

# HIGHLIGHTS

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Jimmy Martin

## On Mission Every Day and to the End

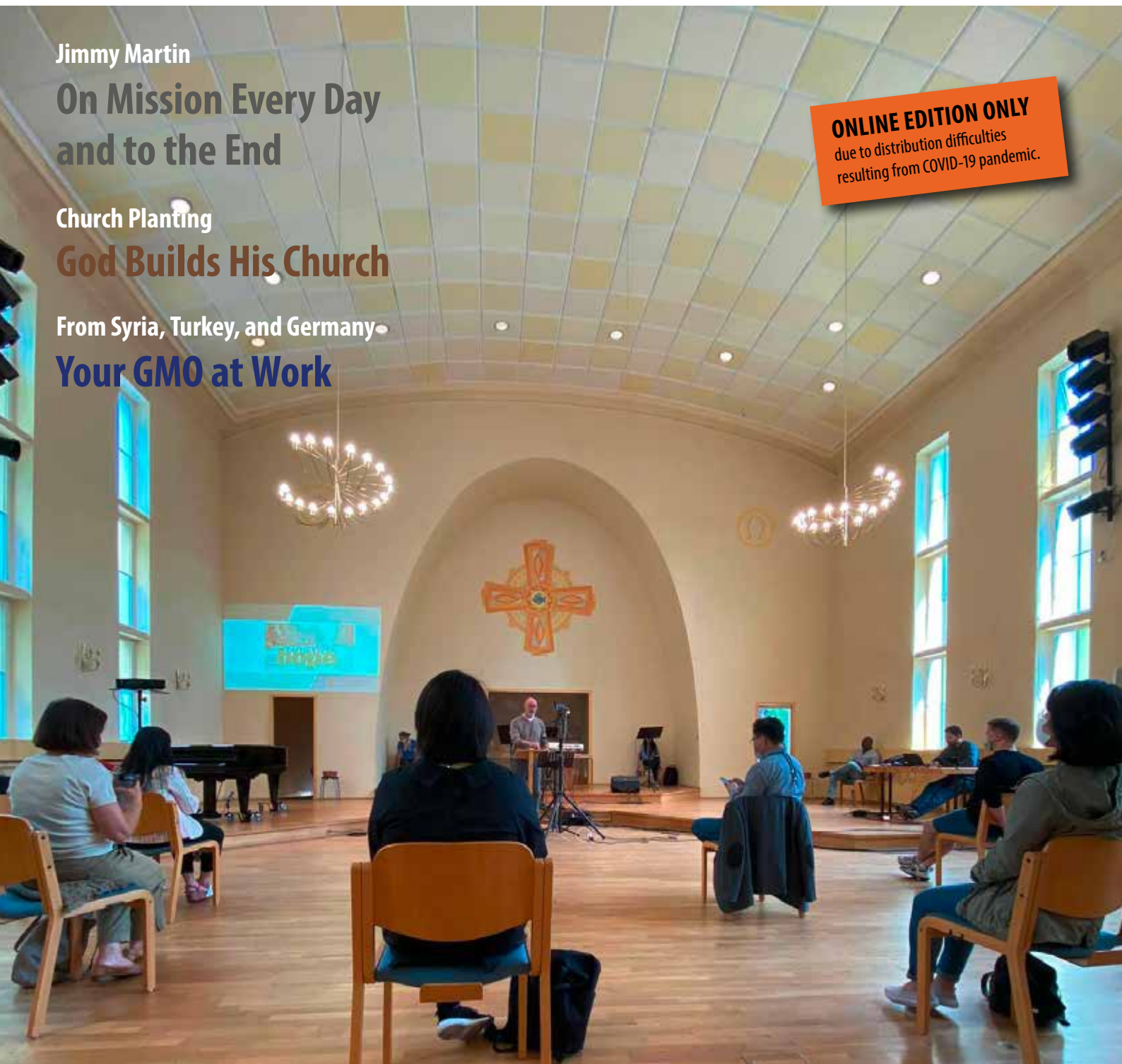
Church Planting

## God Builds His Church

From Syria, Turkey, and Germany

## Your GMO at Work

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# On Mission Every Day and to the End

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV).*



by Jimmy Martin  
General Secretary

## ON MISSION

2020 has been an interesting and challenging year. The pandemic has forced all of us to adapt to ways of “doing church.” In talking with IBC pastors and leaders, I have been amazed how churches have stepped up to learning new ways to carry out the mission God has given them. It has not been without frustration and discouragement, but God has been at work during the coronavirus days in seen and unseen ways.

Most IBC churches did not meet physically until recently as restrictions eased. Some are still meeting online in a variety of ways. Many, when it was okay to do so, continue to provide online services but are also having public worship while practicing social distancing and observing hygiene restrictions.

Most IBC pastors have shared that they have gone to online platforms for ministry and various discipleship efforts like home groups and small-group accountability teams. Leadership meetings and even church business meetings have been done online. One church – IBC Stuttgart – conducted a pastoral candidate “visit” during a week of meetings with various church groups and then called a pastor after a Sunday service – all online!

The results of these efforts have proven to meet the needs of our churches for this time. Many pastors reported an increase in attendance for worship, an increased number of home and other discipleship groups, and even several conversions during the last four months. As churches have learned that online platforms can be a good evangelistic and discipleship tool, they are now looking at ways to leverage

these opportunities for the future. Church ministries will look different in post-COVID-19 days than they did in pre-COVID-19 days.

2020 has been unlike any year in my ministry also. Spending most of my weekends on the road in the past to visit IBC churches has helped me to connect but this has not been possible since March. I was personally disappointed not to be able to visit IBC friends a final time before my retirement. Although I have been able to “preach” for various churches via live or recorded messages, personal interaction is missed. Ours is an incarnational, relational faith. In the absence of being together personally we can identify with the Apostle Paul who was eager to see the Philippian church and longed for all of them “with the affection of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:8).

In our inability to see each other personally, we have on the convention-wide level provided some opportunities to pray for and share with each other. It was good to see and speak with one another, even if on a Zoom meeting or a phone call. The IBC Executive Leadership Team has had several meetings online. Back in March the IBC held an online business session to call our new General Secretary Tim Faulkner. Preparation for such a meeting was a challenge, but most were satisfied that this was the best way to move forward. As I write I am hopeful we will be able to conduct a face-to-face Annual Convention Meeting in Kaiserslautern, Germany, 26-28 October. Some may need to join online due to travel restrictions. Our Women’s Conference was postponed and then postponed again until 23-25 April 2021.

