

LAURA BEST UPDATES



[Laura Best](#) 25 January at 19:50 [Report](#)

Stravo! (hi)

Sorry I am only getting round to emailing you guys now. It has been a very busy start...we hit the ground running. lol. The journey here was fine, everything went smoothly. We had a five hour drive from Sofia in Bulgaria to Stip in Macedonia...it was really nice as some of the places we went through were really stunning, with snow top Mountains and valleys. It is really cold though! Minus numbers everyday and the only room in the house heated is the living room/kitchen...so I am very thankful for my hot water bottle! lol. Tony and Norma the missionaries in Macedonia rent an apartment which is within a family home, so because we were arriving on Christmas Eve we literally dropped our cases inside and went downstairs to the family and had a Christmas Eve meal with them. Over here Christmas Eve is bigger than Christmas day. The dinner was strange, can't say I was a big fan, lol, but it was nice to meet the family. They have a tradition not to have meat or any dairy on that day, some very traditional and religious people will do that for 40 days with Christmas Eve being the last day of the fast...but most people only observe it for one day. They gave us some Rakjia as well, which is a very strong alcohol. lol...I struggled even though it was a very small glass, my Irish blood didn't help me out at all. lol. It did warm you up though. The family also have two large dogs, and one is a Rottweiler called Laura ha ha...and apparently she is very protective of the family and can be snappy. They said when they heard I was coming, that they tried to get her used to a different name for they didn't want to

offend me, but she was having none of it. Most dogs over here though have English names.

The next day, was Christmas day here so it was very quite, people mostly spend it with their families and the only shops and taxi's operating were ones owned by Muslims. Though there isn't a big Muslim community here. There is a very big Orthodox community though which is a big problem, all head knowledge and tradition and can cause a lot of opposition for Angel and Zokjje (the Pastor's of the Elim church in Stip). The family which Tony and Norma rent off are Orthodox but defend the Elim church, and the grandmother, Slavica tells the Orthodox priest off and tells him that the Elim church is a great place of freedom and they should be the same...go granny Slavica! :) She comes sometimes to the church and she said that Jesus went from her head to her heart, which I thought was really awesome! And we are praying along with the church that this will happen more and more to the people in Stip and Macedonia as a nation. It is a poor area, it is like take a step back in time in many ways and the Macedonia people are restricted a lot because they have not been allowed so far to become part of the E.U...for various reasons, I won't go into to it now, you guys may already be aware anyway. This makes getting visas virtually impossible and because jobs and prospects in Macedonia aren't great, therefore, people generally don't have much and many families struggle. Marian and Marko who are part of the family living below us, make cakes, amazing cakes!!!lol. The designs are unbelievable, Marko makes them and Marian designs them and she can do anything you want, she makes the flowers etc all by hand. They showed us pictures, I will try and get some photos to show you, they are truly works of art. They are trying to get working visa outside of Macedonia but they are constantly refused, because there is so much hassle for the employer. So their only chance of making decent money temporarily is if they go to Afghanistan as this is the only place which will grant them a work visa ATM. So please keep them and their family in your prayers, Marko and Marian have two boys as well and they are still very Orthodox, although respect and like Tony and Norma very much and have come to a couple of house meetings, they live with Slavica

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and her husband whose name has slipped my mind...so we are believing that they will soon find a relationship with Jesus like Slavica.

We having been meeting lots of people, on Christmas day we met a a guy called Tony and his wife Natalia, who is expecting a baby girl any day now, in an Irish pub (haha) called 'Dublin'. jokes. Nothing Irish about it apart from the fact it sold Guinness, but it was nice all the same. lol. Tony and Norma met Tony at the shop he works in and over time they built up a good relationship with him and now he is going to the church and has chosen to follow Jesus, his wife although is still unsure about it all and his mother has fallen out with him. So things can be quite difficult for people who decide to leave the Orthodox church. We also met a lady called Susanna and her daughter Joanna. Susanna has a muscle deterioration disease and is in a wheelchair, everyone including Susanna is believing for her healing. She has a very strong faith though her husband is a bit of a layabout by the sound of things, don't mean to sound nasty, I don't even know the guy, but he hasn't treated Susanna very well by the sounds of things. He was kicked out for a while as he was abusing her and she considered filling for a divorce (divorce rate is very high here), but she took him back as she felt she should forgive him. Things seem to be going better now, but he till hasn't got a job, and this makes life hard for the family as they are living off Susanna disability payment which isn't very much. So we are also praying about that.

