

MISSIONTM FRONTIERS

The Roma:

*A Storied People Writes a
New Chapter in Mission*

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CULTIVATING “4TH SOIL” DISCIPLES IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS



BY **RICK WOOD**
EDITOR OF **MF**

EDITORIAL

THE ROMA, THEY ARE THE people of myth, legend and media creations. They are commonly known by the name, Gypsy, given to them by outsiders. Most of us have images in our minds of what “Gypsies” are like even though the vast majority of us have never gotten to know someone who is Romani. These mental images of “Gypsies,” largely generated by how they have been portrayed to us in books, television and movies, often paint the picture of a very colorful people, but ones who are shady in character. And yet this is the association that many may have of a people they have never met. How do these mental images or prejudices get in the way of our ability to bring the gospel to them? This is a major problem in missions, not just for reaching the Roma but also for many peoples and religious blocs. The common preconceived ideas and stereotypes surrounding Muslims are just one example.

The only way to overcome these stereotypes is to confront them with the truth. That is what we are doing with this issue of Mission Frontiers. We are allowing actual Roma people to speak for themselves—to give you a glimpse into the reality of who they are, their struggles, and their passion to make Jesus known among their own people. I hope that after you read this issue, you will come away with a newfound appreciation for the Roma people and how we can reach them more effectively with the gospel.

The Continuous Search for “4th Soil” People

Regardless of what people group we come from or what people we are seeking to reach with the gospel, we must be “4th soil” people who are seeking to discover 4th soil people in others and equip them to go and bear much fruit. A 4th soil person is a reference to Jesus’ Parable of the Sower from Matt. 13 where the seed that fell on good soil produced a crop of 100 fold, some 60 and some 30. Three previous sowings of seed mentioned by Jesus did not fall on good soil and therefore did not bear fruit. Jesus provides an explanation of the parable starting in Matt. 13:19.

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”(NIV)

Clearly, Jesus wants us to bear fruit in terms of saved souls or disciples made. That is the purpose of teaching the parable. He wants us to understand what can rob us of faith and fruitfulness. First let us think about what are the characteristics of a “4th soil” person.

They Obey the Word

In each of the four soils Jesus puts great emphasis on “the word.” The word is the seed that is being sown in each of the four soils and the response of a person to the word will determine what kind of soil they are. ***A 4th soil person is one who eagerly receives the word and is faithful and obedient in applying the word to their life.*** Whatever the word tells them to do, they do it. In many churches there are countless Bible studies where people learn about the word but there is seldom much emphasis on obeying the word, or accountability for doing so. As a result, people remain immature and often succumb to the snares of the first three soils: affliction, persecution, worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of wealth. Knowledge of the word alone must not be our end goal, but rather obedience to what God has called us to do through his word. Only in doing so will we bear the fruit Jesus desires and become 4th soil people.

They Successfully Pass Through Suffering and Persecution.

We probably all know of someone who was apparently a believer but when suffering came or God did not answer their prayers as they desired, they turned their back on God and walked away. Whenever suffering or persecution comes into our lives we have the choice of responding like Job’s wife or like Job. We can either “curse God and die” or we can entrust our future and ourselves to God and His loving care. Only 4th soil people endure suffering and remain faithful to God.

They are not lovers of money, but are generous.

This gets to the root of what is truly important to a person. Is it the status, safety and security that someone may think money can provide or do they see money as a tool or resource for the expansion of God’s kingdom? Ralph Winter talked about living a “Wartime Lifestyle” where the focus is on spending what is needed to accomplish the mission, not on what will make our lives most pleasant or comfortable. The American church, perhaps more than most, must beware of the deceitfulness of wealth that Jesus talks about. The great majority of funds collected by the church stays within the church to bless the people of the church, not to reach out to the lost and make disciples, both near and far.

They are not consumed with the cares of the world.

It is normal and natural for people to care for their families and to work hard to provide for them. But there is a big difference between that and having the things of this world be the focus of a person’s existence. The goals, priorities, interests and passions of 4th soil people are completely different from those in the church who are not living on mission with God. Those who take seriously Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples of all nations” will live very differently from those “believers” who do not.


They work to make disciples up to 100 fold (their maximum potential).

The last word that Jesus sowed into his disciples was a command to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded. If this word is to become fruitful in our lives as 4th soil people, then it must be obeyed. We can’t just talk

about it; we actually need to do it. The majority of people who take the “Great Commission” seriously still just talk about making disciples rather than actually doing it. Fourth soil people will seek to obey the Great Commission and will seek out the training they need in order to make disciples.

This is a reality check for all of us. If we are not regularly and intentionally seeking to share our faith with others and to make disciples, then we need to ask the Lord if we are producing the fruit that is commensurate with 4th soil people.

4th Soil People Are the Ones Who Will Complete World Evangelization.

Providing access to the gospel to every person living within every people will only happen if we foster movements of discipleship within every people. These movements will only take place if average Jesus-followers are equipped to make disciples one generation after another. These equipped disciple makers, by definition, will be 4th soil people because they are obeying the word and they are bearing fruit one generation after another. Our job is to be 4th soil people who seek out other 4th soil people who are eager to be equipped and released as disciple makers in every people, tribe and tongue until God’s promise to Abraham is fulfilled as seen in Rev. 5:9. 

Some categories in this column were inspired by Profile of a 4th Soil Person published by Global Gates. <https://globalgatesinfo.wordpress.com/2017/01/13/profile-of-a-4th-soil-person/>

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Movement in Missions

FEATURE ARTICLE

*Christianity Among
the Roma Gypsies*



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Although 'Gypsy' may be a more recognizable name, it can also convey a derogatory meaning in some European contexts. Therefore, in general, we use the term 'Roma' in this issue, apart from historical usage or a group who specifically refer to themselves as Gypsy.



RECENTLY, I HAD THE PRIVILEGE of attending a Romani friend's wedding. Tables laden with food, a brass band playing music for hundreds of people dancing for hours—this was a rich experience of sights, sounds, and tastes like nothing I had ever experienced. More than that, however, it was also an example of uninhibited celebration, expression of joy in dance, and an extravagant hospitality—all were welcome to the party. Suddenly, I had a tangible picture of God's lavish generosity—a God who welcomes and even seeks the uninvited guests, a God who throws a feast to welcome prodigals home, and a God who "rejoices over us with shouts of joy" (Zephaniah 3:17).

Over the last six years, as I traveled throughout Eastern Europe forming relationships and learning about the Roma in numerous contexts, I experienced many transformative moments. My understanding of God expanded, my conception of His mission shifted, and certain elements of Roma culture and Roma Christianity deeply challenged me. In Eastern Europe, where many Roma communities remain marginalized from the majority society, I have also been burdened and grieved by seeing the cyclic effects of deep poverty and hearing stories of trauma, rejection, and pain. Jesus Christ, as Christian Roma leaders assert, is the only hope; indeed many Roma testimonies manifest the truth of Ephesians 3:18,19—grasping the immensity, richness, and vastness of Christ's love liberates and restores Roma identity. As a beloved son and daughter of God, being filled "to the measure of all the fullness of God" is the key that releases God's power to transform, empower, and equip for mission.

Who Are the Roma?

To understand why this is such a profound witness to the power of the gospel, it is necessary to understand both the current situation of the Roma and the story of Roma Christianity. In Europe, historical accounts first noted the Roma in the 12th century. Although during the Middle Ages, their trades were often portrayed as a valuable contribution to societies, by the 16th century, various areas of Central and Eastern Europe were developing negative attitudes and policies toward them.¹ In the centuries that followed, ruling powers attempted to fit them into the constraints of society, through mechanisms including assimilation, forced sedenterization, slavery, and extermination during World War II. Despite a shift in state policies and

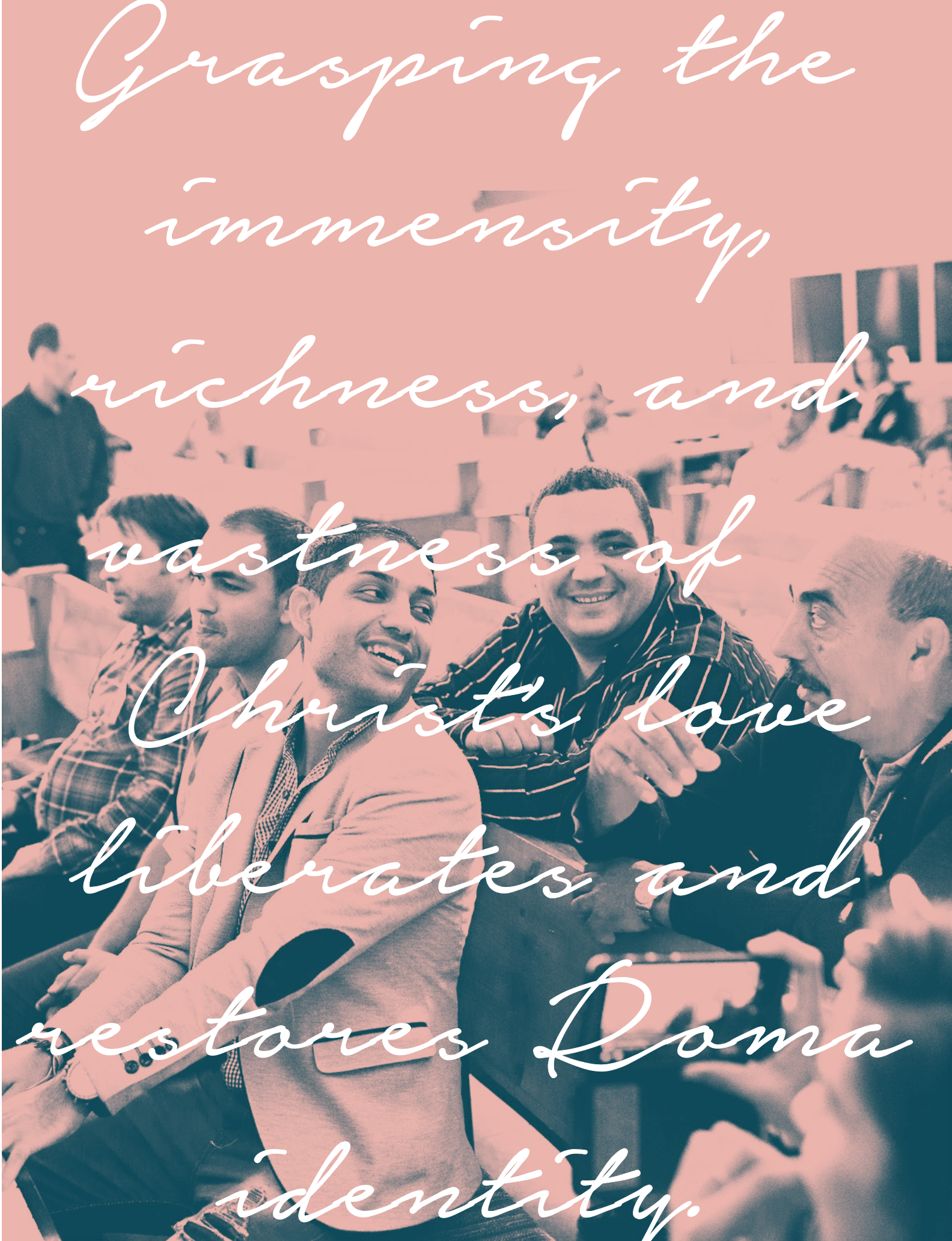
increased international attention over the last couple of decades, particularly in Eastern Europe, many Roma communities are in a deeper state of poverty than the majority populations and, additionally, they faced discriminatory attitudes reinforcing their marginalization.

However, it is a mistake to think of the Roma as a monolithic group, and the use of different ethnonyms can lead to confusion for those unfamiliar with the heterogeneity of Roma group. For example, there are groups who identify as Roma, Romani, Gypsy, Gitano, Travellers and Sinti. Roma or Romani is used in this article in its broadest sense—to describe groups of people who may speak one of the Romani dialects, may have a shared experience and sense of history, cultural practices, and/or self-identify as Roma, Romani, or Gypsy.

It is also a mistake to think that all 10-12 million Roma in Europe are poor and marginalized. In fact, there are wealthy Roma groups and individuals, and there are Roma in every layer of society: academics, lawyers, musicians, actors, and politicians. There are Roma organizations, NGO's, and political advocacy groups. There are also Roma churches and Christian movements that have their own Bible schools, training programs, and church praxis. Consequently, it is good practice to approach each community on its own terms, listening to how they self-identify and not making assumptions. "Who has the right to name us, to tell us who we are?" asked one Roma pastor at a 2016 Roma conference.