## IMPRINT

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Cover photo: IBC Berlin meets in-person following social-distancing guidelines by Christian Windmüller.

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## EVERY DAY

What does all this have to do with the *Great Commission* of Christ to “go and make disciples of all nations”? A lot! First, we have the promise that all authority has been given to Him. It is the *Great Claim*. He has the power and the right to exert that power in spreading His message to the world. He is not limited by viruses or anything else. Inconveniences, sickness, quarantine, even death do not diminish His authority to call people to follow Him and to expect fruitful discipleship from His church. He is able!

Second, we also have the promise of His presence with us as we seek to obey His call to make disciples. He is with us, empowering us. And we have the presence of God’s Spirit with us every day of our lives and to the end of the age. We are not alone as we seek to make disciples. He has not left us; He is with us! It is our *Great Comfort*. God’s Spirit breathes life into our efforts; gives us courage, power, and wisdom in our witness; and draws people to Himself as we share.

Third, it is on the basis of His authority and His presence that the “therefore” makes sense. It is His mission, but He chooses to use us. That is our *Great Privilege*. We are His ambassadors, representatives, witnesses. There is no greater call than to make disciples of all nations (peoples) – every ethnic group defined by race, language, or culture. The church provides the relational environment to give support and challenge to those who are part of the family of God. In our going, baptizing, and teaching to obey, we have the opportunity of becoming disciples and making disciples.

One of Jesus’ clearest calls to discipleship is found in Matthew 4:19: “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Jim Putman, from Real Life Ministries, says the definition of a disciple is in this invitation. A disciple is one who knows and follows Christ (*Come, follow me*), who is being changed by Christ (*I will make you*), and who is committed to the mission of Christ (*fishers of men*) (*Real Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* by Jim Putman).

IBC churches are poised to reach the nations in a unique way. We have the nations at our doorstep. People from around the world are being reached by our English-language ministries. English is the *lingua franca* of the world. By some estimates, almost 80% of English-speakers are not native English-speakers but speak it in addition to their mother tongue. English is used globally in international politics and diplomacy, international law, business, the media, education, and scientific research. In a typical IBC church, there are between five and 65 nationalities, many who are fluent in English although



photo by these from Pixabay

it is a second, third, fourth, or fifth language. If we will embrace our opportunity to reach the nations – our mandate for global evangelization – we can play a key role in God’s mission.

We state the IBC’s mission in this way: “We exist to mobilize and multiply disciple-making churches.” Our vision states: “We envision a movement of global-minded churches that are reproducing healthy disciples, leaders, and congregations.” I believe our churches are at the “tip of the spear” in fulfilling God’s purpose: “For His glory in the global worship, God purposes to redeem a people from every people and rule a kingdom over all kingdoms” (Perspectives Course).

## TO THE END

During my time at the helm of our family of churches, it has been my privilege to witness God’s work in our world and experience “a taste of heaven” here on earth. What we do for Christ, however small or large it might seem, is leading toward the ultimate gathering – massive, inclusive, worshipful, and victorious: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God” (Revelation 7:9-11).

In these last few months of transitioning to new leadership in the IBC I am praying for our churches that during these challenging days we embrace the mission Jesus gave us. I hope to be able to see many of you before Laurie and I leave in early December but if not, please know that we love you and thank God for the blessing you have been to us. God has been good to us in so many ways. And we believe the best is yet to be.

Soli Deo Gloria



# God Builds His Church:

## Lessons Learned about Church Planting in the Midst of the Corona Crisis



by Sam Dyer  
Church Planter, South  
Frankfurt

**26** April 2020. That was the day we hoped to see our plans and prayers come to fruition. On that Sunday, River of Life Church was to hold its very first Sunday gathering. Months of planning were about to be realized...and then in an instant... everything changed. In late March Germany announced countrywide restrictions on public gatherings. With that announcement and the indefinite timeline of when and how the corona crisis would move forward, one thing was certain, River of Life Church would not proceed as we planned.

Notice I wrote *our* plans. It is true, that just about every plan we have made for the new church plant has not turned out as we envisioned. Yet, we know that God's plan for growing His kingdom and building His church in Frankfurt is moving forward just as *He* has planned.

And it is in this space that we have been walking along the path of one of the great truths of the Christian life found in Proverbs 16:9: "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps."

Read on to learn more about how we had "planned our way" and how God has graciously invited us to trust that He is "establishing our steps" by helping to reshape and refine us and our understanding of what it means to participate in His mission.

### THE HEART OF A MAN PLANS HIS WAY

#### A Core Team is Formed

By 2019 the plans were in motion to birth a new church out of International Christian Fellowship, our mother church. God had placed on the hearts of our elders the conviction to begin a new work in south Frankfurt. By late summer several families were invited to prayerfully consider committing themselves to join what we called the Core Team of the new church plant. Six families committed themselves to the new work. In October we began to gather. For the first few months we met in a home every other Sunday as each family sought to finish their responsibilities well at our mother church.

#### A Strategy is Outlined

During these Sunday gatherings, God was knitting us together in relationship. As we gathered and prayed God was helping us become a family. Our Sundays were spent going into God's word together and reminding ourselves of the mission to which He has called His church. Focusing on the life and teachings of Jesus we developed a tool, what we call our Missional Compass, to guide us on the journey ahead.

#### A Location is Identified

For months we had simply called ourselves the South Frankfurt Church Plant. But where in south Frankfurt was God leading us? Broadly we had four fixed points: south of Frankfurt city center, west of Offenbach, east of the airport, and north of Darmstadt where our sister church, Converge International Fellowship had been planted by Bob Marsh. As we prayed, researched neighborhoods, walked the streets, and in one case, even rode our bikes, our research kept leading us back to one place: Sachsenhausen. The highest concentration of English-speaking internationals in our city seemed to be Sachsenhausen, just south of the Main River and just south of Frankfurt's busy business district. Could we unequivocally prove this point? No, but conversation after conversation with other new plants in Frankfurt kept leading us to one clear conclusion – God was at work in south Frankfurt. We met several kingdom-minded planters who had just started new German-speaking plants and were in their infancy stages. Rather than seeing us as competition in south Frankfurt, they invited us to join what God was doing. Working together would multiply our efforts to make disciples in the city.

