

An Open Door, A Place of Welcome and Hope

When we founded PORTA-the Albania House in Athens, we chose its name for strategic reasons.

Porta is found in both the Greek and Albanian languages, meaning door or gate.

We knew that this word would help to open a larger universe of possibility for Albanians.

We believed this title would assist us to communicate our dream that Albanians have a respectful and welcoming entrance into opportunity in Greek society and that they would come to know the basis for the truly good life, found in God's love.

Doors quickly became the symbol of everything we were trying to do. Throughout our building, we placed actual doors to communicate this idea.

For almost a decade, now, much financial, personal and spiritual energy has been devoted to providing entry for Albanians into a more meaningful life and access to God's uncompromising love.

When they first crossed PORTA's threshold, we gave them cross-stitch gifts, created by partners in the United States.

They were free to choose one reading, "Mire se vini" (Albanian for "Welcome!") or "Jezusi te do" ("Jesus loves you!"), because the genuine welcome and open door of PORTA originates in the unrestricted compassion of God, as made explicit in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and as imitated in the lives of Jesus' followers.

At the neoclassical building in the Koukaki section of Athens, in the shadow of the

Acropolis, PORTA's turn-of-the-20th-century front door easily came to symbolize the heart of this movement.

Not long after PORTA opened, my brother, Jerry, and his wife, Rita, came for a visit.

Unknown to us, while they were visiting, Rita was taking notes and photographs of, among other things, the front door of our building.

For Christmas 2007, she presented us with a beautiful, original painting of PORTA's door.

Against the backdrop of the Columbia blue walls, her talent effectively captured the white, metal grillwork of the door, standing slightly ajar, with a bright light signaling warm welcome and generous entry for all.

For more than seven years, this painting has been on loan at PORTA, reminding all that this is a place of welcome motivated by Jesus' love.

As we planned to relocate to the U.S., we knew that Rita's painting should go with us and would find a special place in our new home. But we were also certain that we wanted another picture to replace it.

Recognizing the subtle power of art, we were thrilled when we located just the right painting to replace Rita's work.

While her artwork depicts PORTA's actual door as open, the new painting portrays an entrance as closed, with a lock on it. But the padlock is unfastened.

The new painting reminds us that doors, while potentially open and inviting, can also be closed and locked.

Doors may represent barriers, with access denied as well as entry gained.

It is for that reason that, even though we are moving our bodies from Athens, Greece, to Texas, our heads, our hearts and, to a considerable extent, our hands

will linger in Athens.

We plan to continue to work to ensure that PORTA will remain a place of openness.

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