Christianity and the Roma

The Roma in Europe are Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Jehovah Witness, and Muslim. Often, the Christian Church's attitude mirrored that of society, and there are accounts of the Church refusing baptism and confessions to Roma.² In fact, in the past, due to the lack of engagement in religious institutions, some scholars concluded that the Roma were "insincere" in their religious commitment, although current scholars have argued that this was a result of racist and exclusionary attitudes from the Church.³ The insincerity hypothesis can also be challenged by what has been happening among the Roma for decades. That is, Protestant Christianity has been spreading through Roma communities in Europe, North and South America, and beyond.



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One of the most prominent and well-documented catalytic locations of a “Gypsy Revival” began in France in the 1950’s when a Manouche family experienced the healing of a family member. Clément Le Cossec, a minister in the Assemblies of God church and a non-Roma, devoted his life to encourage this “Gypsy Awakening” by equipping and training leaders and missionaries. For some this meant learning to read. The movement crossed over to different Roma groups and spread to numerous countries and continents.⁴

In Eastern Europe, the Baptists were active in Bulgaria in the early 20th century, and Pentecostalism began spreading in the 1940’s and 1950’s, with rapid expansion beginning both in Romania and Bulgaria after the fall of Communism. The most internationally well-known Roma revival in Romania took place in the town of Toflea, beginning in the 1990’s and peaking in 2003, with their largest baptism being around 500 people. Known as Rugul Aprins (Burning Bush), the members who migrated from Toflea for economic reasons started their own churches and the primary pastor reports 10 churches in Romania, 5 in England, 1 in Spain, and 1 in Germany.⁵

For many complex reasons, reliable numbers of Roma populations in Europe are hard to come by, and the same can be said for the number of Roma Christians. However, certain contexts have educated estimates. For example, the number of active Roma Christians is over 200,000 in Spain, over 140,000 in France, tens of thousands in Bulgaria and Romania, and thousands in places like Slovakia and Hungary.⁶

Just as Roma identity and context cannot be understood monolithically, so it is the same with Roma Christianity—more accurately viewed as movements with just as diverse praxis and theology as you might expect to find in churches of other nations or ethnicities. There are large, well-established Roma churches and small struggling churches and home groups. There are Roma churches with missional impulses stretching to the non-Roma, and other churches that focus just on their particular Roma group.

This issue’s themed articles are meant to exhibit this heterogeneity. There are both Roma and non-Roma writers, each speaking from a different context and perspective. To help set the framework of the wider picture, these five themes emerge in the articles.

1. The Rapid Growth of Roma Pentecostalism

Roma Pentecostalism is the stream of Christianity growing most rapidly. At its present conversion rates, some scholars suggest that it will be the prime form of Roma religiosity in a few years.⁷ At least in Eastern Europe, it is common to hear testimony of coming to Christ through miracles, healings, dreams and visions. Some Roma leaders have a sense that the Roma will be key to evangelizing other nations within Europe—that they will bless other nations.

2. Towards Holistic Transformation

Many Roma communities face deep poverty and marginalization from the majority culture, therefore there is an acute need to both understand the complexity of factors which contribute to this and an orientation

Roma Pentecostalism is the stream of Christianity growing most rapidly. At its present conversion rates, some scholars suggest that it will be the prime form of Roma religiosity in a few years.

towards holistic development based on the Roma leaders’ perspective of what needs to change.

The Roma communities in Croatia in which I serve are certainly not the poorest I have seen, but even so, the issues of a marginalized minority community in a country already facing socio-economic hardship are acute and complicated. One day, I accompanied a woman from my community who was attempting to apply for health insurance. In the space of a few hours, we visited 6 different offices. This woman cannot read, and I marveled at her adeptness at navigating a system based on the ability to read. At the same time, I also got a sense of the vulnerability one faces. In our church community, over half the adults in church are

functionally illiterate. Many children drop out of school before finishing eighth grade. All have continual health issues. Most survive on social help and temporary seasonal labor such as street cleaning. Not all have electricity or running water.

3. Training and Equipping

With the rapid growth of Roma Christianity, there is an acute need for training and equipping of Roma leaders. Although certainly there are Roma leaders attending Bible schools and universities, as well as some movements which have their own autonomous Bible schools, Roma leaders still express the need for more tools and training.

In the past, and even now, other churches or missionaries have not deemed the Roma “capable” to lead their own churches. The Gypsy And Traveller International Evangelical Fellowship (G.A.T.I.E.F.), which grew out of the Gypsy revival in France, has been highly successful in mentoring, training, and sending numerous Roma pastors and missionaries. They are active in 24 countries in several continents. The current leader, René Zanellato wrote in his 2014 update regarding the “secret” to this success:

The error has been that certain leaders of churches and organizations did not understand and did not trust the work and the capacity of the Holy Spirit to let the Gypsies themselves evangelize the Gypsies. These countries and pastors have been a hindering to the development and to the Revival, wanting to impose to the Gypsies their rules and their non-Gypsy mentality.⁸ [sic]

4. Lack of Trust as a Missional Barrier

Attitudes of prejudice or stereotyping, based on longstanding, ingrained images of the Roma, are prominent in the majority populations. However, prejudice can also exist between different Roma groups and from the Roma to the non-Roma (*gadje*). I have argued elsewhere that reconciliation must be a key structure of mission and is critical for the holistic transformation of communities.⁹ Transformation can only progress so far if relationships between Roma and non-Roma are not healed and renewed.

5. The narrative matters...and this relates to mission praxis

How we tell stories is critical for shaping attitudes and actions toward Roma communities. Even as “mission

popularity” rises regarding the Roma, I have become increasingly aware of the images and language used to depict the Roma. This would be a fabulous theme for a future issue on a broader scale—how we, as an evangelizing church, often present a foreign culture/people in our biases, in order to show an evangelism which can be derogatory.

Listening, learning, and asking as an orienting practice for mission are not new insights in 21st century missiology. And yet all too often our mission praxis continues to repeat mistakes made in mission history. As we participate in God’s mission, we must constantly be open to the critique of our motives, strategies, and perspectives. As Father Greg Boyle concludes: “I discovered that you do not go to the margins to rescue anyone. But if we go there, everyone finds rescue.”¹⁰



¹ Crowe, David. *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), xvii, xviii.

² Atanasov, Miroslav. “Gypsy Pentecostals: The Growth of the Pentecostal Movement Among the Roma in Bulgaria and Its Revitalization of Their Communities.” (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2008). p. 99-101

³ Acton, Thomas A. “New Religious Movements among Roma, Gypsies and Travellers: Placing Romani Pentecostalism in an Historical and Social Context.” In Thurfjell & Marsh eds. *Romani Pentecostalism*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 27,28

⁴ Laurent, Régis. “On the Genesis of Gypsy Pentecostalism in Brittany.” In Thurfjell & Marsh, eds. *Romani Pentecostalism*, 33, 39.

⁵ Information accumulated through interviews by author in person with Anușă Capitanu (Toflea, Romania, July 2015), Ilia Bolmandor (Bucharest, Romania, July 2015), and Ioan Caba (Oradea, Romania, July 2015).

⁶ Cantón-Delgado, Manuela. “Gypsy Leadership, Cohesion and Social Memory in the Evangelical Church of Philadelphia.” *Social Compass* (2017), 5; Gypsy and Traveller International Evangelical Fellowship 2014 Report, René Zanellato; Slavkova, Magdalena. “Prestige” and Identity Construction Amongst Pentecostal Gypsies in Bulgaria.” In Thurfjell & Marsh eds. *Romani Pentecostalism*; Podolinska, Tatiana, and Tomáš Hrušič. “Religion as a Path to Change? The Possibilities of Social Inclusion of the Roma in Slovakia.” (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2010.)

⁷ Thurfjell, David, and Adrian Marsh, eds. *Romani Pentecostalism*, 8.

⁸ G.A.T.I.E.F 2014 Report, René Zanellato, GATIEF@orange.fr

⁹ Wachsmuth, Melody J. “Roma Christianity in Central and Eastern Europe: Challenges, Opportunities for Mission, Modes of Significance.” In *Mission in Central and Eastern Europe: Realities, Perspectives, Trends* (Oxford: Regnum, 2017),

¹⁰ Boyle, Greg. “I thought I could save gang members.” *The Jesuit Review*, March 2017. <http://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/03/28/father-greg-boyle-i-thought-i-could-save-gang-members-i-was-wrong>

WAITING FOR DEATH, SURPRISED BY AN ANGEL:



FEATURE ARTICLE

*Signs and Wonders
in the Roma Context*

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“I WAS SO SICK THAT I HAD already begun mourning the fate of my children who would be left without a mother,” remembered Čelebija Kamberović, a 60 year old Roma woman from Leskovac, Serbia.

Čelebija married as a teenager and by her early twenties she already had three children. Like most Roma mothers, she was devoted to taking care of them. Her life consisted of washing, cleaning and cooking for her children, husband, and his parents. She did not know how to read and write but she knew that she wanted a better life for her children, especially her daughter. In general, Čelebija’s life could serve as an example of a typical Roma woman’s life. Men are obliged to earn money while women are responsible for everything else that allows a family to function. Since Roma girls often marry young, instead of using their youth for schooling, they dedicate themselves to housework and the cares of motherhood.

In 1984, when her children were still young, Čelebija fell into a deep depression, and she feared that she would die because of her sickness.

“Suddenly,” she related, “I began to experience periods when my heart would race. I felt that at any moment I could die. When these attacks would come upon me, I would be completely lost. Every other day I received an injection so that I would calm down. For days, I closed myself in a room to cry, afraid to die because then my children would be left motherless, without a person who would take care of them.”

Her family members recognized her deep depression and her fear of death—and everyone expected that her recovery would only happen by a miracle.

Because of a woman’s workload, Čelebija was almost never left with free time during the day to socialize with friends with whom she could share her problems. Her husband was always busy with work. Therefore, her only option was to cry and to pray to God, although she thought that God existed somewhere far away.

“One night,” she said, “After I was crying for a long time and thinking about everything that had happened to me, I fell asleep and had a dream.”

This dream was one of the most striking dreams she has ever had, and therefore she remembered it vividly and with joy: “In the dream, I was sick and on my way to the doctor’s office to go have my blood checked. The

doctor would then be able to diagnose me. At the corner close to the doctor’s office, a glowing being appeared all dressed in white. Instantly, I was aware that it was an angel. He called me by my name and said to stop because he wanted to talk to me. I immediately began to complain to him.”

Elderly Roma in Leskovac say that Roma have always believed that there is one God and one devil. However, this did not mean that Roma knew the real God. The vast majority of the 8,000-10,000 Roma in Leskovac were Muslims, although they would not go to the mosque and would rarely connect with the imam. They would go talk to the imam only when they had difficulties and were really sick, expecting salvation from their God in the rituals that imams would perform. In this way, Čelebija addressed her prayers day and night to the unknown God in whom she was seeking salvation. She also wore various amulets that she got from the imam.

After Čelebija complained to the angel in her dream that she could not find the cure for her sickness anywhere and that even her amulets did not help, the angel told her: “Čelebija, God personally sent me to you in order to tell you that your tears have already come to his throne.”

The angel started to explain to her the way to the Pentecostal Church called the Community of Light in Leskovac. Since she was illiterate and did not know how to read the names of streets, the angel explained to her where she should turn left and right and which building it was on the street. After that, Čelebija woke up.

Both the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Muslim community had declared the small Community of Light Church to be a sect. Pentecostals and Evangelicals register as only a tiny percentage in Serbia, a country in which Orthodoxy is the recognized form of Christianity. Islam is also a recognized religious community. Of the church’s fifteen members, only four were Roma. In the 1980’s, the relationship between Roma and the Serbians in Leskovac was hostile. The Serbians would forbid Roma to walk the main streets of the town and would pick fights. However, the relationships inside the church were different—the Serbians loved the Roma and all considered themselves brothers and sisters in Christ.

Čelebija did not have anything to lose, so she directed herself toward the church, remembering the directions from her dream. “When I entered the church, I found the people kneeling and praying. Since I wanted to

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imitate them, I also kneeled, closing my eyes like the others, and thinking about how I should start my prayer. One brother, who I found out later was a foreigner, came to me, placed his hands on my head, and started to pray. I felt a great power. I had a feeling that fire was coming out of my whole body. It was such a strange feeling that I really don't know how to describe it. On the way back to my house, I felt so powerful and joyful, and I knew I was freed from sickness and depression. I returned home and started to do my chores as if I had never been sick. My family members didn't know what was going on but they were pleased when they saw I was better."

