

where WORLDS meet

the monthly newsletter for the church of the nazarene in eurasia

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ALBANIA: FOOTBALL MINISTRY REACHING BOYS



Photos courtesy Dorli Gschwandtner

In Kombinat, Albania, a local Nazarene pastor organized a boys football team, giving them male role models, prayer and spiritual teaching, and the loving, Christian influence of a church family.

By Dorli Gschwandtner
Eurasia Region Communications

“One day this summer I was walking through Kombinat,” Gesti remembers. “There were a few young guys and I knew one of them, so I called to them and asked, ‘What are you doing right now?’ And they said, ‘We are just hanging around and not doing anything special.’ But I knew that some of them had already started stealing, and I thought that these guys, starting to steal at this age, would pretty soon be in a very bad way, that soon they might be in prison or starting drugs. This is the area where most of the teenagers start drugs and become addicted.”

Ergest (Gesti) Biti, pastor of the Kombinat Church of the Nazarene in Tirana, Albania, knew that this meeting was from God. And he knew that he

couldn’t just let these young boys follow the path to ruin where so many had gone before.

“I asked them: ‘What if I start a football team and I can be your coach, would you like to come?’ They were all really happy.”

The boys could barely believe what they heard – and hardly believed that Gesti really meant it. But he did. The next day at 6 p.m., Gesti came to the field where they had agreed to meet him with some of their friends so they could make a team. When he arrived at the field, 17 young boys were waiting for him – and as soon as they spied him, ran towards him calling “Coach, coach!”

When they realized he hadn’t

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brought a ball – he thought the boys had one – they immediately started doubting his sincerity. But Gesti simply took two of the boys to the next shop to buy a ball.

“When we went back to the field, they were all waiting there, and one kid, he took the ball and started crying, he was so happy.”

Before they started, Gesti made some simple rules: no bad words, cooperate with each other, start each practice with a prayer to the Lord Jesus. All the boys agreed. So they proceeded to have a game and play together, and at the end Gesti chose one of the boys as captain and left the ball with him to bring to the next practice.

“They were so happy because they saw that I trusted them.”

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FOOTBALL: Many boys neglected at home

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Winners

Since the beginning of July 2015, the Kombinat Nazarene football (soccer) team has been meeting three days per week on a public playing field. Around 22 to 35 kids, aged 9 to 12, attend regularly. Gesti was joined by Andi, a young man from the church, to help lead the practice. They usually meet for about an hour to exercise together, practice some football moves and have a game. Thanks to donations they were able to buy additional balls and other exercising equipment – including uniforms for each child in the Albanian national team’s colours: “It really made them into a team.”

But what is a team without a victory?

When Gesti arranged a trip to Lushnje, a small town about 1.5 hours south of Tirana, to compete against the kids there, the football boys showed up at the church at 7 a.m. even though the bus wasn’t leaving until 9.

“Some kids told me, ‘We couldn’t sleep all night because we were so excited to go there!’” Gesti said. “That was such a great experience for the kids. It was something different for them, and we were really glad to see those happy faces.”

Of course, the Kombinat Nazarene team won the match, and when the victorious youth returned home late in the afternoon, some of the boys found an Albanian flag and marched around the Kombinat city centre, singing “We are the winners!” at the top of their voices. While people were looking on and wondering what had happened, Gesti thoroughly enjoyed the scene.

“That really makes my heart happy, to see these kids so happy.”

People who love

The football team is the only social program offered in this community. But it’s not just a social program. Every practice is started with prayer, and at the end Gesti or Andi always share a short message with the kids. A number of the boys have started attending the Saturday kids meeting at the Kombinat Church of the Nazarene. During the school



Pastor Gesti Biti and Andi not only organized the boys into a team, but arranged for them to travel to another city and compete against another team -- a confidence-building experience.

year, fewer boys can attend the football practice because they have school in the afternoon, but still come to the church on Saturdays.

“Most of these kids are from ... families that are not very interested in their kids. Many of the kids don’t have bread to eat.”

-- Pastor Gesti Biti

They can feel that there’s something different about Gesti and the people from his church. Something many of them have not experienced before: people who love and care about them.

“Most of those kids are from poor families or from families that are not very interested in their kids.

