

WHERE WORLDS MEET

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CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
EURASIA

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The God who promises peace

A man hides his family, then flees Iraq to find a safe place where they can start over in peace. The journey leads to the God who promises peace.

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Meet Paris's Arabic Church of the Nazarene

Multi-national church reaches out through children's ministries, women's gatherings, and music ministry.

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The most effective way to communicate with people might be as easy as telling your story.

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God's story, our stories

By Gina Pottenger

Eurasia Region Communication
Coordinator

I stood before my home church as the missionary speaker, sharing stories that had been entrusted to me during my first year as a missionary journalist in Eurasia. One of the stories was the faith journey of Irina Albei (Bucharest, Albania) and how God saved her unborn baby during a series of astonishing miracles. (Read the story here: <http://tiny.cc/4rb4uy>)

After the service, a young man approached me. He said that in his past, he had walked away from his faith in God because he could no longer believe God still performs miracles. He was only in the congregation on that Sunday morning because a friend had insisted he come. Then, this young man heard me tell the story of Irina's longing to experience a miracle, and how God answered her prayers by miraculously saving her child's life multiple times.

"I didn't believe there really were miracles until I heard this story today. I have rededicated my life to Jesus," the young man told me.

I was stunned. This man had never met Irina in person. In fact, I had not met her, either – we'd only talked on the telephone. Neither this young man nor I had seen her child except in photographs, which I'd used in my PowerPoint. And yet, Irina's faith story -- even third-hand -- created space for the Holy Spirit to use it to reach this young man, who responded to God in renewed belief.

This encounter, and many others like it, has convinced me that a primary way God chooses to work in our lives is through the sharing of our stories – our testimonies. When we "witness" to what God has done for us and give Him the praise and credit, the Holy Spirit honors our witness, bringing conviction, repentance, transformation, new understanding, encouragement, strength, comfort -- and belief.

God is a storytelling God. We know this because He has given us the Bible, which, from Genesis to Revelation, is full of stories that teach us who God is, and who we are. At the same time, taken as a whole, the Bible is THE story of God, and God's love for humankind.

If God communicates to us so often through stories, and we are created in His image, it stands to reason that humans may communicate most effectively with each



other through stories.

A mentor in the field of media ministry once told me that effective communication has many things in common with the way we do mission work.

For example, when a missionary crosses cultural and language boundaries to share the gospel, she must travel to where the people are whom she is called to share the gospel with. Once there, she first takes time to understand the people she wants to minister to. That means the missionary starts learning the language spoken by the local people. She listens a lot, getting to know the way people think and view the world, how they understand God and religion, family and gender roles, their own history, as well as world history and their place in it.

Before a missionary tries to communicate, he or she tries to understand. Deeper understanding provides the foundation for more effective communication.

Effectively communicating, after gaining some level of understanding, may be as simple as sharing your own story, or daily faith journey stories, in ways and with words that people understand, and in places where they prefer to meet and spend time.

Stories can be as simple as an answered prayer, or how God helped you handle a difficult situation at work or with a family member. Your story may not yet have an ending. You may be in the midst of your story, but you can still point to where God has been faithful and stood beside you, even entered into your suffering with you. A story might be about how you are waiting with trust for God to reveal himself or answer a prayer. And when someone shares a story with you, perhaps ask where they might see God in their story.

As we tell our faith stories, we are proclaiming God's story! □



Testimony

The God who promises peace

War refugees from Iraq travel the long, dangerous road to peace, a new home -- and baptism as new followers of Jesus.

By Gina Grate Pottenger

For more than a year, Ahmed made a daily pilgrimage to the muted calm of Zagreb Cathedral. Beneath the soaring stone pillars and colored light filtering through stained glass, Ahmed would take a seat in a polished wooden pew, and spend hours pouring out his heart's desire to God.

What Ahmed wanted, more than anything, was for God to protect his young wife, Zahra, and their two sons, who remained in hiding in Iraq. They waited for Ahmed

to receive political asylum in Europe and reunion visas, so they could join him, leaving behind war and threats forever.

