every action/reaction and I aim to give glory to God by having a godly and moral reputation, as well as speaking his love meaningfully into everyday situations.



"Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days."

Psalm 90:14 (NIVUK)

Prayer & praise

- **Online response:** As a small fellowship, it was relatively easy and painless to get the majority of our attendees attending online services and meetings, but inevitably some either cannot or do not want to meet in this way. Since the measures were eased to allow us to meet in person in a sufficiently large space, we have been continuing streaming of services, and so some people who would never darken the doors of a physical church have been reached with the gospel. Similarly with the student ministry, our meetings have been online, but it seems that young people have been less enthusiastic about this method of contact than older people. Praise God for the opportunities that this time has opened up - despite the frustration of seemingly not being able to capitalise on these opportunities.
- **Work:** Unlike for many people in Montenegro, as is true around the world, God has provided me with a steady stream of work throughout the pandemic - maybe 'deluge' would be a more apt term. I certainly do not take this for granted, given the number of people laid off or on furlough during this time. Without the possibility of visiting the UK, I have just worked right through until the start of August. As a church we have been providing certain affected families with food and hygiene packages to alleviate the situation for a small number of people in our area of influence.
- **Rest:** As per a national campaign, I decided that this summer it would be best to have a 'staycation', and so fulfilled a longstanding plan to visit the north of Montenegro, Prokletije National Park to be exact, to explore the mountains there, which are among the country's tallest. Unseasonal rain scuppered some of my plans, but it was still an opportunity to forget about work, be active, and see some new scenery. I'm back to work already, but it seems that most of my clients are taking all of August off, allowing me to catch up on neglected projects and emails.
- **Evangelism:** Please pray for me and our church during the next period as we prepare some online video courses about basics of Christianity. I am currently writing the outline of two courses, and will soon start on individual scripts. The future is very uncertain, no-one yet knows whether schools and universities will be in-person, online, or a mixture of both, which makes it complicated planning activities for the coming semester. However, I am trusting that the work we do on these online resources will not be wasted whatever the epidemiological situation turns out to be from September/October onwards.



During this year

- **Pause in prayerletters:** As was the case last year, my communication via this prayer letter and my website has been very poor, while the main information has been direct to individual people and churches. This year my excuse is the sheer amount of work that I have had to do since the beginning of the year. I apologise if anyone thought I had deleted them from my mailing list - I am at fault for not making time for informing my prayer supporters.
- **Online opportunities:** The annual IFES Balkan consultation which brings together student workers from all over this region was cancelled as it was due to take place at the end of March, just as borders were being closed. The disappointment of not being able to gather was offset by several joint student meetings mainly coordinated by Serbia's student movement (EUS Serbia), which enabled students from former Yugoslav republics and Albania to listen to and interact with prominent Christian speakers (such as John Lennox, Pablo Martinez and Michael Ots) via Zoom, Facebook and YouTube. This solidarity I think is a great witness to the strong links of brotherhood and sisterhood in the Balkans which exists despite political tensions. Also, the many Christian conferences that were moved online and made generally available have enabled people like me who are rather isolated from such events to attend (although my work did interfere with much of this).
- **Unfulfilled plans:** When the pandemic was announced I made a list of many projects and plans that I wanted to undertake and finish during the lockdown. The lull in work lasted only two weeks for me, and so many of these plans remain unfulfilled, which is slightly frustrating! The fact is that there are many good things that we all want to do, and not enough time this side of eternity to do them. But I certainly would rather it were like this than being bored and unproductive.
- **Local tensions:** Last December, a new law was passed regarding religious freedom. The law is very unfavourable towards the majority Serbian Orthodox Church and has inflamed ethnic and religious tensions. A major issue is the intended expropriation of certain church property, including important Orthodox pilgrimage sites. The Serbian Orthodox Church started peaceful "prayer walks" as a form of

protest, which were later banned under the Covid restrictions. There is a general election at the end of August, and this issue of religion has divided society more deeply than was the case before. The evangelical community has a great opportunity in all of this to direct people to Christ and to separate political, national and ethnic issues from the core truths and calls of Biblical Christianity.

Upcoming plans

- **Visit to UK:** Despite having planned several times to return to the UK, I have had to delay this due to flight cancellations and self-isolation requirements. I am considering coming back for a longer period over the new year.

As ever, you can view the current and previous prayer letter [here](#), or view my pictures on [Facebook](#) if you are a member, or on [Flickr](#). My website has some of the same photos at <https://www.reetpetite.org.uk/pictures/>.

Contact

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