From the families -- most of the ones I have seen -- it’s like they don’t have

a connection with their parents. Most fathers are unemployed or alcoholic that abuse them; many of the kids don’t have bread to eat before they sleep at night. That’s why most of those kids start stealing at this age and getting in a bad way.”

The church has made a difference, and Gesti prays that he may be able to continue offering this service.

“The kids feel that we care for them and we’re always telling them that we love them and that’s why we are doing that.” □



Pastor Gesti Biti prays with the boys at each practice, and requires them to adopt good behaviors when they participate.



India church sends two volunteers

By Gina Grate Pottenger
Eurasia Region Communications

As a pastor's daughter growing up in a Nazarene church in Bangalore, India, Miriam Vijaya was always drawn toward missions, and to serving as a missionary.

Today, that vision is turning into reality. The 26-year-old recently quit her job as an accountant at a France-based multi-national oil company and took a two-day train journey to Kolkata where she is serving as a volunteer for three months with her best friend, Monica Rachel, 24, also from Bangalore, through the Eurasia Region's M+Power initiative.

Miriam and Monica are two of the first Indian volunteers to be sent into cross-cultural ministry by the initiative of the India Nazarene Church in many years. They represent a wave of young Nazarenes who are sensing God's call into cross-cultural ministry and are ready to answer that call.

Last summer's Eurasia Mission Orientation (EMO), held in Bangalore, attracted 21 participants, mostly from India, but included a few from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, as well. All were there to find out what it would mean to live and serve God in a cross-cultural context, whether in their own nation or somewhere else in the Eurasia Region.

Of the 21 participants, 16 took the next step to interview for a ministry assignment. One of those has plans to move to the Maldives Islands where he has been offered a job with a business there, and plans to plant a church in his free time.

Because Miriam's father often traveled into other cultural areas of India, Miriam and her brother Moses sometimes traveled with him. Both were shaped by those experiences, and Moses also attended the EMO last year.

"That seed was already in our heart to work among people and to help them," Miriam said. "My heart was always for missions. I was always praying God would open a door for me."

Miriam later graduated college with

see "INDIA" • page 5

Conference gathers evangelicals to consider response to Islamic revival



Photos courtesy Gina Pottenger

Dr. Michael Lodahl, professor of theology and world religions at Point Loma Nazarene University, and author of *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and Qur'an Side by Side*, was a keynote speaker, and led a seminar at a conference held in Manchester, UK, to help Christians develop a deeper understanding of and love for people of the Muslim faith.

By Gina Grate Pottenger
Eurasia Region Communications

In January, about 50 people from throughout Greater Manchester, UK, participated in the Manchester Centre for the Study of Christianity and Islam's (MCSCI) conference, "Evangelical Responses to Islamic Revival," to seek a deeper understanding of people of the Muslim faith, so they are better able to love and serve them in meaningful ways.

Birthered out of its relationship with Nazarene Theological College-Manchester (NTC), where the conference was conducted, the Centre is designed to equip people and churches at the grassroots, both within and beyond the Nazarene denomination, to seek out encounters with Muslims in their own communities.

The conference attracted a wide range of interested participants, from a layperson hosting several Muslim women in her home, to local church pastors, theology students and workers from numerous denominations and nonprofit organizations.

Pastor Kirsten Jeffery, on staff at Longsight Church of the Nazarene, said she attended the conference because, "we have a large community of Muslims around us but we don't have very much contact with them at all." She sought learning to be able to equip the church to better reach out to their neighbours. She said the networking proved valuable for her work going forward.

Graham Dow, a retired Anglican leader, said, "It's amazing, I'm learning so much. The quality of the speakers is incredibly high quality... To build up a network of people of this quality is staggering."

**"We have a large community of Muslims around us, but we don't have very much contact with them at all."
-- Pastor Kirsten Jeffery**

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Dow said that the “measured” presentations by the speakers “challenged” some of his views, and taught him a deeper understanding of Islam and the people who adhere to the faith.

“The message of the conference is that there are hundreds and thousands of Muslims searching for God,” he said.