Although Ahmed had been raised in a different religion, the Catholic cathedral in Croatia's capital was a special, holy place for him. Ahmed felt he could talk to God there, and that God was listening.

A country divided

Ahmed and Zahra hadn't always lived in fear. Before the destabilization of Iraq, people from various sects of the country's majority religion lived side by side in peace. These sects claim to be members of the same religion, but disagree on certain things, and often clash.

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SECTS: Religious tensions threatened family

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Ahmed was an architect who traveled the country to work on infrastructure projects like roads and bridges. When he was relocated to Zahra's town for work, he noticed the beautiful 17-year-old on the street. He asked people about her – what was she like? Who were her family?

Eventually, he got her phone number.

Zahra also noticed Ahmed, and returned his interest. Zahra was from the same religion as Ahmed, but had grown up in a family that belonged to a different sect. When they fell in love, that didn't seem to matter.

Through a coworker, Ahmed proposed. They were married in 2004.

As the country slid further into turmoil, hostility and suspicion increased between the two main religious sects. The very atmosphere was charged.

On more than one occasion, someone approached Ahmed on the street, asking if his wife was from the other sect. People did the same thing with Zahra. The interest in their mixed sect marriage felt sinister.

In 2008, the previously distant fighting between extremist groups and government troops neared their town. Many people fled.

Ahmed's boss told him, "I'm sending you a car. Take your family and leave tonight." Ahmed and Zahra grabbed some clothes and traveled to Baghdad, just before the militant groups invaded the area and confiscated all the empty houses. The young couple's house and everything they owned was taken.

In the capital, a more diverse, larger city, they hoped to live anonymously and escape questions about their religion.

During the next eight years, they continued on with their lives. They had two sons. But the rising tension between the sects inevitably followed them to Baghdad. At the boys' school, people knew their parents belonged to different sects. Other children or teachers confronted the boys about their parents' religion.

The tensions followed the boys home, where they fought with each other. One would say he was with their mother while the other said he was with their father. Ahmed and Zahra did not want religion to tear their family apart. They decided they must leave Iraq altogether.

Long road to a new home

In 2015, Ahmed traveled to Europe for asylum. Their plan was that wherever he received residency, Zahra and the boys would later join him.

Ahmed made it to Finland where he stayed for over a year. But his asylum was rejected there under the Dublin Agreement, in which European countries agree to return asylum seekers to the first country where their fingerprints have been taken by the government. Ahmed's were taken in Croatia, so he was sent to Zagreb. He spent another year separated from his family, working through the Croatian asylum process.

While he waited, he lived in a large hotel that the government had turned into a temporary residence for asylum seekers. People from the Nazarene church visit the hotel to teach English classes, or invite the residents to craft nights, a kids' club and other activities at the church. Asylum seekers who



attend the church's activities love having somewhere else to spend time besides their cramped rooms in the crowded hotel. The church people are friendly and caring. The congregation, made up of people from various cultures and languages, is like an adopted family.

Ahmed wanted very much to join them. But he was concerned people would think he was only attending so that his asylum would be granted – an early misconception some asylum seekers have. So he stayed away.

Meanwhile, Zahra and their boys lived in hiding for three years, moving every three months for safety. The boys couldn't go to school. Zahra says she was frightened all the time, constantly worried their location would be discovered by people from the other sect.

She would receive update calls from Ahmed in Finland and then in Croatia. The waiting and separation was agony.

"When he left me, I was younger than now," Zahra said, describing how the experience aged her. "It was

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PEACE: Safely in Croatia, family chooses Jesus

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really tough for us. He would call me, going crazy.”

“We reached a point where we thought if I didn’t get anything here in Europe and have to go back, the whole family will do suicide together,” Ahmed admitted.

While Zahra and the boys moved and hid, moved and hid, Ahmed continued his daily visits to the Zagreb cathedral, begging God to bring his family safely to him, and give them a life of peace together.

A place of peace

In January, Ahmed’s asylum in Zagreb was granted, and his family received reunion visas.