#### A Church Name is Chosen

The identity and name we would choose was important to us. We desired to have a name that would communicate good news to our city but would also build on the character of the city itself. God unified the Core Team around a metaphor we see over and over again in Scriptures – rivers of living water. In particular the rivers of living water that Jesus promises will flow out of the hearts of those who believe in him. In John 7 Jesus stood up at a festival in Jerusalem and invited all who thirst to come to him and drink. As we looked at our city, and specifically at the English-speaking internationals living in the Frankfurt. we see people who are filled with all of the things this world has to offer, yet desperately thirsting for more. We clearly sensed God calling us to speak lovingly and unashamedly to that need. We would name the new work River of Life Church. God was calling us to invite our city to come to Jesus, to drink, and to live.

#### The Final Piece: A Place to Rent is Secured

We were told that finding a place to rent in Sachsenhausen was not an easy task. Finding a place in the city, that was cost effective, had multiple rooms, and had parking nearby would not be an easy task. But



River of Life Core Team

one conversation with another local planter changed everything. He helped us focus in on several options he had researched and used himself. Within a relatively short time we had found and booked a temporary place to meet. We found a place in the heart of Sachsenhausen located right on the river. We could not have hoped for a better location to launch as River of Life Church than on the bank of the Main River! The first available date was immediately after the Easter holidays. We booked as many weeks in advance as they allowed us to. All that remained was to plan the details of our very first Sunday worship service on 26 April. God had led us each step of the way. It was mid-March, and we stood on the precipice of seeing our plans for the church plant become a reality.

#### **BUT THE LORD ESTABLISHES HIS STEPS**

##### **The World Changes**

Within a week of securing our rental facilities Angela Merkel announced the new restrictions on public gatherings due to the coronavirus. Just as we were about to invite others to join this new work in Sachsenhausen it seems the whole world stopped in its tracks. At first no one was sure of what the coronavirus would mean for the church or our daily lives,

but it was very clear that our plans would change in a significant way.

##### **An Invitation to be Reshaped and Refined**

It is now July and we have had a little over four months to process how God is leading and working in River of Life Church. Rather than an inconvenience we can clearly see the events that have transpired as an invitation to allow God to reshape and refine us and our understanding of what it means to participate in His plans for His church.

While God's work in us is far from complete, here are three lessons God has been inviting us to learn in this season:

#### **LESSON 1 – REFLECTING ON GOD'S PLAN FOR CHURCH GROWTH**

The current corona crisis has served as an invitation to reflect on God's clearly revealed plans to grow His church. Perhaps my greatest concern when our plans to gather were thwarted was, "How will we press on and continue to grow this new church plant?" God has been chipping away at my under-developed views of church and church growth. Despite knowing differently, there is a constant fight in my human

heart to trust in planning, programs, and a gathering place. In this season God has gently reminded me that I am not tasked with growing His church but rather entrusted to faithfully invest in the growth of His people. As we are faithful to make new disciples and to mature the saints God will grow His church. His plan for the growth of His church remains the same. If we invest in and build people, God will build His church.

### LESSON 2 – THE PRIORITY OF RELATIONSHIP

Building on the lesson above God has reminded me that relationships are the foundation of life and of ministry. There is a cost to maturing the saints and engaging the lost, and that is time for intentional, meaningful relationship. If I am honest, I often work and minister desiring to see true transformation in my own life and in the lives of others without spending the necessary time in relationship. Why? Very simply, my schedule is busy with planning for a new church plant.

During this season I have sensed God asking a very specific question: “Do you want to plan to start a new church in Sachsenhausen, or do you want walk with others and be the church in Sachsenhausen?” Is the destination we desire to arrive at a Sunday worship service in the city or being and making disciples who love and live like Jesus. Without time for relationships our Core Team risks the reality of simply going through the motions of planting a Sunday service.

However, if we truly engage one another, desperately longing to love others as Jesus loved us, giving of ourselves, embracing inconvenience, longing to see one another grow toward Christ-likeness then we will experience what it means to be God’s church. As Jesus’ church we must prioritize and protect the pursuit of deep meaningful relationships whose goal is the enjoyment of being and making disciples. As we move forward God is challenging us to build on the truth that the depth of our relationships directly corresponds to our depth as disciples.

### LESSON 3 – THE BEAUTY OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Strange as it may seem the delay of our plans has been a great encouragement to me. There was a relief in seeing that God’s timing was different than ours. As I thought about why I felt this way I believe I can best express my sentiments by saying I saw a unique beauty in recognizing that our planning is ultimately filtered through God’s sovereignty. Proverbs 16:9 reminds and instructs us that while our hearts plan, it is only God alone who can establish our steps. How comforting to know that we are ultimately dependent on God to establish all that we do. Our plans may fail, falter, and change, but the Word and the purposes of God stand forever. To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.



# EBF Mission Partnership Church Planter

## Meet Fatjon Mullxhi

In April, the International Baptist Convention began supporting a new European Baptist Federation Mission Partnership church planter in Albania. Meet Fatjon Mullxhi. Fatjon comes from a family with a Muslim tradition and first heard about Jesus as a seven-year-old when a group of Christians showed the Jesus Film in his village. “At that age, I did not know anything about faith or what it was,” he said.

After leaving his hometown, he went to Tirana to study. There, searching among his books, he found a Bible and began to read the Gospels and Proverbs. It was his first time to read about Jesus.

Like many who visit our IBC churches, Fatjon went to a summer camp in 2016 to learn and practice English. He quickly realized the real goal of the camp was to share the gospel. After a lot of questions and time discussing about God, he said “Yes” to Jesus. After camp, he began going to Agape Church in Tirana where he learned more about God and His love for him.

The next year he invited others to the camp and volunteered at the camp himself. The following year he began serving on other teams at the church and started helping others to know Christ and to feel His love in their lives. “Now, when I look back,” Fatjon said, “I understand that small Bible between my books was not an accident. God used it for me to get to know Him and commit my life to serving Him.”

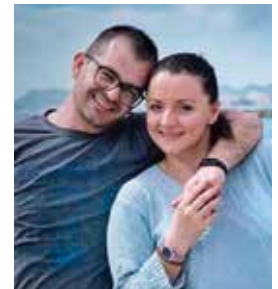
Fatjon and his wife Anisa are now planting a daughter church of Agape Church in the village of Yrshek, four kilometers from Tirana. This village of 1,000 inhabitants has no other churches in the area.