Planning for the conference began several years ago against the backdrop of the Arab Spring and the growing Syrian refugee crisis, the expulsion of Middle Eastern Christians and the spread of fundamentalist religious ideology. The conference wrestled with theological issues, as well as the context of Islam in Great Britain and beyond, and considered the role of believers from a Muslim background in the Church. In fact, the objective was to bring together experts and practitioners to explore theological issues, as well as the context of Islam in the United Kingdom and beyond.

“The message of the conference is that there are hundreds and thousands of Muslims searching for God.”

-- Graham Dow

Speakers included respected Christian names in the field such as Martin Accad, director of the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies in Beirut; Salim Munayer, director of Musalaha, living in Jerusalem and working for reconciliation in the Middle East; Michael Lodahl, professor of theology and world religions at Point Loma Nazarene University, and author of *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and Qur'an Side by Side*; Greg Livingstone, founder and former director of Frontiers International Mission Society; Dr Philip Lewis, lately retired as Lecturer in Peace Studies at Bradford University, Interfaith adviser to successive Bishops of Bradford and founder of Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity; and others.

The presentations and seminars covered numerous interest areas, such as reconciliation between faith groups; the distinctions between different sects, tribes and major branches of Islam; how to dialogue with Muslims about faith; whether to utilize the Qur'an when talking with Muslims about faith;



Martin Accad, director for the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies in Beirut, Lebanon, offered the perspective of an Arab Christian on the conflicts in the Middle East. He asked those in the West to be aware of the history and geopolitical situation in their attitudes and actions, because these actions affect - sometimes negatively - the Church there.



Participants at the conference not only listened to a variety of expert keynote speakers, but also chose from a wide range of seminars, and were given time to interact with the speakers in a closing panel discussion.

understanding Israel and Palestine today; the refugee crisis and the Church; and more.

MCSCI was founded in 2014 by Nazarene Theological College under the directorship of Rev. Dr. Dwight Swanson, a senior lecturer in Biblical Studies at NTC for nearly 20 years, along with Rev. Canon Phil Rawlings, the Church of England's Interfaith Officer in Oldham, UK. Rawlings is completing doctoral studies in the area of Christian engagement with Islam and has a longstanding interest in caring for Muslim neighbours as an inner city minister.

The Centre develops specialist classes and programmes to more firmly and deeply root Christians in the tenets of their biblical faith while at the same time preparing them for participating in informed, respectful and loving dialogue with Muslims.

MCSCI is an available resource to Nazarenes, through the Eurasia Region and globally, who would seek out learning, dialogue and equipping for interaction with their Muslim neighbors. For more information, or to listen to audio recordings of the conference keynote speakers, visit mcsci.org.uk. □

Nazarene Manual translated into Armenian

By Nikolaj Sawatzky
Regional Literature Coordinator

The Nazarene Church in Armenia has taken a significant step forward in the development of resources for Armenian Nazarenes by completing translation of the Nazarene Manual into Armenian.

The Church of the Nazarene in Armenia and the CIS Field, of which Armenia is a part, has some very committed people who believe in providing theological and practical resources for the people and the local churches. These individuals worked countless hours to produce it. Not too many people can actually imagine what a tedious task it is to translate the Manual -- the denomination's book describing

its polity, practices and beliefs. Finding an accurate translation of the Manual is critical to the unity and development of the church in every language group where the church has a presence.

Therefore, I am very, very grateful to Pastor Seyran Vardanyan and his team for completing the whole Manual (not just portions of it) in Armenian. This is the first time we have the whole Manual in this language. Previously, the Armenian church had only the Articles of Faith section in their language.

I am certain that it will serve our people well as they develop the structure for leadership and service of our church in that part of the world!

Thank you Pastor Seyran for this immense achievement and blessing. □



Pastor encourages church's engagement with mission

By Silvia S.
South Asia NMI Coordinator

In the north part of Bangladesh, Pastor Dinesh helped to organize a Nazarene church in 2010. Twenty-eight families are involved there today. Since the church was founded, Pastor Dinesh has prioritized raising funds for Nazarene Missions International (NMI), a ministry of the denomination that mobilizes local churches in God's mission to the world.

Pastor Dinesh encouraged church members to collect rice every month. After a certain time, the collection was very good and they started to help Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries International (SDMI) to organize children camps with these funds. They are maintaining church expenses with this fund, as well. And they donate rice for their district assembly -- an annual gathering of local churches who are formed into one district, at which time they conduct business and voting.