As soon as his asylum was granted, Ahmed wasted no time finding Pastor Mahdi*, the leader of the Arabic-speaking worship service at the Zagreb Church of the Nazarene.

Mahdi* and his wife had been asylum seekers themselves, and were actively ministering to those living in the hotel, where they had also once lived while waiting for their application to be accepted. (Read their story: <http://nazarene.org/article/young-couple-escapes-persecution-finds-home-croatia>)

“I got my residence at 12 p.m. and talked to Mahdi at 4 p.m.: ‘I want to come to church.’”

A short time later, as Zahra and the boys walked off the plane in the Zagreb airport, Ahmed snapped a photo. It was the first picture he posted on social media since he fled their home. They had no more reason to hide.

“When they first came, it was snowing,” Ahmed recalled. The very first thing he did was take his family into the city center. “We went to the cathedral and I said, ‘This is

the reason you are here. All the prayer to God happened here, in the cathedral.’”

Relocating to a predominantly Catholic country has provided an immense sense of relief for the family. They know that their traditional religious sects don’t matter here, and believe that generally Christians live in peace.

“Why don’t Christians fight?” he wondered when he began living in Europe. “Here in Croatia, there are all religions, and even atheists. And they don’t fight. I think Christianity is the most peaceful religion because it’s calling for peace. Because Christ, when He was born, He asked for peace between all people.”

Ahmed and Zahra want their sons to grow up in the church, away from the religious divisions and fighting that are destroying their home

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BAPTISM: 'He's always with you. God is faithful.'

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country.

"It affected my kids a lot and that's why I entered the church," Ahmed said. "I want them to be raised away from the fights. I don't hate [my faith] but I want to have a new life, a new beginning. I want them to forget the war, the death, and have a new start. Because people are fighting together, they make the religion bad. So I want [my sons'] head and brain and their thinking to be in the church."

New life, new faith

In Croatia, the family has peace, but it will take time to rebuild their life. Ahmed found a job as a painter, but the two-year benefits he receives as a new resident in Croatia do not cover the living expenses or health care of other family members. Zahra

wants to work part-time, but does not yet have the right to do so.

There is also lingering trauma and fear that they must overcome.

Recently, Ahmed took Zahra out for coffee, just the two of them. It was the first time in three years that Zahra had left their children alone, and it was difficult to be separated for even a couple of hours. Ahmed convinced her they would be safe.

They've enrolled their sons in the local school, and insisted that the boys also attend the optional Christian religion classes. The family attends every gathering offered at the Nazarene church.

"We felt belonging and we know everyone now," Zahra said. "We're [always] waiting for Sunday."

As they met regularly with believers and studied the Bible, the family grew in their belief. They reached a point of decision where they confessed Jesus as Lord of their lives. Having completed a Nazarene membership course, early this summer they were baptized into the faith.

Just like in the cathedral, Ahmed knows he can talk to God in the Nazarene church, and anywhere, really.

"In Christianity, He's not just God, He's a Spirit with you. You cannot put God in a box and say this is the way to pray to God. He's everywhere and He's always with you. God is faithful." □

Programmes

Certificate in Spiritual Formation (60 ECTS)

This programme is designed to develop a foundational knowledge of the Bible and to strengthen your Christian faith.

Diploma in Christian Ministry (120 ECTS)

Builds on the certificate programme, providing you with the basic skills to minister in a local church.

Advanced Diploma in Applied Theology (180 ECTS) - NEW

Builds on the diploma programme, providing a deeper understanding of theology as it is applied to the practice of Christian ministry in society today. This programme is equivalent to an international Vocational Bachelor of Theology.

All programmes are offered fully online in English.

Contact

For questions, contact the Digital Campus Coordinator at: digitalcampus@eunc.edu.

<https://www.eunc.edu/moreinfo>

The advertisement features a dark red background with a white crosshair graphic. Four squares in the quadrants are colored: top-left is orange, top-right is yellow, bottom-left is yellow, and bottom-right is orange. The text 'European Nazarene College' is written in white, with 'DIGITAL CAMPUS' in yellow below it. A QR code is positioned at the bottom center. At the very bottom, the text 'TRANSFORMATIVE * CONTEXTUAL * MULTINATIONAL * WESLEYAN' is written in white.