We went to church for the christmas day service on Friday which was good...it was funny they had a song which was the same tune as jingle bells but with Christian lyrics. It is a very small building, they have about 50-60 people coming at the moment, which is good for the area and they are growing continually, but they really need a new building for not everyone can fit in, so that is another point of prayer. Tony the guy we met on our first day, also is a Macedonian folk singer, one of the best in Stip so we went to a restaurant called 'Kasablanca' to hear him, it was very different style of music, but he has a great voice and was easy listening...it was nice to experience more of their culture.

The Pastor's wife Daniela asked Luke and I to take the teen meeting today so it was a bit thrown together but I think it went ok...they have about seven young people, please pray for them and that they along with the rest of the church will really encounter God. We then met some of the locals whilst walking around and then we went to Pastor's Angel's house and had dinner. Talking to him we have heard a lot of stories of hurt and betrayal from missionaries who have come into Macedonia and also from some of their members (who are no longer members), and the local Evangelical church (the Pastor seems a bit threatened and incorporative). Angel and Zokjie are really nice guys and are trying to build bridges and unify with them, but it is harder than they anticipated. So a lot of bridge building and healing needs to happen. A lot of cities in Macedonia don't have any Christian witness, and this is a big burden on the Pastor's heart. So we are praying more anointed christian Pastors and leaders etc rise up and go to these places.

Not sure what we are doing tomorrow apart from church in the morning. Every week we are going to another city called Strumica to teach English, we stay there for two-three days, taking English classes in the afternoon and then evening until 10. I am taking the kids, apparently there is no one to take them and they disrupt the other classes. So that is one of my projects, which means I need to brush up on my Macedonian as well as English lol, I need divine help!lol. Please pray for that, lol also I am struggling to shift this cold as well which is frustrating, it isn't getting much better and the cold weather I don't think is helping. lol. Norma is also having trouble with her leg, we walk a lot so it slows her down a lot and gives her a lot of pain. I am also talking at their mid week prayer meeting on wednesday night, we will just be back from teaching in Strumica, so if could pray for energy and inspiration that also that would be much appreciated.

That's an update for now...hope it makes sense I am a bit tired. I hope this email finds you all well! Thanks for prayers and support! Shall be in touch soon

blessings Laura

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Hi

Sorry I have not updated in a while. Things are going well here in Macedonia...enjoy staying with Tony and Norma and devotional times have been really good in the morning together, feeling very challenged. Weather brightened up for a few days there, so it was really nice and not so cold during the day, still cold at night but I am used to that now. We took advantage of the good weather the other day and went to give out some tracts and pray. It was a religious holiday, something to do with John the Baptist so there were lots of people around, and the majority of people happily took them as well. I am used to people avoiding you when they see you have a tract, lol. They have a strange custom on this day, basically people will head down to the river and the Priest will throw in a cross and people will dive in to retrieve it. The person who gets the cross, is said to be blessed and that year will be one of prosperity for them. Then they go round all the houses in the area with the cross asking for money and that if they do they will be blessed also...but the joke is recently some opportunists who didn't jump in the river or get the cross, just get another cross and go around the house's asking for money, lol, craziness.

Unfortunately, we received some disappointing news at the weekend. As I mentioned in my last email we were supposed to be going to a place called Strumica to teach English for a few days. Unfortunately due to the cold weather, a broken heater, and lack of money to heat the building with portable radiators, the man in charge Salvay has cancelled the English classes until March/April whenever the weather gets better. This is disappointing and causes Luke and I difficulties with the course requirements. Also I really don't want to be just sitting around and being of no use. So please pray God would lead and direct us each day with His agenda and that He would equip us.