As time passed, Čelebija fell more in love with Jesus, and she became stranger to those around her. Her husband and father-in-law had a good reputation among both Roma and Serbians in Leskovac because they were influential in politics. Under Tito's Communism, although religious participation was not forbidden, it was restricted and downplayed. Even though her husband and father-in-law saw with their own eyes that she was healed, they forbade her to go to the "Christian sect" so that she would not embarrass them in front of the community. After every argument, fight, and beating Čelebija would endure, she would tell them, "You can beat and yell at me, but you cannot take away the joy from my heart. You can kill me, but I am not afraid of that anymore. I will never be able to forget how I experienced God of whom you are ashamed." She would always find a way to escape her house to go to the service where she would pray for her family to be converted.


In 1999 when her husband realized that he could not pull her from the church, he decided to go with her to a service. Since he liked the message, he wanted to come more often. Eventually, he converted and after his conversion, the whole family came to Christ.

In the story of the Roma revival that began in the 1990's

in Leskovac, Čelebija's account is not unusual. Almost every other Roma family in Leskovac converted because of a miraculous healing experienced by someone they knew. Today, after thirty years of evangelization among the Roma in Leskovac, there are two Roma churches and pastors estimate the number of Christians to be well over 1000. As it was back then, miraculous healings continue to happen today. In fact, this is one of the primary ways in which the gospel reaches other Roma families who still do not know Christ.

Čelebija possessed a strong will to want to read the Bible—therefore, she learned how to read and write. Today, she is the leader of the women's work where more than 200 women come to the meetings. She regularly visits sick people and with her personal example, she encourages them that God can turn their suffering into joy.

All of Čelebija's family remain close to God. Her children with their spouses and their children regularly visit the church. Čelebija's daughter married at nineteen to a man who is today a deacon in the Roma church. Her children are brought up in Christianity and her daughter married the son of a Roma pastor from Leskovac. She also helps Čelebija in the women's work.

Čelebija's conversion changed the life direction of her daughter and the other women in her family. Her daughter takes care of the household and the whole family but in a different way because the focus is now on Christ. She is free from the traditional mentality that minimizes women's rights. As the Roma Christian community grows and matures, women have become more important and valuable in the eyes of their spouses and their community. Because of the church's care and intentional effort, every year the number of early marriages decreases among the Roma girls. Along with the growing number of educated Roma in Leskovac, this change also improves the image of Roma in the eyes of the Serbians. 

OBEYING THE

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*Overcoming
Cultural
Obstacles
to Mission*

FEATURE ARTICLE



BY **MIKI KAMBEROVIĆ**

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Miki is a pastor in Jagodina, Serbia and is also on the Board of Roma Networks, a grassroots movement aimed at connecting and networking Roma ministries across Europe. www.Romanetworks.com

IT WAS MIDNIGHT ON A WINTER night when I returned home to Leskovac, Serbia by bus from a city about 90 miles away where my wife and I felt called to plant a new church. My wife was still up waiting for me. With sadness I said to her, “No, we are not going to move to Jagodina! I don’t think it is the will of God, because otherwise, He would help us find an apartment to rent with our small financial resources. Since God did not provide, then it means it is not His will.” Immediately, my wife answered, “Yes, we will go, we will move there!”

One year before, we had already started to plant a church in that city. Deep in my heart, I knew that God was calling us to move there, but my logic opposed it because we did not have enough money for even the basic things like food. Somebody had offered an unfinished house for us to stay in, and it had no bathroom, incomplete kitchen, and no heating. Because of this, I told my wife that I did not want to take her and our two young sons to live in such bad conditions. To make matters more difficult, the youngest had been born by caesarian section only two months before, so this would have been even more difficult for my wife. Her determination to obey God, however, made me feel ashamed. So I said to myself, “If she is ready to move into those conditions with two young children, then I should be even more ready.”

In our lives, we often face giants, but this period of my life felt like the biggest challenge that I had ever faced. I know that the enemy wanted to use fear to stop us from moving—and if that had been the case, all the fruits of salvation that we see now after 13 years would never have happened.

The Call

I came to Christ at the age of 10, and accepting God’s love for me healed the sense of inferiority I always had as a Roma among Serbians. At that time, I could not even imagine that God would call me to his mission to bring His Kingdom to the lost. As I grew older, I became very involved in my church in many different ministries, but I felt no attraction to become a leader or a pastor.

A Serbian who had a great love for Roma people started my church. This Roma church was probably the first in former Yugoslavia, established in 1986. There were

only 70 people in the church until 1999 when we had a great revival, growing it to 900 people. At that time, the church had many ministries involving women and children, and also started a church planting project. An organization from England was offering to support and educate young leaders for five years. During that time, the new leaders needed to start a new church somewhere in Serbia. I was one of nine people that joined this project and many of us from this group did indeed plant new churches.

The call of God was very clear to me, and for me, knowing that allowed me to keep moving forward. There were many conversations between God and myself, similar to Gideon’s situation in Judges. Every time, God confirmed to me that He was indeed calling me.

Cultural Barriers in a Roma Context

In Roma culture, when you are the only boy in a family, you have a very special place. However, my older sister has cerebral palsy, and this situation made my parents work very hard, spending most of their money on her treatments. Their greatest fear was that there would be no one to take care of my sister when they became too old—they would always tell me that this would be my duty. Also in the Roma culture, the only son would never leave his parents. Roma would never put their parents in old people’s homes—we take care of them until they die. Families stay close or often live together.

When I understood that God was calling me to move and leave my parents and my sister, I wanted to obey God, but these deeply ingrained cultural values made this an extremely difficult calling. After I told my parents that I was going to move to a different city, they were broken and angry. My father told us that if we move we should never come back or talk to them again. Because of this, despite the clear calling from God, I started to create reasons to make it look like it was not God’s will for us to go. It was extremely difficult that my parents would not release me, and for me to feel that I was neglecting my duty as a good son.

It was with many prayers, tears and the courage of my wife that I could finally make the decision to move. Through this experience, I came to see that all cultures must submit to the culture of heaven, the culture of Jesus’ love. I have never regretted that I obeyed the culture of Jesus, and thankfully my relationship with


When God is calling you to a mission, He is already preparing a way for you to walk in it, and only if you follow this way will you be able to be a witness of His miracles, blessings and provision.

my parents got better as they began to see the fruits and blessings of our work. They began to see how important it was that we were working for the Lord.

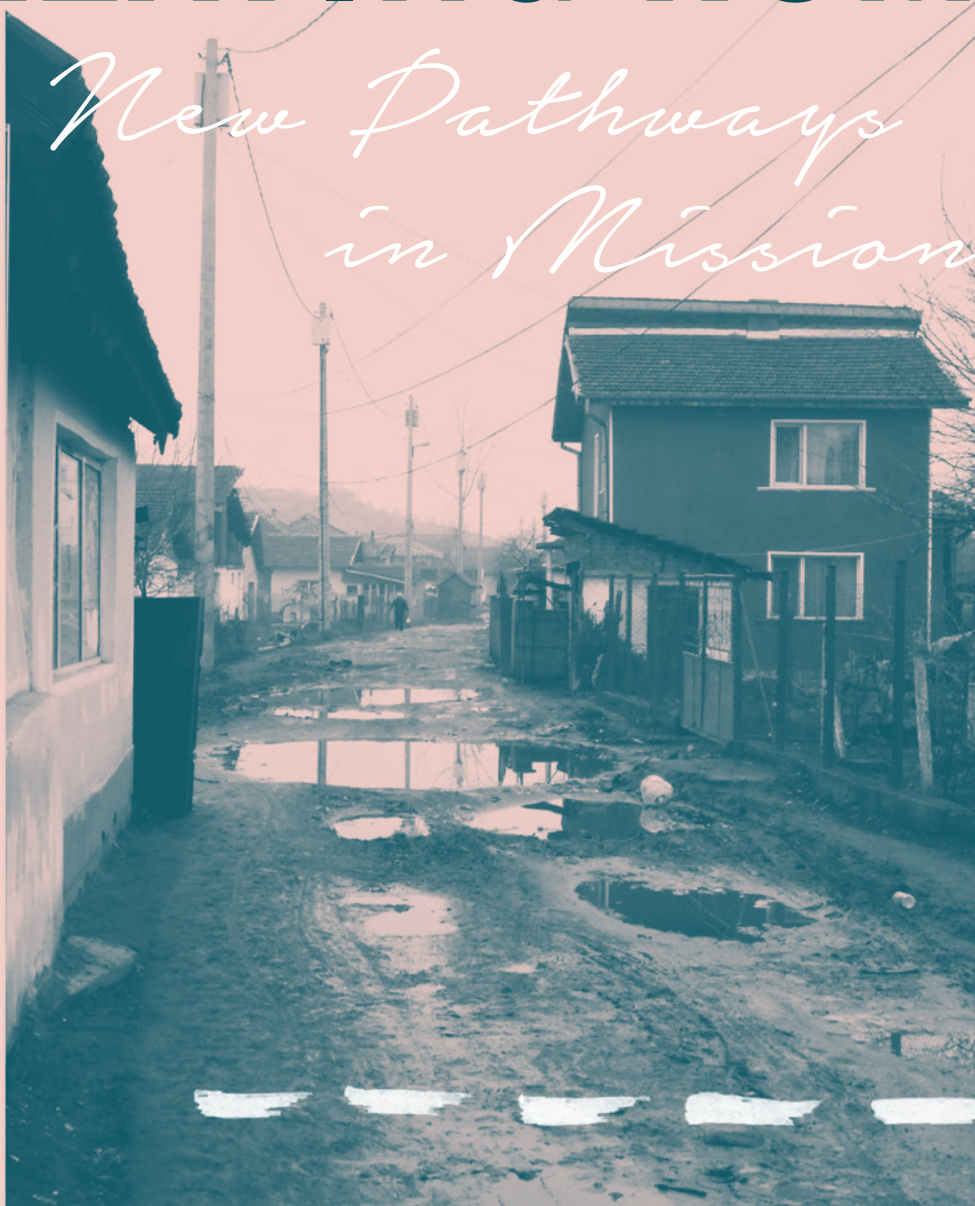
Stepping into Mission

The first morning after we moved to Jagodina, we experienced our first miracle. I opened the door and found two loaves of bread and milk sitting on an outside table. The anonymous attached note read, “Miki this is for you and your family.” God continued to take care of my family and me as we preached the gospel to the children, youth and adults. We never lacked for basic necessities—there was always enough. Still, there were many challenges. Living with my parents, every person in the family had their own job to make the family function. My job had been to work and earn money while my parents took care of other things like managing the money. So when we moved, we had to learn how to do everything, from practical things to learning how to pay our bills on time.

Eight months after we moved to that unfinished house, we moved to a house where we live to this day. The work and vision continue to grow and expand and the ministry has influenced thousands of people, children and youth. We opened a children’s kindergarten, children’s clubs in several towns around Jagodina, a summer camp and new house groups that we hope will become new churches. God provides buildings, cars, coworkers and finances for every month.

When God is calling you to a mission, He is already preparing a way for you to walk in it, and only if you follow this way will you be able to be a witness of His miracles, blessings and provision. Of course there will be many challenges, particularly if your own cultural values oppose your call. However, when I see all the things that God did through the past decade I am happy that I obeyed that call. My obedience made it easier for me to trust God as he continues to lead me in ministry among the Roma. 

LEAVING HOME:



FEATURE ARTICLE

BY **NAYDEN NAYDENOV**

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Nayden Naydenov grew up in the Roma mahala in Lom, Bulgaria. He, his wife and daughter recently moved to Germany. He is establishing his family there, working on his paperwork, and will soon be looking for a stable job.

I WAS BORN IN LOM, BULGARIA, a small, ancient town known as Almus during the Roman Empire. In Lom, like many places in Eastern Europe, there is a separation between where the Bulgarians live and the three Roma neighborhoods (*mahalas*).

I believe the town is very significant because it has more than a century of Evangelical history. The people of Lom claim that it was in this city that the first Roma Baptist Church in the world was registered in the early 1900's. Because of this history, the Roma people in Lom are "breastfed" with the gospel and honor the Christian way of life. We begin going to church from a very early age because our mothers and grandmothers take us to church every Sunday. From every house in the Roma neighborhood, at least one person in the family, if not the whole family, visits a Sunday service.

Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism among the Roma in Bulgaria spread rapidly after 1989. A 2008 study estimated that there were over 800 Roma churches and 600 Pentecostal preachers, deacons, and elders. Another estimate puts the number of Pentecostal churchgoers to be 50,000, not including those who identify as just Evangelical.¹

In 2004, when I was 16, I became curious while watching all the people who would pass my house on the way to the biggest Roma Pentecostal Church in that part of Bulgaria, as it had 400 members. Pastor Ilia Georgiev, a man who taught himself to read using the Bible after his own conversion in 1979, founded this particular church and is still the pastor. In 1993, the people began to build the church with their own hands and money—a process that took 10 years to complete. Despite the deep economic crisis, the church is still supported only by its members.

I went to the church, and immediately the other young people noticed me and became my friends—and that is how everything began for me. In 2005, I received Jesus as my Savior. Soon after that, I started to preach at the youth meetings. In 2006, I attended Bulgarian Presbyterian Reformed College in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital city, for two-and-a-half. I was also a translator in the church, so I was able to befriend many different preachers and men of God.

Socio-economic Crisis

One of the biggest challenges for the people in the church is the socio-economic situation and the sub-standard education. In fact, our particular region is the poorest in the entire European Union. Lom's Bulgarian population has a 50% unemployment rate, a percentage that is even larger among the Roma population. Those who are able to find employment work in the private sector or in a temporary contract paying only 215 Euros (\$230) a month. Therefore, for a family to survive in Lom, at least one member of the family needs to work outside of Bulgaria.


In 2007, Bulgaria was accepted into the European Union, and people slowly started to leave to find work. Now in Lom, there are an estimated 7-8,000 Roma left out of 15-17,000 people who used to live there. The Roma *mahalas* have become like ghost towns—the streets used to be filled with noisy kids playing, but now most of the people who remain are over 50 years old.²

In Bulgaria, the Roma are known as people who do not pay taxes, electricity or water bills. They are thought to be lazy and "live on the backs of the working people." However, the issues are much more complex than such a stereotyped generalization. It is not because the Roma do not want to pay for utilities, but because they cannot afford it. The money they receive is just enough for food and sometimes for clothes [and only for the kids]. In fact, Bulgaria cannot provide normal life for its people. A 2015 estimate claimed that 2.5 million Bulgarian-born citizens work outside the country, 55% are between 20 and 29.³

A New Country

I see the complicated truth more clearly now because more than 100 Roma families from Lom, including my family, live in Germany, in and around Kaiserslautern. There are also others from other parts of Bulgaria: Vidin, Belingrad, and Shumen. Here we pay taxes, rent, and electricity. It is interesting that the same uneducated and unqualified people that do not have work in Bulgaria find work and success in Germany.

I chose Germany because the country is stable and secure and has a good economy. When I along with



Most of the Roma immigrants would not last without the church as they find spiritual and moral support there.

others migrated here, we started from zero and began a whole new life. For most of the people, everything is unknown. Most do not know the language. Some of them have never left Bulgaria before so they encounter a lot of hardships—for example, wading through the complicated documents or looking for an apartment to rent.

However, through these difficulties we find success. How? We thank God that the Roma people help each other. Those who speak German help others to find a job or an apartment, or to borrow money. We are trying to integrate into the German culture. We go to language courses so we can learn the language and find better work. The kids are visiting local schools that will provide them with better jobs than their parents currently work.

The second reason I chose Germany was because my sister's family and some friends of mine were already there. So the risk that I took was far less than for others. The most important thing for me was that in Kaiserslautern, my community from Lom already had a church—every Sunday around 50-70 people worship

God. I knew that I would be able to find support and strength to continue and not to quit this new life my family and I have chosen. And it was just like I had hoped. Everyone encouraged me that things will get better, and to pray and believe. Most of the Roma immigrants would not last without the church as they find spiritual and moral support there.

The Church as the Center in a Migrant Community

There are four churches in different places in Germany made up of Lom immigrants. Pastor Ilija travels from Lom every other month to visit the churches. The churches are an important center for the Roma immigrant community. The church in Kaiserslautern united us and sustains our lives. Although the church is open for everyone, primarily people from Lom visit it. The church service is conducted in Bulgarian and we sing some songs in the Romani language. When we come together, we remember from where we started, who we are, and that we have the same roots.

The church in Kaiserslautern keeps focused on its




purpose: To preach the gospel for salvation. Young people have surrendered their lives to God. People who were drug addicts have been changed by the power of God. In Bulgaria, there were people that I never imagined would repent. In Germany, however, they find God—or rather, they are found by God. Perhaps this is because in Bulgaria, they could rely on their comfort in the culture and their tightly knit communities. In Germany, they feel more vulnerable and are forced to depend more on God. They begin to pray more and see how God answers their prayers. The church builds the character of young people and gives them direction for their lives, since some of them had only experienced living in the *mahala* and did not know how to navigate the larger society. We also remind ourselves that in Lom, there are many poor families. Because of this, our German church decided to send some money to Lom for orphans and poor families.

Our church is active in making connections outside of the Lom community as well. In 2017, we organized a conference in Germany with guest preachers from Bulgaria. This was a very big event for the Roma immigrants from Lom. At those meetings, Roma came from other parts of Germany. Such conferences strengthen our spirits and give us the power to go on. When we are together, we feel that we are back in Bulgaria. We are also expanding our networks; we have started to work with a church in Wiesbaden that has Roma members from a different part of Bulgaria, and we also work with German Roma friends.

A Better Future

In conversations that I had with some of the people,

they explained that the reason they left Bulgaria was to have a better future for their kids. They want their kids to have opportunities they did not have in Bulgaria. We all hope Bulgaria can eventually succeed to be a place for good living and not just for surviving. We want our educated young people to stay in Bulgaria and not to leave because they do not have the opportunities to succeed. We all want to go back to Bulgaria one day because there is no better place than home.

But in the meantime, God is using this economic crisis for our growth and benefit. Similar to when Israel came out of Egypt and traveled to the Promised Land, God also wants us to humble ourselves, to obey His words, to learn how to live in a godly way. The circumstances we face require us to trust God every day just like the Israelites did in the desert. Perhaps this is the main reason that so many people who did not repent back in Bulgaria are being transformed in Germany. 

¹ Atanasov, Miroslav. "Gypsy Pentecostals: The Growth of the Pentecostal Movement Among the Roma in Bulgaria and Its Revitalization of Their Communities." (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2008); Slavkova, Magdalena. "Prestige" and Identity Construction Amongst Pentecostal Gypsies in Bulgaria." In Thurfjell & Marsh eds. *Romani Pentecostalism: Gypsies and Charismatic Christianity*. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).

² This crisis is noted in other places in rural Bulgaria. See, for example: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/10545458/Ghost-towns-left-by-Bulgarians-seeking-work-in-UK.html>

³ Data from the National Statistical Institute and the Economics Institute with the Bulgarian Academy of Science. <http://www.novinite.com/articles/171684/More+Bulgarians+Working+Abroad+Than+in+Bu+lgaria>

STAYING HOME?



FEATURE ARTICLE

Cultural Bridging in a Time of Crisis

BY **R. SHANE MCNARY**

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R. Shane McNary serves as Field Personnel with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, ministering among the Romani peoples in Slovakia and the Czech Republic since 2004. He has a ThM in Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. His thesis focused on models of leadership in Romani communities of Central and Eastern Europe.

WHEN BERTY, SHORT FOR BARTOLOMEJ, and I met for coffee, it was clear that he was under a lot of stress. Severe stomach cramps, sleeplessness, and anemia had taken its toll on him physically and spiritually. The time he took out of his busy work schedule to sit and chat over coffee was one less hour he had to finish a construction job he and several of his co-workers were busily trying to complete. I knew the history of how Berty used to operate a large, successful construction firm. He had several men who worked for him, a good reputation, more work than he could handle and enough income that he and his young family were able to live very comfortably. Once, when we were talking about whether it was better to carry your wallet in your front or rear pocket Berty said, "I carry mine in my hand. That way I am not burdened by money if my wallet is in my back pocket nor led by money if it is in my front pocket." He laughed, knowing there were times in his life that his desire for money and possessions was his highest motivation. Before coming to faith in Christ, Berty talked about living "in the world." Now, as a deacon in his church, his desire is to raise each of his four children to love the Lord and to live in such a way that his life is a testimony of who he is in Christ. It is not always easy.

Along with majority populations from Central and Eastern Europe, tens of thousands from minority Roma communities have relocated to Western Europe in search of jobs, housing, and education. Many of these intra-European migrants are evangelical Christians. From within my own tradition, the maxim of Johann Oncken, the father of continental European Baptists', was, "Every Baptist a missionary." His motto became the guiding principle as Baptists migrated across Europe in search of opportunity. The history of Europe is a story of shifting borders, internally displaced persons and almost constant periods of adjustment as diverse populations wax and wane across the continent. The Romani peoples, whose own story of migration is still not fully known, likely have more stories to tell and more skills to offer of how to cope in today's world than any other group.

When Berty's business collapsed and he struggled to earn enough money to live from week-to-week without having to pawn his wedding band, there was strong temptation to move from Slovakia and join others from

his extended family in places like Germany, England or Belgium. Berty and his family regularly took their vacations to visit family scattered across Western Europe. Their relatives would ask, "Why don't you move here? You can make more money and life is better here." Even though Berty lived in Belgium for a while and made very good money, he was certain that it was not God's will for him to emigrate from Slovakia. "Better to be poor at home with Jesus than rich somewhere without Him," Berty tells me. Tragic stories of the disintegration of families after they left home to migrate to the West are all too common. Children lose their more conservative social mores in the West. Families still have struggles, but in strange lands they have no family or social network on whom they can depend. They often end up much worse than if they were back home.

I have spoken to pastors of churches across Slovakia and Czechia (Czech Republic) who tell similar stories of personal and congregational heartbreak. Ministers and ministries invest years into the lives of people seeing them come to faith in Christ, mature as believers and even become leaders in the church only to lose them to migration. While it is true that "every Christian migrant is a potential missionary," reimagining a small local church in eastern Slovakia or northern Czechia as a missionary-sending congregation is too hard to comprehend.¹ Still, the Holy Spirit is doing this very thing in congregations across Central and Eastern Europe. Migrants are playing the roles of missionaries as they take their Christian faith into countries of Western Europe.

As we continued with our coffee, Berty shared another story. By word of mouth through some of his Christian friends, Berty was hired by a woman to do some work on her home. "She was not a Christian, but she hired me because of my reputation for good work. She did not like Cigány."²

He told about how she would stand at her window and watch as he and his employees worked. Once they went to ask if she had a small grill they could use to cook their lunch instead of having to go into town. "As long as you don't break it" she quipped. They asked to borrow a guitar so they could sing together as they waited for lunch to cook. "Make sure you give it back. I am watching you."

Berty, like others from ethnic or economic minorities, is very aware of when he is being watched. The high-context communication styles of the Romani peoples are able to read authenticity or prejudice, gullibility or concern in the body language, arrangement of chairs in a room, or tone of voice. They are masters of non-verbal communication. The homeowner did not need to say “I am watching you” because Berty and his crew already felt her stare.


Cultural bridging is a skill immigrants must learn as they adjust to life in their new context. Bridging is the ability to engage another culture by use of language and knowledge of customs or other social mores. Bridging is important in the development of social currency or capital. Transformational development of impoverished communities emphasizes that in order to advance, moving within and between socio-economic classes requires knowledge of unwritten cultural standards. This is where cultural bridging becomes crucial for how migrant communities function in their new context. Within Romani studies, the ability to adapt culturally is broadly discussed. Most of the Romani peoples in Central and Eastern Europe are in settled communities. Still, adaptation to life as perpetual migrants, as they move from their cultures to engage the majority cultures in which they live, accentuates their mastery of cultural bridging.

When emigrating from Slovakia or Czechia to the West, deft and seemingly innate abilities at cultural bridging are how Roma have adapted to life. Bridging is a tool many Romani Christians utilize when sharing their faith. In the case of the Christian, sharing one’s faith cross-culturally can be filled with uncertainty. Am I communicating clearly the gospel message in a way free from my own cultural baggage? Can others see Jesus clearly in my life?

After the reconstruction was completed and Berty had received payment, the homeowner said she had something else to say to him. “You know that I did not like Cigány. But as I watched you all read the Bible and pray each morning before you began to work, I heard how you would sing praise songs about Jesus as you played on my guitar; I saw you work together to do a good job on my house and all the while encouraged each other in your faith. I want you to know that because of you I began to read my Bible and I have accepted Jesus too.”

Berty shakes his head as he finishes his coffee and his story. “This is why I am still here. God has a plan for me here to witness for Him in what I do. And like my family that has moved away, we are trying to do what God has called us to do. We live in such a way that other people will want to know Jesus because of our life.”