Local church

Meet the Arabic Church of the Nazarene, Paris, France

By Pastor Farag Mikheil

When I came to France in 1989, there was not any Arabic church in Paris. So with a Christian friend I organized an Egyptian fellowship, a group of Christians who met on Sunday afternoon in the basement of the French Church of the Nazarene in Paris.

The group started to grow and many Egyptians came to our meetings. After I finished Bible school, the majority asked me to organize an official church out of this Christian group.

After studying the Church of the Nazarene's Manual, we decided to join the Church of the Nazarene.

Our Arabic Nazarene church was founded in March 1995, one year after I was ordained pastor by the

late General Superintendent Dr. William Prince.

The Arabic Church of the Nazarene in Paris is composed of different nationalities among Arabic-speakers; the majority are Egyptians, but we also have brothers and sisters from Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Syria and Jordan.

Most of those people came to France to escape war and persecution, many Egyptians found in France a refuge country where they can be safe and free to worship the living God.

We meet each Sunday at 3 p.m. for worship; the ladies meet on Thursday at 1 p.m.

We are about 60 persons, including children. The number of children is increasing and we need more space for their activities.

We also have a wonderful praise team called, The Fruit of the Spirit Praise Team. They are a real blessing for the church.

Last December, the praise team sang outside the church building on the front stairs while another team conducted evangelism by talking with people and giving Bibles.

God is building the Arabic Church of the Nazarene in Paris, to Him and Him alone be the glory.

I came to France for one year, this was my plan. But God had another plan for me. I realized that He sent me to take care of His sheep, represented by The Arabic Church of the Nazarene in Paris. I am so thankful for God who gave me this privilege to be His servant.

There are many challenges of serving in France; as the ministry is growing, I have to find enough time to do the work of the church while I work in teaching English in the University and senior high schools. I continue to pray so that the Lord may open doors for me to be full-time minister to pastor the church in a better way, and to meet the increasing needs of the Arabic Christian Communities in France. □



Who are Nazarenes?

We are a Christian people

As members of the Church Universal, we join with all true believers in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in affirming the historic Trinitarian creeds and beliefs of the Christian faith. We value our Wesleyan-Holiness heritage and believe it to be a way of understanding the faith that is true to Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

We are a holiness people

God, who is holy, calls us to a life of holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, called by various terms including “entire sanctification” and “baptism with the Holy Spirit”—cleansing us from all sin, renewing us in the image of God, empowering us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, and producing in us the character of Christ. Holiness in the life of believers is most clearly understood as Christlikeness.

We are a missional people

We are a sent people, responding to the call of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all the world, witnessing to the Lordship of Christ and participating with God in the building of the Church and the extension of His kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Our mission (a) begins in worship, (b) ministers to the world in evangelism and compassion, (c) encourages believers toward Christian maturity through discipleship, and (d) prepares women and men for Christian service through Christian higher education.

Learn more at: www.nazarene.org/articles-faith

“Then Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’”

— John 8:34

Prayer requests

Please pray for Ahmed, Zahra and their sons as they rebuild their lives in Croatia. Pray that God continues to deepen and mature their faith in and relationship with Him. Also ask God to bless them with jobs and financial independence, as well as adaptation to the culture, language and new ways of doing things. Ask God to use them to bring many others to faith in Jesus, as well, and to build the church.

Pray for the Arabic Church of the Nazarene in Paris, France, as they live out their calling to the Great Commission in their city and culture. Ask God to bless the church with unity, dependence on the Holy Spirit and discipleship growth. Pray that the Spirit would bring many others to faith through the church.

Pray for leaders, lay people, churches, educators, children's workers, youth, compassionate ministry workers and all other Nazarenes in Eurasia, that God would nurture his church in maturity, compassion, humility, entire sanctification and mission.

Where Worlds Meet

is the monthly newsletter for the Eurasia Region of the Church of the Nazarene.

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