We have done lots of home visits over the last week or so, to people in the church and up in the Romi Gypsy community. The gypsy communities are very poor and many are

uneducated or have had a poor level of education. Tony and Norma have a real heart for these people who could be considered social outcasts in many ways, for Macedonian's don't really trust them or like them, although there doesn't seem to be any major problems between the two communities at large. However, Tony and Norma are praying for this community and seeking to build bridges and take the gospel to them whatever way they can and we have been praying with them that God would bring a Romi Gypsy believer, or anyone God would anoint to help reach and lead in this community. Tony and Norma have built up a good relationship with one family in particular who we went to meet, who have just had their eighth child, a girl, and they have named her Norma after Norma the missionary (aww). The 10 of them sleep and live in one room, which isn't very big. The Father is struggling to find work at the moment so things are really tough for them. You may ask why do they have so many children when they struggle so much? The simple answer is they can't afford birth control or the money for operations. They are a very loving family and Semiran the mother works very hard and seems to genuinely have made a commitment to Jesus and she talked to us about how much she couldn't cope if she didn't pray to Jesus. Also they were telling us two of their little girls, who are around 5 and 7 years old, prayed for their Mother whenever she was in hospital giving birth to baby Norma. So God is definitely working in this family and we pray He will continue to grow in their hearts and minds. Norma and Tony try to go see them as often as they can and sing macedonian Christian songs with them like "My God is so big", which the kids seem to really love and they know all the words and plague Tony to play his guitar. The whole family joins in which is really nice. We also took up some food and clothes and colouring in pages with a verse and talked with them about it and prayed and chatted with them. Please pray for this family and their community, and for the families protection as Nori (the father) is really trying to seek God and is coming to the church meetings and comes around to the apartment to chat to us, but his family don't like Christianity and would tend to cause a lot of trouble. Also for Semiran and the eight children, that God would provide and reveal Himself more and more, and

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that supernaturally they would gain understanding and insights.

A lot of outreach here is simply relational. The communities in Macedonia are very social and they help one another. As outsiders for the U.K people a lot of people automatically want to talk with you to know where you are from etc... or to develop their English etc. So it can be a good opening for conversation, and we carry tracts around for many times you get conversations with shop assistants owners and opportunities arise to invite them to different events etc. Also it is true that sometimes the best gift you can give someone is time. Many people here are out of work and struggling and taking time to talk with them, teach them English or make them dinner can make a real difference. Luke and I struggle due to the language barrier, but we try hard and most of the time someone is around who can help translate. Please pray we will get more opportunities with people. Also please continue to pray for the Orthodox priests who have a lot of influence...we are praying God will touch their hearts and that they will be challenged and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We had a meeting with the Pastors and their wives to chat about where we could help or what they would like us to do, it was a fun meeting but also productive. We got some projects out of that, like creating a welcome to Macedonia pack, for teams or people seeking to come out to serve here. Also designing some t-shirts for them, for future programmes they are hoping to do in the community etc. Also we will be taking some of the children's meetings, I spoke at the prayer meeting last week, and this week took the youth prayer meeting. And every saturday Luke and I take the youth meeting. Please pray that we will have wisdom and creativity in all that we do.

There aren't many youth in the church, so Luke and I are praying and hoping to really invest in them and to encourage them in their gifts and to take ownership of their faith and to not to depend on the teams which come out etc...but to support each other and to do stuff together. So as part of that we have been organising social events, such as games nights and table tennis matches, walks and DVD nights etc. For they have been off for Christmas and there isn't

much to do around Stip. They go back to school next week so we thought it would be good to take them out of Stip, so tomorrow bright and early (6am!) we are setting off to Skopje the capital city on the train which will take a few hrs 2 hrs. Please pray that goes well. Also please pray that these young people recapture God, that they will have a fresh encounter with Jesus and that they will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

If you would also pray more christians would take a stand in Macedonia and seek to serve in areas on Macedonia. For many towns don't have christian influence. Also that more support and investment from other countries will come in, to help with the unemployment issues. Also that they will become part of the EU for that would help them a lot. Also that God's light will shine on all the injustice and corruption in this country, that God would lead men and women to take a stand and make a difference.

I think I will stop there, I hope it all makes sense...I must head to bed 5 am will come to soon! lol.

I do have a personal prayer request, nothing major but I am having some toothache at the moment which is getting worse. I got some stronger painkillers today and praying it will just stop for I really don't want to go to the dentist here. So please pray.

I hope this report finds you all well! Thank you for all your prayers and support!

thoughts and prayers

Laura