Like IBC churches, this church plant in Yrshek has been affected by COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown. During this time, the members shared their testimonies via video on the church’s Facebook page. This was not only an encouragement to each other but provided an opportunity for non-believers to hear the gospel. Recently things have opened up a bit, and they have been able to meet together outside and do some outdoor activities.

Pray for Fatjon and Anisa and other members of the church plant as they seek to meet people and share the gospel. And pray as they, too, plan to one day hold an English camp like the one Fatjon attended – where the real goal is to share the good news.

Albania, once declared an atheist state, is now very ripe spiritually although poverty stricken. The Baptist Union of Albania is one of the smallest in Europe but is very missions minded, as the existing churches are being multiplied.

If you or your church is interested in helping Fatjon and the church plant in Yrshek, please contact Building Connections Director Scott Corwin at [connections@ibc-churches.org](mailto:connections@ibc-churches.org).



Fatjon & Anisa Mullxhi

### PASTOR PROFILE

TREVOR HARRIS – International Bible Church, Jurbise, Belgium



WIFE: Priscilla

CHILDREN: William (5) and Calvin (2)

YEARS AT CURRENT IBC CHURCH: 1 year

OTHER IBC CHURCHES SERVED:

This is my first pastorate within the IBC. My parents used to attend IBC Brussels, and many moons ago, while on sec-

ondment with work, I used to go to the midweek Bible study at IBC Berlin.

BRIEF PROFILE OF YOUR CHURCH: International Bible Church Jurbise has been around since the late 1960s, early 1970s and is located just outside NATO’s HQ next to the Belgian city of Mons and a few miles away from a U.S. Air Force base at Chièvres. We are therefore a largely military community with a good smattering of other internationals and French-speaking Belgians. We number around 100 with numbers fluctuating in line with the military rotations.

WAYS YOU ARE INVOLVED IN THE IBC: Nothing concrete as yet.

OTHER MINISTRY INTERESTS: I teach at two French-speaking seminar-

ies, one in Brussels where I will give a homiletics course starting next year, and one in Geneva where I’ve been teaching Mark’s Gospel for several years. I am also involved in an expository preaching ministry called “Preach the Word” (Prêche la Parole) in France.

PERSONAL INTERESTS AND HOBBIES: I like cycling and walking and reading history books. Otherwise most free time is just spent with my family and at the moment seems to involve playing a lot of lego, hide and seek, and pretend medieval battles. As an introvert I’m always trying to hide and be on my own though!

FAVORITE/LIFE BIBLE VERSE: Mark 9:24: “I believe; help my unbelief.” (ESV)

# Giving in Times of Disaster

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8, ESV)*

These are times in which our generosity toward others is being tested. This worldwide pandemic has brought to light many people in need of our compassion. The great majority of us live around people who are hurting, and every day we have to make decisions on how to effectively share the resources God has entrusted to us. I am writing from my experiences with respect to how I am coping with the question: How can I wisely help others in a time of misfortune?

## **Do not neglect supporting your local church.**

“Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away” (Proverbs 27:10). “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). I am confident that now more than ever,

that our local Christian fellowships have adequate resources during this emergency to step up before our neighbors in need and, with words and deeds, demonstrate the message of mercy and redemption through Christ.

## **Do not be overtaken by guilt.**

“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 John 3:17). During this pandemic, I am directly supporting a number of struggling families. Almost daily, I receive other valid requests for assistance; in which, with pain I have declined helping. I have been encouraged by the prayer written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, “Lord, grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” This crisis will bring many challenges with regards to making decisions about who should receive our personal assistance. I believe there will be times in which we will have to ask the Lord to help us to peacefully accept that our generosity has limits. However, if God has entrusted us with resources, in spite of so much future uncertainty, we must have the courage to continue supporting those in need, relying on God for wisdom to discern what we can and cannot do for others. “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

## **Strive to give towards self-supporting strategies.**

During my service as a humanitarian worker, I learned that the most important assistance I can give to people in need is that which yields self-sustaining benefits. The people to whom I now provide support during this difficult time include three single-parent families plus five other families. Part of my giving, besides assisting with everyday needs, has also been directed assistance for projects that would bring some self-support. They receive sewing supplies, wood and tools to build cabinets, a used vehicle so a husband could start a taxi business, or garden supplies and seeds. We see this in the humanitarian work I have done as well:

- During Hurricane Mitch, a pastor and I were flown in a couple helicopters with our humanitarian assistance supplies into the most remote jungle of Honduras. We had taken with our supplies 1,000 fishing kits. The tribe chief said, “Out of all the do-



A greenhouse project in Venezuela allows people to grow seedlings for crops.

we should step up our financial support to our local church. As the family of Christ, we must make sure our local congregation keeps functioning well and has all that it needs to fulfill the Great Commission. Every local congregation, regardless of its size, has the historic responsibility to stay open and function well so the message of reconciliation can be shared. There are millions of people who are open and seeking beyond themselves, eager to hear the good news of redemption. The Christian Church has the historical challenge to make the story of the “Good Samaritan” their story. It is our obligation to ensure



nations you brought to us, the most valuable are the fishing kits, because now we can go to the river and bring home food.”

- Recently, in Venezuela, I directed a relief project which involved constructing a greenhouse capable of producing close to 25,000 seedlings so people can grow their own food in their gardens.
- After Hurricane Felix made landfall in Central America, I was flown on a cargo helicopter into the most remote northern Nicaraguan village. I was able to deliver hundreds of tools so people would be able to start rebuilding their homes. The next day when the helicopter came back to pick me up, as we flew over the village, we could see dozens of people waving their tools to show us they had begun rebuilding.
- In Thailand I visited a community that had been badly damaged by the 2004 tsunami. I was very impressed by its efficient reconstruction. I asked a community leader what was the most valued assistance they had received from humanitarian agencies. His answer: tools.
- I participated in building greenhouses in cold and remote mountains in Peru and enjoyed seeing the pride in which these Inca descendants were harvesting their own produce.
- I was part of a humanitarian relief team who assisted in Haiti after the earthquake. My own observation is that more could have been done by investing in initiatives that would bring self-sustainability to this deprived country.

#### Establish a “giving” budget.

This was actually my late wife Pam’s initiative. She set up something which she called “The Giving Account.” Pam would faithfully set aside a percentage of our personal income in order to be able to assist friends or charities. At one point, a late relative saw how effective our giving account had become, and she became engaged in refilling the account. Like in the story of Elijah and the widow, our family’s “Giving Account” has never gone empty. “For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’” (1 Kings 17:13b).