Life for the Roma in Eastern Slovakia is often marked by high unemployment and little hope for finding a regular job. Often facing discrimination in education and employment, many find the freedom of emigrating to the West a welcomed way out of their difficult contexts. And despite the truth that in the West there are more opportunities, there are also new challenges to life in their new contexts. The challenge for churches left behind by emigrants is a loss of leaders, discouragement and even feelings of betrayal as members leave. And though the growth of Romani churches throughout Western Europe is due in large part to how well churches in Central and Eastern Europe have disciplined their members, separation from the constant encouragement and relational closeness of their home congregations creates challenges for the new mission churches.

Berty’s story illustrates how one Roma family from Eastern Slovakia chose to remain at home as they struggle to eke out a living while giving witness to Jesus Christ through their lifestyles. The skills of cultural bridging are not only how the Romani adapt to new contexts, but also their method of evangelism. 

¹ 1 Hanciles, Jehu J. *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008).

² Cigány - an exonym for the Romani people common throughout central and eastern Europe. It is translated into English as “Gypsy.”

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Soon, they put their plans into motion—with Adam earning a PhD in New Testament, Anna working toward a Masters in counseling, and both of them falling in love. Not necessarily in that order.

It all made sense. Get married, finish school, and head to the mission field.

But during their engagement, Adam learned he would eventually need a liver transplant. And within their first year of marriage, he became gravely ill. The condition forged their relationship deeply, Anna explained, "making our vows that much more meaningful." God eventually brought healing to Adam without a transplant, making him healthier than he was previously.

With plans back on track, they researched pan-Pacific ministry opportunities in the Philippines through WorldVenture—at just about the time they welcomed the birth of baby Luke to their family.

Anna laughs as she recalls, "Since our decision to live abroad as missionaries, we've had a blatant realization that we are not in control. God made a place for us to contribute our gifts...so we're taking that next step of faith to see how he uses us."

“We've
had a
blatant
realization
that we
are not in
control.”

Those steps brought many confirmations during their preparations for ministry—even changing their perspective of the Pacific Ocean. Now they splashed along the beach energized at how this same water was also touching

where they wanted to be—the Philippines. What was once a barrier had become a bridge. By fall 2017, they would be in country.

But they would not have to step alone into the unknown—thanks to the WorldVenture family of missionaries along with their own strong, supportive family and community at home.

"We have history linking us to people at home who help in meaningful ways—including financially and prayerfully—and even with something as practical as banking." As a former staff member at ECCU, Anna knows the strong commitment ECCU has for ministry, including saving missionary members more than \$1 million each year in international fees*.

"That's particularly meaningful to us now that we're facing foreign transaction fees and figuring out how to bank from thousands of miles away. We also appreciate knowing there's a biblical perspective being applied to our finances. Banking with ECCU means an investment in something I believe in." Anna cites Matthew 6:21 as their biblical basis for putting their money where their heart is.

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IDENTITIES & CULTURES:

Understanding as a Prerequisite for Mission



FEATURE ARTICLE

BY **GUSZTAV PUPORKA**

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I was born as the 5th child in a Roma family in Hungary. Because of family issues I was taken away and brought up far away from my family and culture. The living word of God has healed the wounds of my heart and strengthened my identity. I now minister to children and to youth by starting new youth groups in churches and organizing youth camps and conferences. My calling is to share the inheritance from my heavenly Father with all new generations.

I am Roma, but I was raised in a non-Roma community. I was 18 when I gave my life to God. As I was reading my Bible, I came to the story of Moses. God revealed to me He was sending me to my people to share the good news. Therefore, it was inevitable that I needed to be changed inside and outside, and also study Roma communities on a deeper level.

I became interested in the history, culture, habits, lifestyle and language of my own people.

I visited several different communities, mostly Hungarian Roma. One of my friends said: “All Roma communities are completely different. The Roma are not a coherent mass. Therefore, it is unavoidable [that you need] to learn a lot about them.” In my personal experience, I have found that this is indeed vital.

As Roma, we have a unique perspective about how we see the world, others and ourselves. My experience is that whether we take this into account or fail to do so will affect our approach to mission.

The Roma and Identity

After my conversion to Christianity, I had to redefine my life and my identity. The latter has taken years and it is still happening. Since there were no Roma Christians with a healthy identity around me who had gone through this process and therefore could help me in it, it was only the grace of God that helped me redefine my Roma identity. Today I can describe myself as a Christian Hungarian with Roma origins. That being said, I think there are other good ways to declare a healthy Christian Roma identity.

Often, the identity and self-esteem of different Roma communities determine how they approach the larger society.

For example, in Hungary, Carpathian, Vlah, and woodworker (trough-maker) Roma groups each have a different view of themselves and of others.

If we imagine a theoretical pyramid starting from the top (the most elite) down to the bottom, each Roma group would put themselves, other Roma groups and non-Roma people in different places on this pyramid. This affects how they welcome and accept missionaries (and their message).

In most of the poor woodworker (trough-maker) and Hungarian Roma communities, we can observe some level of identity crisis. They are not proud to be Roma, because they are often surrounded by prejudice and they can sense and see they are despised. Missionaries primarily target these disadvantaged communities—why is this the case? When a mission or ministry reaches these particular Roma—since they see no other option—they are compelled (or maybe they try) to conform to the missionary’s value system and expectations of the majority society. Sometimes, this is because missionaries focus on changing cultural factors rather than focusing on the gospel—this leads to a dead-end in mission.

When Roma from this group are born again or hear the gospel, a key need is to build up or redefine their Roma identity. This raises the question: Can a non-Roma minister help them with this and if yes, how?

In the case of Roma people who already have a stronger identity (e.g. Vlah Roma), when they become a Christian, they only need to discover how they can live their Roma identity in a biblical way, rather than feeling like they need to try to adhere to all the expectations of the majority society. They can live with their chin up—as a devoted Christian, yet also fully Roma.

Roma People and Education

Education had a great emphasis in my life, even though my circumstances or finances have not always allowed me to study.

As I mentioned before, Roma people are not a coherent mass, so education has a different meaning in each of the communities.

The disadvantaged Hungarian Roma people tend to see education as the key to their elevation. They are more dependent on the majority society than, for example, Gabor Roma communities, so they need to live and succeed with a lifestyle similar to the non-Roma people.

Groups like the Gabor Roma people usually live in more closed communities, trying to stay independent from society’s expectations. Though globalization has had a significant effect on their culture, they still reject any efforts that would assimilate their style of life. The community is self-sufficient; they don’t feel the need for further education. Gabor Roma have been masters of

metalwork for centuries and the women run businesses. This also indicates that these Roma live their lives in a completely different social structure. Their children do not want higher education, because they do not need it to live in their communities.

Despite this, the Gabor Roma study things that benefit their way of life. All the men have to get a driving license at a young age. They learn all the main routes of travel through Europe by heart. All of them speak Romani, Romanian and Hungarian very well and often they also speak French and some Slavic languages. More recently, they learned German and English for everyday communication. Many people think education will help the Roma to integrate into mainstream society. I don't believe this is true—education without the gospel will not change hearts.

Mission in Christ's Way

Trustworthiness is a key characteristic for missionaries. What does it mean to be a trustworthy person? To be devoted? To have a high level of morals? These are obviously necessary. We need to consider, though, that in different cultures the values, habits and lifestyles are different—so how can we determine whether a missionary is trustworthy and can develop trustworthiness within a given culture? Maybe all Christians at some point have thought that our commitment to Christ has made us capable of any ministry without preparation.

Have you considered how God called Israel?

According to the New Testament, God emptied Himself and became a fully Jewish man to lead Israel to salvation via Jesus Christ. So He did not start by forming Israel into His likeness, but rather in Christ He became a fully Jewish man.

When we are doing ministry to the Roma, do we research and study first and become like the ones we are going to serve, or do we strive to assimilate into our likeness those to whom we are going?

Several misunderstandings can arise from the differences. For example, a preacher—who had good intentions and who really loved Roma people—entered the Roma district of town wearing a black priest garment. The

black garment reminded the Roma people—those who rarely or never visit church—of funerals and death of which they are very afraid. This, along with other similar cultural differences caused tensions and eventually brought an end to the mission work of the local church.


In another case, a preacher who had long hair and wore an old fashioned suit tried to visit the highly particular and wealthy local Roma people, but eventually he failed to build any bridges.

Based on the above mentioned cases, I think it is important we develop mutual trust and acceptance. It is important that they can see and sense that I am one of them, I am with them, I understand their situations and problems, and they can rely on me. I also need to let them help me. One who needs grace visits the others who also need grace.

Missional Faithfulness to the Gospel

When I started to participate in mission to the Roma, many times I thought that I could achieve results. I have seen many times that when the mission is results-oriented and financed from foreign sources, it involuntarily compels the missionaries to start thinking in numbers. Do we report the number of people who really came to Christ? Do we report those as baptized who became born again? Can we distort the clear message of the gospel for the sake of our own or others' purposes?

Another aspect of the faithfulness to the gospel is the question of how culture relates to the gospel. We often face this subject in contemporary mission. Shall we be aware of the culture of a community or the culture of the missionaries in such measure that it may alter the clear message of the gospel, and therefore perhaps cause insignificant or neutral things to become significant?

In conclusion, to what extent do our missions consider these differences, identity, and cultural factors in a way that helps the Roma come to Christ? 

QUESTIONS OF PREJUDICE IN HUNGARY



FEATURE ARTICLE

I AM A SOCIOLOGIST AND A ROMA WOMAN.

I work for the Kecskemet Reformed Church Roma Mission and I primarily deal with social phenomena concerning Roma people. I think it is important to exchange prejudice for having personal experience and relationship with one another. I often participate in discussions where I can hear questions similar to the following ones.

Why do Roma start having children so early? Why do they have so many children?

To explore the reasons why Roma girls start having children so early, we should look further than the

explanation regarding the lack of education. As we observe the everyday life of Roma families, we find that Roma children do not receive careful and close attention at every stage of development. The parents' priorities are that their children will have their tummies filled and that they will not be cold or become ill. When girls' sexual maturing begins, this may be the first time in their lives that they receive special attention. This special attention from the opposite sex is such a nice feeling that they soon have a relationship—but as they are not prepared for the consequences, they often become pregnant. The other side to this phenomenon is that education has no real value in their eyes—conversely,

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giving birth to children and becoming a mother offers them a lot of value in their communities.

Long ago, more children were born in non-Roma families than today. But as time passed by, education and careers became more important for women and their salaries became an important income for their families. Consequently, the birth of their first child was postponed until they became older. The later a woman gives birth to the first child, the shorter the rest of her fertility period, and fewer children will be born. There is no real sign of this phenomenon in Roma families since the value of education has had a minimal effect on this group.

The reproduction rate of Roma people is so high. Will they outnumber Hungarians soon? Will they attack Hungarians and conquer them?

This statement is the typical product of propaganda. Although we rarely hear it in this kind of sharp and extremist wording, we often hear it in “softer” versions. This statement is not only false, but it intentionally causes fear and therefore it strengthens tensions and the distance between Roma and non-Roma people.

This viewpoint shows us the default presumption: some people must rule over others. This is opposed to our Christian worldview and our understanding of humans.

Roma only have so many children in order to get child benefits and other social benefits given according to the number of children.

It is quite obvious from the demographic data that Roma families had just as many children before the introduction of child benefits. Of course they know about it and count on social benefits, but I think it is similar in non-Roma families. The difference is in the significance of the social benefits as income, since great numbers of Roma families are disadvantaged and this form of support is very important for them.

Why are Roma so loud and aggressive when they are applying for services and social benefits?

Roma people have to face prejudice and offence many times; many people are afraid of them or reject them without any sign of acceptance, without having any

personal contact or experience with them. At the same time they need to access some services and they need to get the attention of people to address their issues. The threat of physical insult, the aggressive communication or the loud communication itself helps them to achieve their goals. If they get affirmation for this—it did not work, when trying gently, but it worked when they were loud—then most likely they will try a similar approach next time. If these practices did not work they would not use them. These are easy-to-access and approved tools to achieve different goals.

Why should we be afraid of Roma people?

Nobody should be afraid of the Roma. Fear is a self-defense mechanism. Whatever behavior we think is normal is part of our culture. To be afraid of any other strange and new behavior is a natural part of our lives. The only cure for it is personal experience and getting to know new things and people.


Why do Roma say they are starving when we can see many overweight children?

They are not fat because they eat a lot every day, but because they eat unhealthy food.

Eating is very important for Roma families and it is a way of expressing their love. Yet, we can observe short-term thinking as a tendency among them. Their priority is to fulfill their needs today. They enjoy eating and cooking as well. They usually eat high calorie food: pasta, potatoes, meat.

