

Reaching the foreigners at our doorstep:

Living in a foreign culture is an experience we often look forward to with excitement and enthusiasm. However, many of us are unprepared for the challenges we are going to face once we are living in a different country..

It is important for us to understand that a culture is everything that a group of people thinks, does and makes. These inputs are learned and transmitted from generation to generation. Therefore is not easy for a person in a short time to integrate himself without changing his mindset and habits. In these years we have worked with people coming from different nations that have strived to adapt to their host cultures.

There are definitely many problems in multiethnic groups, but we have as well great possibilities for the Kingdom of God.

Today about 6% of the population of Europe are foreign citizens. Nearly 56% of these come from within Europe itself: from Romania, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Germany.

The foreign citizens have some main destinations; approximately 75 % of the foreigners in Europe live in Germany, Spain, UK, France and Italy. There are about 20 millions of

immigrants living in Europe, of which 6 millions are citizens of other European countries, 6 million of Africa, 4 million of Asia and 4 million of the American continent (Source emrg gem).

In the Bible we find many stories of people that have lived out of the nation where they were born. God has called people from one nation and sent them out in new directions when life begins to look too settled, too full of routine, too full of pleasures, or too weighed down by sin. In Hebrews 11 we read of the changes in direction experienced by the people of Israel that recognize to be "strangers and exiles on earth" (vs.13). The story of the nation of God is a story of wanderings in many places. When Joseph was sold into Egypt, he learned to adjust to a new culture. When there was famine in the land, Jacob and his sons and their families went to Egypt.

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When their descendants had been turned into slaves in Egypt, God called Moses to lead the Israelite people out of this oppression into a new period of wandering. Moses himself had been raised in a foreign family. As the people wandered in the wilderness after crossing the Red Sea, their task was to once again try to create a society that would bring the justice of God on earth.

In the New Testament God is reaching the uprooted and the foreigners. Jesus became a refugee while still a baby, fleeing with his parents to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. As an adult, Jesus travelled around Israel, wandering with his disciples from place to place, living at times in difficult situations (Matt. 8:20). Jesus connected with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the prisoner and the sick. The disciples were told to continue the ministry of Jesus and focus on those in need.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is telling us that there are no longer strangers, because through Christ all people are one (Ephesians 2:19). Paul also talks of his own work of bringing the Gospel to those who are not Jews, who are by tradition "strangers." Paul affirms the Gentiles (the strangers) as people of God, people for whose sake he is willing to die!

The churches that have grown the most in Europe in the last years are "foreigners communities"! Therefore it is important for us to focus more intensively on those groups in order to see a change in our society. Finding connection with foreigners and possibly starting a church from within their people group need to become a goal in our ministry.

This kind of work would be most effective if are helping these people to link to their host culture through adaptation programs, social support, language acquisition and job assistance. Reaching foreigners and help them to both adapt and to understand the love of Jesus will bring great fruit !