Now they have reserved 1,045 kilograms of rice. Every year they are collecting 224 kilograms of rice.

The total population of the area around the church is about 250,000, and most of the people of the district



are farmers. The literacy rate is 44.39 percent. The people here are very poor, and sometimes they can't earn their living. But, their commitment for God, as well as for His mission to the world, is really courageous.

"As a believer I am committed for God's work and our Church also," Pastor Dinesh said. "I am always encouraging church members to work for God. If all churches come forward like us, it is possible to do anything for God's glory."

Pastor Dinesh was ordained in the district assembly this year, and also was selected as a member of the District NMI Board. He is a very active member of NMI and has a good heart for God. □

INDIA: Called since youth

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a bachelor's degree in accounting, and Monica trained as a nurse. While Miriam enjoyed her work in a major corporation, she knew what she really wanted was to be a missionary.

Monica interviewed for her first job at a hospital.

"At the time of the interview, I started crying. In my heart, God said, 'I am not calling you for this. I am calling you to missions.'"

Monica changed directions, embarking on several short-term opportunities through parachurch organizations such as Youth With a Mission and Kings Way Union Ministry.

When she returned home to Bangalore, she asked God to make the next mission opportunity clear to her.

The district superintendent visited their church and talked about M+Power. The young women felt this was the answer from God they were waiting for.

At the EMO, Miriam and Monica were accepted together to an approved ministry site with the Nazarene church in Kolkata, where they are now serving in the local church, as well as helping with a Nazarene Compassionate Ministries project.



M+POWER
EURASIA

UPCOMING TRAINING EVENTS

9-12 May, Sri Lanka
3-5 August, Moscow
4-7 Sept., Hungary
9-11 October, India

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– Psalm 118:5-6

Do you have pictures of your church ministry in Eurasia that you would like to share with the region? Send them to communications@eurasiaregion.org and we'll consider posting them on our Facebook page.

www.eurasiaregion.org

YOUTH: Served in local church

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Their local church, Divya Jyothi Nazarene Church, which had provided them many opportunities for ministry as they grew up, such as teaching Sunday school, rallied around their calling.

“My pastor, when I told him I was getting into missions, he was very happy,” Monica said. “I could see the church support me in every step.”

The congregation, which numbers about 200 to 250 members, weekly contributed money to a box which the women kept at the church to collect donations. The women also baked cakes and sold them at Christmas to raise more funds.

They departed January 31 for Kolkata, where they will be assisting a local Nazarene church with overseeing a Nazarene Compassionate Ministries child development center, teach Sunday school, and also after-school tutoring, computer and English classes.

“God’s call is upon everyone,” said Miriam. “It depends on how you respond to it, if you’re obedient to Him. I would encourage our youth to go out [in mission].”



Monica urged local churches to give young people ministry experience locally so they can grow and develop as leaders with the support of their church.

“Let them start with small things in the church, giving them opportunities in different ways,” she said. “When we show them that they’re accepted in the church and loved in the church, they will open up and do many other things.”

Visit www.eurasiaregion.org/ volunteers for more information. □

Prayer Requests

- Please pray for Pastor Ergest Biti, Andi, the Kombinat Church of the Nazarene, Albania, and their ministry with neglected boys in their community. Pray that the Holy Spirit would work in the lives of these young people, drawing them into loving relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Please pray for Miriam and Monica as they minister during the next three months as volunteer M+Power missionaries in Kolkata, India. Ask God to abundantly bless their work and experience, and reveal next steps in His perfect time.
- Pray for Pastor Dinesh, his local church, and churches throughout Eurasia Region to continue passionately and sacrificially obeying God’s calling to participate in His mission, both locally and globally.
- Christ commands us to pray for more workers for the harvest in Luke 10:2: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (NIV). Pray that God would raise up and equip new workers across the region.

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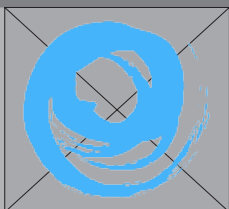
We welcome stories, photos and prayer requests. E-mail submissions to communications@eurasiaregion.org

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