#### Engage others.

Recently a person approached me with an urgent and valid need. However, his financial needs were way above what my personal giving budget could afford. I prayerfully approached a good friend who I knew would have the resources to assist, and I put him in touch with this family. My friend was eager to come on board and meet their need. It is quite possible that you may encounter a need much greater than what you can afford to support. You may want to approach someone you are comfortable asking to step in. The good Samaritan recruited the innkeeper

to go beyond his regular workload and at the request of the good Samaritan, he became a health-care provider looking after the recovery of the wounded neighbor. “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed” (Proverbs 19:17).

#### When possible, become directly involved in your giving.

I recommend that donors become directly involved. Last year I got to know a missionary family ministering in a remote Venezuelan native community. Their home was in desperate need of maintenance, and the community was in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. I felt compelled to assist. Travelling to this distant village involved driving for more than 12 hours with our relief supplies through one of the most dangerous Venezuelan roads. We also had to deal with threats of imprisonment for bringing humanitarian assistance. After two mission trips to this community with my Venezuelan relief team, we were able to help fix this missionary family’s home, plant gardens, and provide medical and food assistance to dozens. We left with an enormous gratification that what we had done for this family and this community was done well. “She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:20).

Nearly 15 years ago my family and I came across a talented cabinetmaker who had fallen into hard times. His name is Jose. My wife and I agreed to assist this man and his family over a period of time. We helped to purchase machinery for Jose’s shop: table saw, planer, router, drills, wood, hand tools, etc. Every time I travelled to North America or Europe I would always shop for tools that would help enhance Jose’s cabinet-making work. Eventually Jose became more established in his business. He also became an enthusiastic disciple of Christ and a very effective evangelist.

When I visited Jose’s wood shop last week, I found him and his family plus two other men busy packing food supplies to be donated to neighbors. Without referencing my name, Jose said to the two men helping, “During the lowest part of my life someone came and was generous to me and my family. I often felt I did not deserve such generosity. I became persuaded of God’s unconditional love because in spite of all my shortcomings, when I was in need someone was generous.” “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). 🌍

*Nery Duarte*

*Nery Duarte is a member of International Baptist Church, San Jose, Costa Rica, and a missionary with Latin America Mission where for the past 30 years he has participated in relief/humanitarian operations throughout Latin America.*

# Preparing an International Church to Build a New Building



by David Packer  
Pastor, IBC Stuttgart

In the next few weeks, after more than nine years of planning, praying, and promoting, the International Baptist Church of Stuttgart will complete a building project. This will be my second international church building project to see completed in my 25+ years of pastoring international churches overseas with IBC Singapore being the first. I have learned a great deal in these projects and am still learning. Both projects were multi-million-dollar projects. Both projects were done in strong unified agreement and support of the church body. Both took several years to complete from the initial envisioning stage to the completion. Both were financed completely by the church body, with no outside grants.

Churches need places to meet. We are commanded to continue to meet together to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). Moses prayed, “Lord, establish the work of our hands” (Psalm 90:17), and we establish and make strong the churches we serve by winning the lost, by training workers, by preaching the gospel, by organizing and leading, and by securing them a place to meet and to continue the witness of the church. “This space of the church does not exist just for itself” Bonhoeffer wrote, “Rather, the space of the church is the place where witness is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ” (*Ethics*).

There are four stages of building any church building: envisioning, planning, giving, and building. Two essentials that should be inseparable parts of the entire process is prayer and communication. Throughout the process every church should pray and keep before it the words of Psalm 127:1: “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.” And the pastor and the building committee should regularly communicate with the church body about the process. Even when there is not much to say, it is still important to remind the people that the work is continuing. “By wisdom a house is built” (Proverbs 24:3), and by wisdom a church house is built.

## ENVISIONING STAGE

All things spiritual and worth doing in the church begin with the movement of the Lord in the hearts and minds of the people. It may begin with the leaders of the church, but it will be more than an idea that is handed down to the people. It must come from united hearts that desire to honor God and reach the world for Christ. In both IBC Stuttgart

and IBC Singapore, when I came to the churches to pastor, there had been several ideas already floating around the leadership about building, even some architectural sketchings about possible plans. These “false starts” were still starts nonetheless and helped pave the way for the eventual building plans.

Re-dreaming the original vision of the church is helpful. Why was the church started in the first place? The church needs to care about its people, about the program for its children, and for adequate space to worship the Lord. But it must also look beyond itself and care for the lost world. Preaching on texts such as, “I tell you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35), is helpful to create this sense of vision. The leadership should pray for their own hearts as well, that God might give them compassion for the lost around them and that the church body might also feel this same compassion and sense of mission.

## PLANNING STAGE

The next stage is to plan the work. The church leadership and the church body should have the confidence that God will lead them through this process, that He will give them the wisdom and unity to do what He wills them to do. The church should put its best and most visionary leaders on the planning committee. What the committee is called is immaterial. We simply called it the Building Committee, but it should have a written description of what it is to do. The church should elect this committee and take the matter seriously.

The first steps are to assess the needs and to explore the options. They should consider how much space they need for their church. They may also consider whether they should build or simply reorganize. They should report regularly to the church body. Trust should be established between the committee and the church body. At this stage there will be numerous recommendations that different people will make. They hear something or think something is possible and ask if they had thought about doing it. Most of these, I have found, are not realistic, but they should each be explored, and the people thanked for their suggestions.

The committee might also explore the possibilities of relocating, evaluating if they would be more effective in a different part of town. Action should not be taken until this work of evaluating is completed. Many churches have made quick decisions, hoping to save

money or because someone wanted to get rid of some property, and it turned out to be a bad decision. Do the homework and make a proper assessment of your needs and your situation. Make sure the solutions will really allow room for growth.

Before you get to the fund-raising stage the church needs to be fully behind this project. Be sure that you have a united committee and that the leadership of the church are fully behind this. The vote to build should be a very strong vote, 90% in favor or at least 80%. If there is not a strong support for the project, the fund-raising stage will be difficult and painful.

## GIVING STAGE

A spiritual and organized way to raise funds is very important. Churches should accept that this is an essential matter, that it is making an investment for the future of the church. In both of my international church building experiences we regularly reminded the people that we had been recipients of the generosity of Christians in the past, most of whose names we no longer know, but God knows them and what they have done! It is now our turn to do our part for God, for the church, and for the future.