Lack of information and an attempt to satisfy desires generated by television advertisements—since television is the only source of information for many Roma families—they buy unhealthy sweets and other food full of preservatives for their children. Overspending at the beginning of the month and eating cheap food for the rest of the month is typical for them, because of longing for better food in times of deprivation and because of this short-term thinking. Cheap foods are also known to be poor in vitamins but high in calories.

Why don't they want to be like us?

Everyone would like to live better, but the culture of everyone is equally precious. We should not strive to become similar, but to accept each other and to delight in the values of each other. 

FROM PREJUDICE + *to Love*

I AM BULGARIAN. I was born and raised in a loving family and had a wonderful childhood. Both of my parents are very well educated with good professions, so getting a good education was the number one priority in our family. I made it into the best kindergarten and schools. In this environment, I communicated with children just like me: white and coming from similar families. I never had any Roma classmates. When I saw beggars down in the center of the town, I always wondered why they were so dirty and begging. I thought that these were low class people and I should not communicate with them.

I had no interaction with Roma people at all until I became a believer. When I accepted Christ at age 17, I saw some of these “different” people in the church sitting among Bulgarians and worshipping God together. At the end of each service, people greeted each other with a kiss and handshake. I did not greet the Roma, because I had a very deep prejudice toward them without even realizing it. Two years went by quickly and I ended up at a university in the big city. The church there had fewer Roma and consequently I felt fine.

In my senior year, I was offered a job as a coordinator of the compassionate ministries at our church. I felt God was clearly leading me toward that and I felt His presence and peace about my decision to

take the job. My very first project was at one of the Roma schools in the country. The first time we went there I was unprepared for the interest and love of the students. By the end of our visit they all wanted to come and hug us. That experience completely shocked me. I tried several times to pull myself away and leave the school, but the crowd of children was too “demanding.” That night I had serious turmoil in my heart. I felt convicted for my earlier behavior and realized that I had a serious problem. I asked Jesus for forgiveness and a change of heart. This did not happen suddenly. Month after month I went to the school and met with these children and their families. I started to listen more attentively and learn about their culture. I was invited to family gatherings and my appreciation for their culture and traditions grew with every single event. The love for their families and their hospitality—even to strangers—were things I have not seen anywhere else.

Today, some of my closest friends are Roma. I am a pastor of three Roma churches and still teach at this Roma school. I can only thank God for His mercy and love and bravely say that everything is possible with God—even changing the depths of our hearts and minds where prejudice and other unrighteous habits are deeply rooted. With Him we can overcome everything!

FEATURE ARTICLE

BY **ZHANETA GEORGIEVA**

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Partners In Ministry with the Roma

FEATURE ARTICLE



BY **TOM BECKER**

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Tom Becker serves with EFCA ReachGlobal on the Catalyst Team. After 16 years as a church planter/coach among the Roma in the Czech Republic/Eastern Europe, he now networks and partners like-minded people, churches, and organizations to work among the Roma. As the US representative of Roma Networks he has the opportunity to travel, consult, coach, and partner both U.S. and European Roma ministries together.

Meeting the Roma

“I laughed more tonight than during our first two years here in the Czech Republic,” I said to my wife as we left Ivan and Jana’s house in 1999. We did not know it at the time but we had just met our best friends and greatest colleagues in our mission field. It was also our first introduction to the friendliness and warmth of the Roma people. Within days, we were planning together for youth events and an adult Bible study. The Roma in the city trusted me because they trusted Ivan and Jana. I would soon learn the particular importance of building trust as a basis for partnership when working as a gadje (non-Roma) with Roma. From those humble beginnings, a church was planted and Ivan and Jana became the leaders. Back then I could not have dreamed of the ministry path on which God would lead me. Since those early days, I have laughed, cried, and struggled with many Roma Christian leaders. It has been a joy to progress from evangelism and youth work, to church planting with a Roma couple, to coaching other Roma church planters, to traveling and teaching in Eastern Europe, to my present day job of developing partnering relationships between Roma and non-Roma churches, denominations, and organizations in Europe and the USA.

Even as an introvert, networking and developing partnering relationships comes naturally for me. I have a strong belief that unity in the Body creates energy and opportunities that we cannot achieve when working alone. Too many ministries, either by choice or circumstance, are isolated and do not have enough people to do fruitful ministry. Roma Christians often have the added challenge of being marginalized. At best, churches do not see the necessity of reaching the Roma. At worst, they do not want Roma in their churches and oppose ministry to them. However, God is a global God who brings his people together to show a watching world what unity in Christ looks like.

Mission Partnering

In 2014 I attended the “Roma for the Nations” conference as a representative for ReachGlobal, a mission organization committed to developing, empowering, and releasing national workers. Out of this conference, Roma Networks (www.romanetworks.com) was established with the vision “to network,

connect, and research for the sake of sharing the gospel and seeing transformation in Roma communities throughout Europe.” They do this through regional networks that come together to educate, empower, and encourage Roma and non-Roma leaders. During lunch one day at a 2015 conference, Jim Baker and I sat with the Roma Networks board and brainstormed possibilities of cooperation. I have been told, usually with a smile, that I have the gift of “finding work for others.” The leaders of Roma Networks have the same gift and after an hour and a half together, we each had long to-do lists that would take months to complete! This was the beginning of a rich partnership that would lead to lasting cooperation between our missionaries and the ministries represented by Roma Networks. Some of our work together included training in member care, training in the use of media tools, creating a documentary of God’s work among the Roma in Europe, coaching, and consulting.

One of the greatest felt needs of the Roma church in Europe is pastor training. The gospel is spreading quickly and the churches are struggling to make disciples. There are socio-economic factors that limit the number of full-time paid pastors. With this in mind, 11 ReachGlobal missionaries from two teams recently travelled in Hungary, Serbia, and Romania. The missionaries from the Catalyst Team work with nationals to launch gospel initiatives among marginalized people. The Global Equipping Team trains Christian leaders in emerging gospel movements. After collectively connecting with hundreds of Roma leaders and getting to know Roma culture and church life, we met with Roma Networks leaders for two days of planning. The outcome was a plan for pastor/leader training in the areas of Bible study (Pathways Bible Studies) and church planting. There is ongoing discussion about training in community development, story-centric Bible teaching and leadership development.

This partnership between the Catalyst Team, Global Equipping Team, and leaders of Roma ministries is built on trust and cooperative work. However, it is just the beginning. I recently had the privilege of serving as the U.S. representative at the Roma Networks country representative meetings in March 2017. It was gratifying to see people who I knew when they were just starting as pastors/church planters now traveling internationally as

country representatives! Secondly, it was exciting to hear country reports from representatives of 27 countries. There were reports about a wide variety of ministries in diverse situations. For example, in Finland there are no “Roma churches” because they are all integrated. In the Czech Republic, however, the struggle for acceptance is hard and often discouraging.

Local Church Partnership

My presentation focused on building relationships between individual ministries in Europe and ReachGlobal missionaries and U.S. local churches. There is great synergy when these three partners can work together. One U.S. local church is considering sponsoring training in Community Health Evangelism (CHE) through the ReachGlobal Global Equipping team. The goal would be to train the church’s people and other missionaries in CHE. Then the local church in conjunction with experienced missionaries could equip Roma leaders in Europe to plant churches in a way that does not create dependency. This model of a local church working with a training missionary and a Roma ministry is ready to be multiplied with church planting, community development, Bible training, story-centric Bible teaching, and leadership development.

Things About Partnership that I Have Learned from the Roma

1. Trust is the basis of all partnerships. Building a partnership is building a relationship, and this requires trust forming over time. Although both people and the task are important, trust can only be built if the focus is on the people—and this contributes to better long-term results. Although building trust is an important factor that should be emphasized in any partnership relationship, it is especially important in a Roma context because of Roma history and their current situation.
2. Slow and steady wins the race. (See #1 above about taking time). Western missionaries (myself included) and church leaders tend to be very task oriented. They see what needs to be done and want to get to it. (I once had a missions pastor tell me I might not be the right person for this job because I didn’t have a

winner-take-all-attitude. He said I should talk about Europe as the new ‘dark continent’ where we are going to launch an invasion to “invade and conquer” as soldiers of Christ! In my mind, our discussion ended at that moment.) But Roma culture, especially in Eastern Europe, is intensely relationship oriented and time efficiency is not as important as in Western culture.

3. Network broadly/partner deeply. Not everyone you meet will be the right fit for a partnership. It is important to know what God is doing among many areas of ministry so that you can understand Roma culture, European culture, and local culture. It is important to spend time getting to know people so you really know how they are wired and how they do ministry. This takes time (see #1 and #2 above about taking time). So get to know a lot of Roma ministries and leaders. Find out where there can be a win-win situation where both sides will benefit with each other’s strengths.
4. Partnership is a two way street. Partnership means that you are both equal partners. You may have different strengths but you should go into any partnership looking for those strengths that can work together. Push all thoughts out of your head that you are going to “help a poor, underdeveloped people.” The Roma people are marginalized, and in many cases, oppressed. But they are not weak and do not “need our help.” The Roma church is vibrant and has a lot to offer. Western churches need to look at the wealth of relationship, the faithfulness of Roma churches, and see how God is working among them. That is a story that God is writing to show the world something special about his character. Take the time to look for the strengths of both sides in this equal partnership (See #1,2,3 above about taking time).

Developing friendships and partnering with Roma churches has not always been easy but has always been rewarding and life-giving. I suggest you give it a try.

HOW GOD LED US INTO

Roma Mission



FEATURE ARTICLE

BY **SHARON CHAN**

www.gcciusa.org/index_EN.html

Sharon Chan holds a Ph.D., Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary. Prior to her joining the Great Commission Center International she served with CCCOWE, LCWE and AD 2000 and Beyond Movement.

Through our Chinese and English publications, special prayer meetings and sharing, we continue to encourage Chinese churches worldwide to support and be involved in Roma ministries.

AS WE PREPARED TO CELEBRATE The Great Commission Center International's (GCCCI) 20th anniversary in 2013, we prayed to God for His guidance on launching new mission endeavors. When I came across an article on the Roma people in Eastern Europe in Christianity Today, I felt touched by the Lord. However, I kept this to myself. Later, when I read another article on the Roma published in Mission Frontiers, I told my colleagues and asked them to pray with me to seek God's will. I also showed these two articles to my mentor, Dr. Thomas Wang, who is the Founder and President Emeritus of GCCCI, and asked for his advice. He not only gave me a "green light" but also told me that he and Mrs. Wang were willing to go with me for a fact-finding trip. With the encouragement of Dr. Wang, I was confident to plan for further actions.

First, I wrote to the author, Melody Wachsmuth and asked for her permission to translate her 3 articles (the third in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research) into Chinese. Surprisingly, Melody wrote to the three publishers to get permission for me. I was touched by Melody's help and convinced that God was opening the door for the Chinese Church.

Secondly, I planned a trip to Eastern Europe. Now, the question became: How can we get in touch with the Roma leaders there? I shared my need with GCCCI Hong Kong Board when I passed through Hong Kong in June of 2013. Dr. Titus Loong, a member of GCCCI Hong Kong Board, introduced me to Rev. Viktor Sabo of Subotica, Serbia. We communicated through emails and agreed upon our first trip to Serbia and Hungary in November 2013. Our first team consisted only of five people. Rev. Sabo made an arrangement for us to visit Roma churches and Christians in Subotica, Apatin, Belgrade, Jagodina and Leskovac in Serbia. He also introduced us to Rev. Albert Durko, the director of Hungarian Gypsy Mission International. Rev. Durko and his colleagues came to Serbia to take us to visit his mission in Bekes, Hungary and they showed us their

education, social service and church planting ministries among the Roma people. It was an eye-opening trip for all of us.

At the end of this first trip, Dr. Thomas Wang announced that GCCCI would organize a consultation at the end of September, 2014 for Roma Christian leaders and missionaries who were working among the Roma people in Budapest, Hungary. In order to have broader representation to the consultation, we paid visits to Roma leaders in eight European countries in April of 2014. As a result, there were about 100 Roma leaders from a dozen countries that came to the Budapest consultation.

It has been GCCCI's policy to encourage the local people to take up the baton if we feel they are ready. Therefore, before the end of the 2014 consultation, Dr. Wang helped the Roma leaders form a steering committee of six Roma and non-Roma from six different countries to plan and prepare the next gathering in 2016. Nina Vujić, a Croatian serving in a Roma majority church, was elected as the coordinator. Thus, the Roma Networks was born.