You must take fund raising seriously. It cannot be merely one more thing that the church is doing those months. It must be the main thing that you are doing. The leaders should lead in generosity, with the pastor making the first gift himself. A biblical principle that is consistently seen throughout the building of the tabernacle and temple and the rebuilding of the temple is the willing hearts and participation of the people. Note these passages:

*And everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for its service, and for the sacred garments. (Exodus 35:21, building the tabernacle)*

*I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. (1 Chronicles 29:17, the first temple)*

*Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites – everyone whose heart God had moved – prepared to go up and building the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:5, rebuilding the temple under Zerubbabel)*

The need and the building must be presented in a way that is prayerful, visionary, practical, and Christ-honoring. How much people give is between them and God. This giving should be above and beyond someone's regular tithe or offering to the church. This is a special gift for the future of the church and is done in response to the movement of God in our hearts and done for the glory of God.

## BUILDING STAGE

This stage involves making specific decisions. You must settle on a budget. The budget is usually settled in the vote for the project, but if not the church should vote on what the budget for the project will be. You must decide on a builder. A committee needs to make numerous decisions on the building, from the style of the building, to the cost for doorknobs and hinges, to the color of paint, to the size of classrooms.

Deciding on what to build can be based on a simple breakdown of your congregation into age groups. You can do a study of a typical Sunday attendance and break it down into percentages. For example, you might find that on a typical Sunday morning you have 45% adults, 35% babies and children, 30% youth. That is important to know, because probably even if you double in size you would still have the same percentage. Adults need 1 square meter per person. Youth need 1.2 square meters per person. Babies and children need 3 square meters per person.

It is also important to realize that churches are public buildings and need industrial-strength equipment. The same materials you would use in a private home will often not be durable enough for a church. So you have to think practical in these areas. And, of course, it is essential for Christians to obey the building laws of the nation they live in.

Building projects are inconvenient. In Singapore we met in a hotel for two years while we built. In Stuttgart we have met in the building but construction, with all of its dust and big equipment, has been all around us. Volunteers can do a great deal, but they usually cannot do everything due to government regulations that require workers to be trained and certified.



IBC Stuttgart's new building.

## PREPARING THE PEOPLE

Building a church building is a spiritual exercise. God must move in our hearts so that we are not satisfied with what we have or with what He has to work with in the church's material equipment. A people's love for God and for the work and witness of the church will be purified and clarified in a building project. United prayer of the church should deepen during the project and that will prepare the church for the future God has for it.

The construction should make sense biblically, spiritually, and practically. Through the project the church should learn to trust its leaders, and its leaders should learn how to work together. My experience is that a lot of grace is also needed because building projects also stress churches. Sometimes there are tense discussions, and disagreements must be worked through and unity found.

Germans say that you are not really married until a husband and wife have assembled an IKEA cabinet together. I believe we can say something similar about a church building project – that as challenging as it is, there is a tremendous sense of having joined hearts and hands together to construct a building that God will use for His glory for the future.

# An Era Ends

*“God does not live in temples built by human hands.” (Acts 17:24b)*



By Rodrigo Assis da Silva,  
Pastor, Multination Church,  
Frankfurt

Thursday, 25 June, was kind of a sad day. Not in the sense of unhappiness. More in the sense of melancholy or mourning. As is normally the case when it is time to bid farewell to something or someone you love and/or has been an important part of your life. Describing feelings in a second language is always difficult, and English is possibly my third. So, I hope you understand what I mean.

The photo is the building of Bethel International Baptist Church, in Frankfurt, Germany, which started being demolished that day. When I moved here to pastor this church in 2013, the situation was quite challenging: very low Sunday attendance and income, a debt, and a lack of a clear vision for the future.

Adding to the challenge was the ownership of the building you see, which is in the outskirts of the city, outside the underground zone. This was the perfect location for an international church in 1963 when the church was built, due to the proximity with the U.S. Army installations. But when the U.S. base closed in 1995, this location no longer made sense for a church reaching out to international people living all over the city, especially if they were coming by public transport. The church building was also very run down and not meeting current safety standards (outdated and unusable fire exit system, presence of asbestos, several leakage points on the roof, etc.).

The mission given to me in 2013 was clear: to lead a church revitalization process. Despite the challenges, the church had one major strength that became the driving force for the revitalization: they were extremely loving and welcoming! How many churches do you know that put themselves at risk by offering “sanctuary” to protect refugees against deportation? Our church did it! And it was a unanimous vote to do so. That says it all!

In fact, the church revitalization process succeeded much more because of the influx of refugees seeking Jesus and the loving attitude of the church members in welcoming them, than because of my leadership or “change management” skills. No “false-modesty” here; this is truly how I see it. Between 2014 and 2018 alone we baptized 68 refugees from Iran and Afghanistan, for instance.

By 2015 the church was already much healthier: the financial debt had been paid off, we were running more than a hundred people in our Sunday services and there was a big sense of excitement for the future. We started a consultancy process “ReFresh,” led by our dear friend Gary Preston in order to discern a vision for the future. Despite all that, the

church building was still a big question mark.

As with any good Baptist church, we formed a committee to analyze the situation more closely (Baptists love committees!). Professional expertise was sought, and the reports we received from the architects were not very good: the cost of repairing the building was so high that it would actually be cheaper to demolish the building and erect a new one, if we wanted to remain there.

To be able to fund the construction of a new church building, the church would have to borrow money from the bank and be in debt for many years. All that to have a new building on a plot of land that was not the best location for our church. That fact was also confirmed by a feasibility study facilitated by the International Baptist Convention.

Everything was pointing in the direction of selling the church building and finding a new place to meet on Sundays. However, as you can imagine, that was a very emotional topic for many of our members. And, yes, as Baptists, that would have to be a decision made by the majority vote of the church members. So, we called the church members to start a process of prayer and discussions.

That was when something very interesting happened; the heating system of the building suddenly stopped working. We called different engineers to come and check it, and they all made the same technical statement: it couldn't be repaired. That happened during a very cold winter in January 2016, and something had to be done so that we could meet there on Sundays.

We tried to bring electrical heaters, but the precarious electrical system would not cope with the load and would completely shut off. We tried to serve hot drinks, and some people even brought blankets to the services to keep themselves warm. But with such thin wooden walls, it was just impossible to keep warm in that building. After three very cold Sunday services we were already hearing reports of children getting sore throats and families choosing to skip services.