As soon as the steering committee was formed, GCCCI stepped aside and let the committee be in charge. However, GCCCI continues to serve in a supportive role. Through our Chinese and English publications, special prayer meetings and sharing, we continue to encourage Chinese churches worldwide to support and be involved in Roma ministries. We also organized two more conferences and a number of short-term mission trips from 2015-2017, mainly for the Chinese churches in the hope that they will see with their own eyes the spiritual and physical needs of the Roma people. Several Chinese churches in the USA, Canada, Hong Kong and even Eastern Europe are willing to take up the challenge. It is our prayer that more and more Chinese and non-Chinese churches will work together with the Roma leaders in evangelizing the Roma people not only in Eastern Europe, but all around the world.

SUSTAINABLE MISSION

WHO PAYS FOR THE BOOKS?

SUSTAINABLE MISSION IS A macro-movement, a way of thinking, a general framework. It encourages missionaries and mission supporters to think carefully about how they are serving in local communities, and to consider methods and models of mission that encourage local sustainability and the empowerment of local believers, rather than developing an unhealthy model of patronage and dependency.

In many ways it is easy to agree with the principles of sustainable mission, but when it comes to the crunch, decisions about day-to-day practical matters needs to be made. This is a story of one such decision.

I've been a missionary in Mexico for eight years. I work as part of a para-church movement, providing theological training to pastors and church leaders. But I am also a member of my local church. The youth group at our church has decided to start using the Spanish-language version of a well-known evangelism tool. The program runs for 14 weeks and includes a short booklet of Bible studies, homework material and other readings. Each participant in the program requires a booklet which costs about \$4 US. This is not a huge cost for the youth of our church as they are largely from middle or upper-middle class families, but there is a culture of receiving things for free.

So the question that has been raised is, "Who is going to pay for the books?"

The easy answer is that I (as the foreign missionary) will, or at least I will contact an American church who will gladly give the \$200 needed to buy the books. A couple of emails, a phone call or two and I would have the money – no problem.

Sounds good. Good resources get into the hands of people who can use them – surely that is our aim? It is a model I've seen repeated many times across Latin America. But thinking through some of the principles of sustainable mission allows a few problems to be identified and an alternative model to be developed.

First, if the group receives the material for free, the users lack a "personal investment," which usually means less motivation to use it. A free resource is more likely to sit on the shelf rather than be used. Instead, if they pay for the material themselves, they are more likely to turn up to the sessions, do the prescribed homework, and therefore receive the benefit.

Second, freely given materials trains the recipients to wait for the next free box (which may come in a month, a year or never). Instead, if they buy the materials themselves, they are in the habit of buying good materials for training, evangelism or edification, and will seek them out.

Third, bringing in free materials from outside undermines local Christian booksellers, authors and publishers here in Mexico who are trying to develop good resources in Spanish. Instead, locals buying local means relationships are developed (see the second point above), businesses are grown and local authors are encouraged to produce locally relevant materials.

So what does the theory of sustainable mission mean for the very practical question of "Who pays for the books?"

It means the local participants do. In fact, even better, the local participants can pay 120% of the cost of the books, to cover the costs of the extra books needed for their non-Christian friends, and to pay for the coffee and cookies that will be offered as part of the training. Then, when the next course runs, they will be in the habit of using their local resources, rather than looking outside.

Finally, this model empowers the local believers to serve each other and their community. It encourages them to see a need and meet that need themselves as members of the body of Christ who have been blessed with gifts and resources to do the good works that God has prepared in advance for them.



For more information go to wmausa.org

BY **PETER SHOLL**

Peter Sholl serves as the director of MOCLAM, an institution that offers theological education by distance in Spanish. He lives in Monterrey, Mexico with his wife and three teenage daughters. He is a graduate of Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia and before being a missionary pastored a church in suburban Sydney. His passport is Australian, but his heart is becoming Mexican

Brothers and Sisters, Please Stop “Training”¹

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Steve Smith (Th.D.) was part of a church planting movement in Asia. He currently leads a global effort to catalyze biblical church planting movements in every unreached people group and place by 2025. He is the author of *T4T: A Discipleship Revolution* with Ying Kai (WigTake Resources, 2011) and *Hastening and Rebirth* in the “No Place Left” saga (2014 Ventures, 2015 & 2016). Steve serves as VP of Multiplication for East-West Ministries and Global Movement Catalyst for Beyond.org.

Fifteen years ago, “Church Planting Movement” (CPM) was a relatively unheard-of—and even widely questioned or opposed—concept. Today, many different types of ministries and efforts are being labeled “CPM.”

Definition of CPM

Over the last 20 years, as we have come to better understand this God-phenomenon called Church Planting Movement, the definition has become clearer.

- A Church Planting Movement can be expected to be in place when four or more separate streams of new disciples and new churches are multiplying past the 4th generation in a relatively short time (months or years, not decades). Generation 1 is counted as new churches composed of new believers, not pre-existing believers. Generally, a CPM does not emerge until there are at least 200 new churches and they are led indigenously by believers that have arisen from the harvest.
- Our goal is sustained CPMs 1) in which the vision is owned and led by biblically qualified leaders who have arisen from the harvest, 2) which have stood the test of time

and persecution, 3) which number well past a thousand churches and 4) which are cascading into other people groups and regions. Generations often become impossible to number, but 15, 20 or 25 generations of new churches are not uncommon.

The heart of CPM praxis is pouring our lives into local believers in a way that helps them become 1) whole-hearted followers of Jesus (life transformation and devotion to Jesus) and 2) fishers of men (Mark 1:17). In this process, many become catalysts of movements. The two common avenues of finding local believers to invest in and train are 1) winning them to Christ through evangelism and 2) casting vision to existing believers to pursue Father’s heart for movements, and then to be trained and walk this road together.

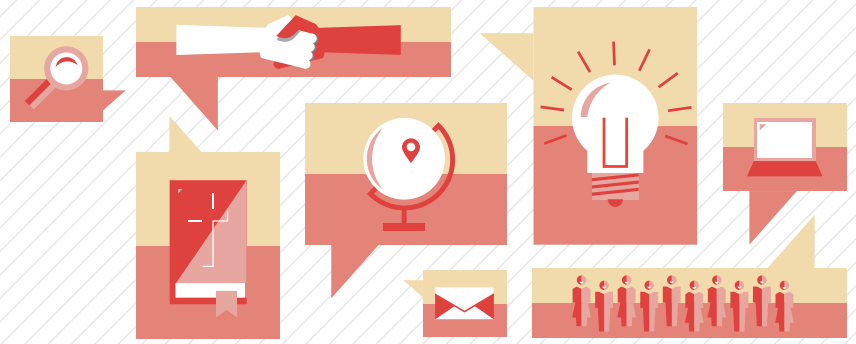
Training Disciples For a CPM

The primary term that has arisen to indicate discipling that results in equipping believers to do the work of service (Eph. 4:11-12) is “training.” In the early days of movements, the word “training” was chosen to differentiate it from misconceptions associated with other great terms:

- Teaching—Teaching the Word of God is essential. “Training” emphasizes that the teaching should result in heart obedience in the listener (doers of the Word, not hearers only).
- Discipling—Discipling often conveys the idea of receiving for personal spiritual growth. “Training” emphasizes that a disciple not only receives but is also equipped to pass on what he or she receives.

Training describes a process of regular (usually weekly) life-on-life teaching and discipling that results in the disciples 1) growing in Christlikeness through genuine life transformation (“following Jesus”) and 2) being equipped, encouraged and held mutually accountable to make disciples of others who can repeat the discipling/training process (“fishing for men”). Training places emphasis on developing an environment and structure to multiply discipleship at every generation.

Training has always been meant to equip disciples in a way that can result in true life transformation and movements of disciple-making that spread throughout a city, region or people group.



EVENTS CAN CHANGE HEARTS BUT ONLY FREQUENT DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING CAN CHANGE STEPS.

Training was never meant to refer to pop-in-pop-out conferences or events. Training “events” can change minds and hearts but do not usually change hands and feet (lifestyle). Only regular life-on-life training changes lifestyle.

Unfortunately, today many people refer to pop-in-pop-out training events as “training.” In a best-case scenario, we pop in and have amazing God-encountering conferences. God convicts the group of wrong thinking and practice. He moves the hearts of listeners to cooperate with Him to see movements of disciple-making emerge. In less ideal scenarios, we pop in and pass on CPM principles, but there is no real heart change.

Regardless of what occurs in such pop-in-pop-out conferences, a disconnect emerges IF there is little (if any) weekly follow-up. When there is no regular, life-on-life mentoring, coaching, modeling and discipling, the

hopes of disciples raised in the training events become dashed.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.
(Prov. 13:12, ESV)

We give hope but defer fulfillment through lack of regular follow-up. Disillusionment sets in. We have inoculated them against kingdom movements.

If this is what someone means by training, I say, “Brothers and sisters, stop training!” Remember: events can change hearts but only frequent discipleship training can change steps. If all we do are training events, how can we help disciples through the problems and discouragement that inevitably follow when they try to change their lifestyles and encounter spiritual opposition?

The goal of our training is 1) life transformation (including church formation) and 2) movements that

can spread through a region. The ideal situation is for us to cast vision deeply (which can be through an event) but then have 12-24 months to deeply invest in groups of local believers through weekly/bi-weekly discipleship training that walks them through the stages of a movement.

Let’s look at two scenarios of movements in Acts that rang out through the Roman world and see how Paul trained them: a 3-week model and a 3-year model.

3-Week Training Model: Thessalonica

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17:1-2, ESV)

It appears that Paul only stayed in Thessalonica for about three weeks

before he was chased out by persecution. Even so, something amazing emerged from this launch:

*You became **an example to all the believers** in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has **the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere**, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you **turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God**, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thes. 1:6-10, ESV, emphasis added)*

Two characteristics are apparent from Paul's letter to these dear believers shortly after his departure:

1. True life transformation – they are an example of faith and radical turning from the old ways
2. Regional movement – their example and witness has reverberated throughout the region

3-Year Training Model: Ephesus

In Ephesus, on the other hand, Paul built a base of operations in the province of Asia for three years (Acts 20:31).

*This continued for two years, so that **all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord**, both Jews and Greeks . . . And this [the seven sons of Sceva incident] became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, **confessing and divulging their practices**.*

*And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So **the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily**. (Acts 19:10, 17-20, ESV, emphasis added)*

The same two characteristics emerge in Ephesus:

1. True life transformation – deep sins are being rooted from their heart in reverence for the Word of the Lord
2. Regional movement – everyone in this Roman province of Asia has heard the Word of the Lord

The Training Process that Resulted in Movements

According to Paul, it was the *manner* of interaction that was the critical factor in these God-movements.

Lifestyle of the 3-Week Training Model

*Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know **what kind of men we proved to be among you** for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thes 1:5-6, ESV, emphasis added)*

*But we were **gentle among you**, like a **nursing mother** taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you **not only the gospel of God but also our own selves**, because **you had become very dear to us**. For you*

*remember, brothers, our labor and toil: **we worked night and day**, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, **how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers**. For you know how, **like a father with his children**, we **exhorted** each one of you and **encouraged** you and **charged** you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thes 2:7-12, ESV, emphasis added)*

With just three weeks, Paul took up the role of mother or father, exhorting, encouraging, and charging these new believers day and night. He imparted his very life rather than popping in and popping out. He was an example they could emulate of holy conduct. The Thessalonians had become dear to him and he imparted his life to them. For three weeks, he was all in. He then stayed in contact in the years to come through 1) personal follow-up visits, 2) emissaries, 3) letters and 4) taking Thessalonian believers with him at times (Acts 20:4).

Lifestyle of the 3-Year Training Model

*But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, [Paul] withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, **reasoning daily** in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:9-10, ESV, emphasis added)*

*“You yourselves know how **I lived among you** the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all **humility***

IF YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN BRING REAL HEART CHANGE AND LAUNCH TRUE KINGDOM MOVEMENTS THROUGH TRAINING EVENTS ONLY, I ADMONISH YOU TO STOP TRAINING OR CHANGE YOUR APPROACH.

*and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how **I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable**, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ Therefore be alert, remembering that **for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears**. And now **I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.** Acts 20:18-21, 31-32, ESV, emphasis added)*

Whether Paul had three weeks or three years, he conducted his life and ministry in the same manner. The picture of training that emerges here is one in which every day he was training. He did this in an incarnational life-on-life manner, admonishing and teaching with tears. He trained not just in the hall of Tyrannus (public) but house to house. For Paul, training was pouring his life into disciples and commending them to God and His Word.