At that point, we started calling rental halls in Frankfurt to find a temporary place for our Sunday services. We must have called 50 places, no success. That was when Jimmy Martin asked me if I had tried the Adventist church. Since they are a German church that meets on Saturdays, perhaps they would allow us to use their building on Sundays.

What a great idea! The Adventist church welcomed us with open arms. And what was supposed to be a temporary arrangement became the perma-

ment location for our Sunday services since then. This gave us a very central location in Frankfurt. Their beautiful worship hall can seat more people than we could seat in our old building. They have dedicated spaces for children and another hall for fellowship. It has a good size car park (very unusual in central Frankfurt!). All that convenience for our Sunday services came at a fair and affordable rental price. Our church staff moved offices to a “very cool” – I must say – co-working space, also used for smaller ministry gatherings. Without a permanent church building, the church started putting even more emphasis on week-day home group gatherings.

In 2017 we finally decided to sell the old church building. The proceeds from the sale, including future return on investments, are being used to advance the Gospel – not by erecting new church buildings, but by building people! This has always been a core value of our church. During my tenure as pastor we financially supported the studies of five trainee pastors. We employed and sent two full-time indigenous Muslim-background believers as missionaries. We saw two women being raised from our church as Christian NGO workers to serve missionally on Lesbos.

In 2018 we re-launched our church under a new vision and a new name: Multination Church. Since then, we have also used proceeds from the property sale to plant a new church, Multination Church London. We have a dream and a plan to use those resources to plant many more churches in international cities in the future. We will do that by investing in training and sending people, while still remaining free from building and land ownership.

What we have done might be counter-cultural, unconventional, eccentric, risky. What we have done might also not be what works best for every church group in every location around the globe. What we have done might even not be the model we will follow for the rest of our entire church life.

I understand that seeing a church building being knocked down is not the most pleasant image you will see today. What I can say is that, for me, it has been a great privilege to pastor a group of people who truly understood the basic biblical concept that “God does not live in temples built by human hands.” He lives inside each one of us who open our hearts to receive Him as our Lord and Savior. And when He does, our words and actions can only emanate love. We – the people – are His church!

It has also been a great honor to work with such a godly, humble, courageous, and unselfish group of elders, who always put discerning God’s voice as

a priority over their own personal preferences. If I must make a confession – I personally had another idea for this property. But the more we talked and prayed together as leaders, I realized they were right! Yes, pastors are not always right and would do well in listening to their elders!

The demolition of the church building – as sad as it is – is just the last “seal” in the closure of what has been an amazing season of church revitalization. Is everything perfect at the church right now? Are we thriving and really where we should be? Not at all,



Bethel International Baptist Church building is demolished.

but the ground is leveled and a beautiful new season is starting as a new pastor will come soon to continue to build God’s people.

In January I set in motion a transition process to step down from my position as pastor, as I clearly saw I had completed what God had trusted me to do at the church.

As for my future, all I know is that I will not be pastoring another church in my next season of life and ministry. I feel God is calling me to work full time in missions with a focus on aid and development, based from Frankfurt. If you would like to keep in touch about that, please email me at: [rodrigo@all4aid.org](mailto:rodrigo@all4aid.org)

I am grateful for everything I was able to experience as pastor of the church and for all the people He has brought into my life because of the ministry – people who were part of this amazing journey, even if for a short period of time, helping us to build what has become Multination Church today. I am also really looking forward to what God has in store for the church in the future!



## Exciting Stories From Germany, Turkey and Syria

# Your GMO at Work ...

### KAINOS SAYS THANK YOU

Thank you very much for the difference you will be making in the lives of women and their children! Our mission has remained the same – God has a new beginning and a new life for every woman and child who has been trafficked. New Life Haus, a home for these women and children, will be a part of this, and no pandemic can stop God’s plan!



A safe environment to heal and find freedom is needed even more now. Many women found themselves stranded in Germany, without food or resources that most Germans have available to them. Because of this, we are reaching more women than ever before.

In Stuttgart and in Kaiserslautern, we are reaching 35+ women and children with weekly groceries. And every week our numbers are increasing for food. Most of us do not know what it is like to be hungry. IBC churches are helping in this area. Re-

cently an IBC Stuttgart home group provided for all the groceries for 10! This same home group helped with the delivery of new clothing for the women. After experiencing what God is doing and being a part of real and practical needs, their eyes were opened.

We also shared with the home groups about the online outreach that we have just begun and the great need for security when we search the web. One individual from a home group provided two new computers because they “experienced” the need of the women. This IBC home group is a part of taking Jesus to the women hidden in the dark! Yes, Jesus has called us to share His love to the ends of the world, and we are seeking to go “to the ends of the virtual world”!

We cherish your prayers, and thank you so much for what you are doing.

*Lana Packer and all the Kainos Team*

### FROM TURKISH BAPTIST ALLIANCE

Part of our Global Missions Offering went to support the churches in the Turkish Baptist Alliance. We’ve received copies of some of their recent prayer letters.

One pastor writes, “I am indeed very grateful for all your prayer support as well as the financial support to meet these needs which contributes to all God is doing in this area. From those of us working here in Turkey sharing the Gospel where there’s so very few workers, to see all that God is doing is amazing, and we’re very thankful to all of you for your behind the scenes support.”

Another pastor writes, “The mayor organized a New Year’s Concert in our church. The church was full and many had to stand. Many also visited our book table. What for you is normal is for us a miracle. Muslims entering a church even though many believe it is ‘unclean.’ In the middle of a Muslim world, God is doing miracles.”

A third pastor writes, “As you know, we have been planting seeds in the region where we have been for about five years. Praise be, we have witnessed that many have taken our Lord Jesus Christ into their lives. We are in prayer that the sown seeds yield abundant crops. And we have started to see the buds as like the first buds of spring appeared. Please continue praying with us so that these buds turn into fruits and grow and develop in the Lord.”

Like IBC churches, the Turkish churches were also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown. One pastor writes, “It still feels weird as we write these lines, because we are a 10-15-minute walk from some families in our church, but we cannot meet with them in person.” Their church did a “live” broadcast of their Easter Sunday service. The pastor writes, “We even had guests on our live event and that was without doubt a good occasion to share the gospel to a greater number of persons than through the meetings indoors.”

Children in Idlib line up to receive their chocolate treat.



## ADANA BAPTIST CHURCH REPORTS ON REFUGEES IN IDLIB

We loaded the aid packages filled with food, blankets and other materials to the Red Crescent convoy and took them to Idlib province of Syria in April. After waiting at the border for a period, we entered Syria. We encountered a terrible scene in Syria. The buildings are ruined; people are living in tents in fear, under miserable and difficult conditions. There were many children. They caught my attention. The children felt very happy when they saw our convoy; they ran towards us. They were expecting only chocolate from us. We were well prepared. We took some packages of chocolate with us. We delighted the kids, and then we took the food, blankets, and other necessary materials to the houses and tents one-by-one, as we had previously planned.

The help was distributed to about 3,500-4,000 people. We chose food rich in protein to help with nutrition for the children and young mothers who are breast-feeding. Children in the camps are getting sick and dying because of hunger. We also think that the blankets were very needed, as there is still cold weather in the north of Syria, and it rains frequently now.

Those living in the tents are also not protected against the current pandemic of coronavirus; yet there is not a current assessment of that. The conditions they live in predispose them to other contagious diseases as well.

After Assad's forces and the aircraft of Russia bombed, people fled towards the border with Turkey as their homes were ruined. They told us that the Turkish Red Crescent saved them; they would have died if it were not for the Turkish Red Crescent.

My eyes were full when I heard it. I was asking myself why there are so many soldiers in this area. But the Turkish soldiers are there to help provide security and to help those in need as much as they can.

People who were living in tents felt very happy and thanked the people who helped. A few million people live in the area, and they do not have clean drinking water. They boil dirty water and give it to their children to drink. People live in a very difficult situation and have accepted these aids given to them as a miracle of the Lord. We, as people delivering help, are very happy that we deliver these materials to those in need and that we have done a good thing.

Old people wanted us not to forget them, and they told that they need a lot of help. They said that they will eat the food we sent to them little by little; they will cook a lot of juicy food to make it economic. They keep dry foods to eat them later, and they thanked to us.

There are so many tents that you cannot imagine. I did not know that so many people have migrated. We give aid to people, but both Europe and all the world should really help the Syrians. Otherwise, more people will die because of hunger. There is a huge disaster in Syria. A Syrian told us, "We did not forget the world. The world also shouldn't forget Idlib. I thank the people who made these donations. They showed us that human being is still not dead. There is hunger, misery, and bad conditions in Syria." 🌍

*Sükrü Onbasilar*  
*Pastor, Adana Baptist Church*



Distributing food and blankets to Syrian refugees.

## NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

### Dubai, United Arab Emirates

WE HAVE BEEN blessed by the faithfulness of our members to online church where practically all of our ministries are operating on one of the platforms – even our children's church, which was the last to go online and was very well received. Our Bible studies on Fridays, where recently we had up to 70 members and friends join – twice as many as would have physically joined at Bible study sessions, are especially blessed. Places of wor-

ship have not been opened in Dubai yet, and we patiently wait for the government's decision on this matter. We had two members test positive for COVID-19, but both has since been cleared after a period of isolation. A big concern for our church leadership is providing support for people that had been retrenched and face the decision to return to their home countries. 🌍

*Darryl Petersen*



## Hoensbroek, The Netherlands

*“Where we have seen God at work in our church through coronavirus”*

Since 15 March, our Sunday church service at Emmanuel Baptist Church, Hoensbroek, The Netherlands, has been tremendously changed from physical meeting to live streaming via internet. All our church programs were totally changed into social distancing to be able to continue serving and functioning as a church body. We experienced God’s provision, His way, and His time in our church:

- Sunday service being followed through live stream (via internet). Surprisingly, many people became part of this weekly Sunday service, local and abroad. Thanks

to our three church members who faithfully came and helped with the technical support, Pastor David Harsdorf could still preach every Sunday.

- Our weekly (Tuesday) Ladies Bible Study (which ended two weeks ago) was joined by two different churches online (via Zoom). We experienced some adjustments on how to communicate and study together as a group, taking turns to talk and having time to pray for each other.
- Fellowship through Zoom – our way to stay connected with each other.

On 5 July, three months after the lockdown began, our church celebrated the Lord’s Supper in a physical Sunday service with 38 people in our church building. It was also simultaneously followed by other church members via live stream from their home.

We at EBC are thankful for having a church family that, no matter what the situation and the uncertainties we experienced these past months, could stay connected and fellowship with one another – near or far.

*Menchie Bolk*



EBC Hoensbroek is ready for a social-distanced service.



David Harsdorf

## Darmstadt, Germany

HI! MY NAME IS Jason Sadler, and I am a member of Converge International Fellowship in Darmstadt, Germany. Back in March, I had the opportunity to lead a really amazing life group. It was a 10-week Bible study called Crazy Love by Francis Chan. It was a very intensive study about fully understanding God’s love for us and evaluating our love for Him in every aspect of our lives. It makes you question, doubt, re-evaluate, and confirm your walk with Jesus all at once. So, to say that I was nervous to lead such a deep study would be an understatement. Even more so because it was my first time ever leading a group!

After meeting for the first time it became very clear, that this was going to be an amazing 10 weeks. The group I got to lead was perfect! We all came from different walks and situations, but we all had

one thing in common – we wanted to learn more about God’s crazy love. So, we jumped right in, wholeheartedly, transparently, and ready to receive. Week after week Chan’s study pushed us further and further past our limits, as we dug deeper and deeper into God’s crazy love. Due to corona regulations we met for many weeks through Zoom conferences. But throughout the week we would meet one-on-one to disciple and encourage one another to get us through these difficult times. It seemed like we just couldn’t get enough of each other. We grew closer and closer as a group and helped each other in every way we could. As soon as the regulations loosened up, the group was finally able to meet in person again. And let me tell you, it was so awesome!

This study has affected us all in so many ways, and it has made us want to share

God’s crazy love by serving others. So, we decided to convert our Crazy Love small group into “Project Helping Hands,” a ministry of serving others in our community.

This past weekend we were blessed with our first project to help an elderly widow from our church. She had several things around the house that needed to be done that she just couldn’t do herself anymore. We had the privilege to come together as a group and serve her and to even reach out to some of her neighbors and tenants. This was just the beginning of what we hope will be a blessing to our community, and we pray that we will have many more chances to serve others for the glory of our Heavenly Father.

*Jason Sadler*