Implications for Our Training


Training of disciples is essential if movements are going to emerge. But our term “training” must mean what Paul did with his disciples. Training conferences can help us filter for hungry disciples, but only regular, life-on-life training will change lives and impact regions. Paul reasoned in the synagogues (events) to find those who would believe and walk with him in kingdom movements. He then imparted his life, day and night, to those who walked with him.

A goal of every conference should be to identify men and women we (or co-laborers in that region) can regularly pour our lives into in the weeks, months and years to come in the various locations in which we work. Sometimes, we will have only a short time to share our lives, like Paul had in Thessalonica. Sometimes we will have years, like Paul had in Ephesus. But regardless of the length, the hope of our training is to impart our very lives to these disciples and commend them to God who can equip them to be ministers of His grace.

How often must we interact? In some refugee situations, colleagues know they have only a few weeks with new believers, so they meet like this for training every day. In usual situations, colleagues train disciples weekly. In busy urban environments, some colleagues train their

disciples every other week and encourage them to start their own training groups on the off weeks. The least frequent I have seen anyone train believers in a way that resulted in life transformation and a Church Planting Movement was once a month. Less frequently than that and it is too difficult to bring real implementation that results in life transformation, healthy church formation and multiplying generations.

So, brothers and sisters, do not stop training events if you are using them to find disciples to invest your life in. But if you believe you can bring real heart change and launch true kingdom movements through training events only, I admonish you to stop training or change your approach.

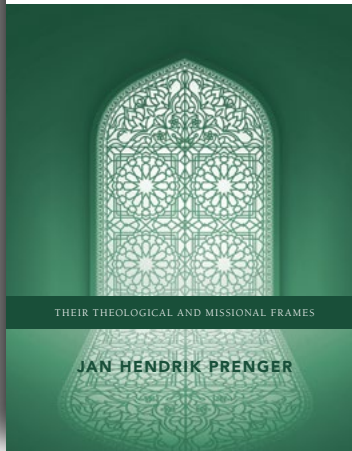
At the end of the day “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). Such lifestyle training was Paul’s model. Does it sound much different from what Jesus did with His disciples? 

¹ In January 1995, John Piper published an article entitled “Brothers, Tell Them Not to Serve God!” in which he admonished readers not to serve God in the wrong way. That article deeply impacted me and this title honors that spirit.



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MUSLIM INSIDER CHRIST FOLLOWERS



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Muslim Insider Christ Followers

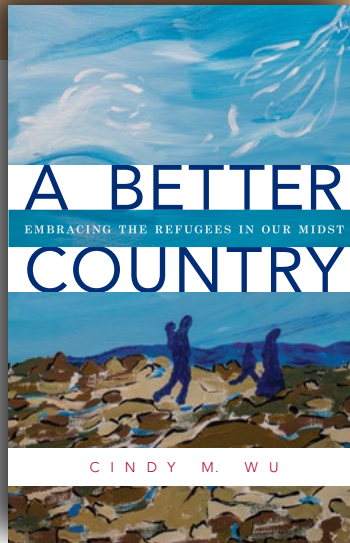
Their Theological and Missional Frames

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List Price ~~\$26.⁹⁹~~ • **Our Price \$21.⁹⁹**

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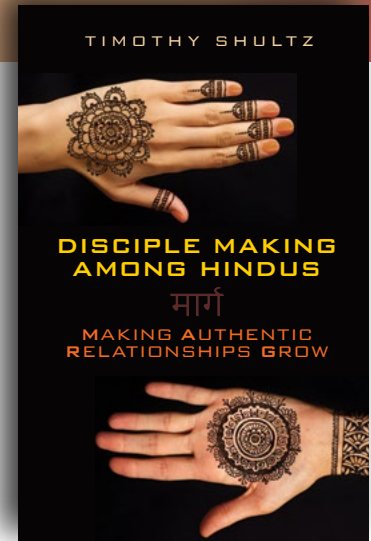
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NEW

Disciple Making Among Hindus

Making Authentic Relationships Grow

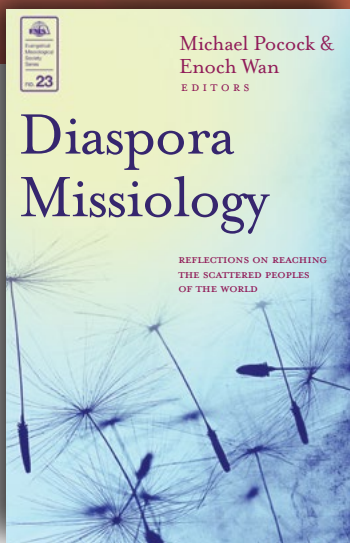
Timothy Shultz (Author)

Drawing on thirty years' experience among Hindus, Timothy Shultz writes this book as a testimony of the kingdom of God growing in a non-Christian environment. *Disciple Making among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow* describes how Hindu people experience and respond to Jesus Christ. What are the core values and rhythms of their cultural world? What are the patterns of community and discipleship that help them draw closer to Jesus? Through moving personal stories, biblical reflection, and practical wisdom, Shultz introduces us to the centrality of family, the covenantal relationships that make up Hindu social life, and the yearning for authentic spiritual experience.

While this book will benefit anyone wanting to make disciples among Hindus, it is far more than a strategy of contextualization or a blueprint for successful evangelism. Read it to discover the beauty of Hindus as Jesus sees them—and the beauty of Jesus through Hindu eyes.

List Price ~~\$14.⁹⁹~~ • **Our Price \$11.⁹⁹**

ISBN 9780878081387
Timothy Shultz (Author)
WCL | Pages 154 | Paperback 2016



Diaspora Missiology (EMS 23)

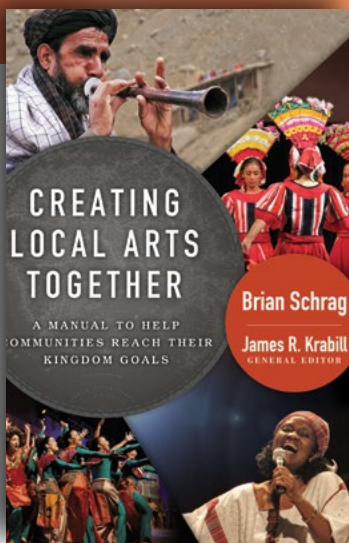
Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World

Michael Pocock, Enoch Wan (Editors)

For many years, cross-cultural missions were directed to people in the countries of their birth, generally in Majority World areas. Foreigners present among or around the intended focus of ministry were not viewed as part of mission ministry. Diaspora missions focus on these peoples, who are now actually and virtually in more accessible places. This book will help you understand the dynamics behind this accelerated movement of peoples from one region to another, biblical principles and precedents that guide ministry today, the application of social and communication studies, and actual cases of ministry to and with diaspora peoples.

List Price ~~\$16.⁹⁹~~ • **Our Price \$13.⁵⁴**

ISBN 9780878080458
Michael Pocock, Enoch Wan (Editors)
WCL | Pages 289 | Paperback 2015



Creating Local Arts Together

A Manual to Help Communities Reach Their Kingdom Goals

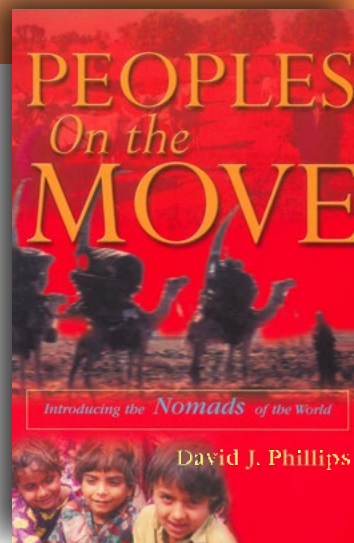
Brian Schrag (Author), James R. Krabill (Editor)

Creating Local Arts Together is a manual designed to guide an individual or group into a local community's efforts at integrating its arts with the values and purposes of God's kingdom. The practical, playful text reduces experience-based scholarly insights gained from multiple decades of incarnational ministry around the world into a flexible seven-step process.

This manual is the second book in a two-volume set on the principles and practices of ethnodoxology. The first volume, entitled *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, presents in textbook format the central "Foundations," "Stories," and "Tools" designed to equip readers in exploring more fully this important new field of research and ministry.

List Price ~~\$24.⁹⁹~~ • **Our Price \$19.⁹⁹**

ISBN 9780878084944
Brian Schrag (Author), James R. Krabill (Editor)
WCL | Pages 316 | Paperback 2013



Peoples On the Move

Introducing Nomads of the World

David J. Phillips (Author)

Nomads — they inhabit every continent yet have "no abiding city." Always on the move, they are often "invisible," unreached, despised, and easily forgotten by settled citizens. This is the most comprehensive source of information on all the nomadic peoples of the world and includes maps, black and white photographs, people profiles, and bibliographic data.

As you develop a new understanding of the political, agricultural, economic and cultural foundations of nomadic life, you will praise the "God of nomads" for his rich diversity and work among these peoples — and even consider your own calling and priorities in life.

Davis Phillip has worked with the Unevangelized Fields mission in churches along the Amazon river and in the cattle ranch regions of Brazil; and as missions researcher with WEC International, contributing to Patrick Johnstone's *Operation World*. As founder member of the Nomadic Peoples Network he has visited nomads in India, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, the Middle East and West Africa; more recently he has been teaching in Nomadic Peoples workshops.

List Price ~~\$19.⁹⁵~~ • **Our Price \$15.⁹⁶**

ISBN 978-0-87808-352-7
David J. Phillips (Author)
Piquant | Pages 490 | Paperback 2007

A Word for the Global Church from Africa

by Greg Parsons

Director of Global Connections
Frontier Ventures

Last year, while in Thailand, I was particularly discouraged. I had a cold, had just flown 18 hours and was worn down. After adjusting, I began to do what I do at all conferences: connect with people—Often with people I know at some depth. But this time, there was a new brother. He had grown up in an African country and been sent as a global worker to a large country in Asia. He had been there for 3-4 years—it was his 2nd cross-cultural field of service, and likely his 5th or 6th language—having grown up in Africa.

Since the event was focused on his Asian country, I noticed this man talking with the others in their language with great expression. They listened carefully with interest! I asked another leader how his language was coming along. They said that while his vocabulary was basic, his grammar and pronunciation was excellent. He could tell stories in a way that engaged people. Those who spoke the language loved to listen to him and were honored that he spoke so well. And, that was true back in his own country—where he works with students near a university campus. Beyond language skills, I've found out that he is a man of insight with a passion to tell of Christ and his love.

Since then, I've tracked with him. He is now back in Africa for a home assignment and a break. But he is sharing vision and his burden for the

lost with the church back home. While there are more workers going out from Africa, it is rare to find them in Asia, so I'm sure he is in great demand as a speaker—if for no other reason than it is interesting to hear him.

But, in a prayer email he sent several weeks ago, he expressed great frustration with the level of vision from some of the churches in one area back in his home country. One night he couldn't sleep. So he woke a friend and went to the graves of workers who had pioneered the gospel and established churches in the area where he was. He wrote his burden and prayer—which reminded me of the way I and others who mobilize feel at times. Here is one paragraph from his plea:¹


"Today erecting Church buildings is the top agenda of almost every local church in [this people group]. Erecting [an] office building is the top agenda. Erecting ... [a] Memorial Building is the top agenda. But, the gospel, outreach, and sending missionaries to the unreached people groups is not the top agenda. They misunderstand me, they say [I am] against the church building. No, that is wrong! I believe we need more infrastructures in [my country]. But any project that kills the gospel [or] that consumes all the resources, I oppose it in the name of Jesus! When they came up with a mega church design, I thought they would finish that and turn their attention to the gospel work, but it did not happen. They came up with primary and secondary school project. I still hoped that when they finish that, they would turn their attention to the gospel work but it did not happen—they came

up with building shops and guesthouse and so on. Now I realize that there is no end for this. It is just killing the gospel in a very subtle way."

We all know that churches can build and focus on the spread of the gospel. But since the church is people, the physical things like buildings can also be a huge distraction. They certainly are not required by the Scripture.

As I pondered how to share his reflections, I got another email from him. He shared that while one meeting with the top church leaders was delayed, they do have a vision for the unreached. He has been invited to share with many churches and gatherings in June within various church groups. They want to send ten missionaries a year from these churches—50 in the next five years.

I have gained great encouragement from this brother and his wife. Would you pray with me for them and the others like them who come from very humble means but are wholly committed to the task and uniquely gifted to contribute in ways that someone like me never could.

Perhaps you have a similar story? If so, please go to www.missionfrontiers.org look up this issue and post your comments under this article. We'd love to hear from you. 

¹ I have his permission, but I have removed names and places for security and to give no offense. Remember, English is not his first language.

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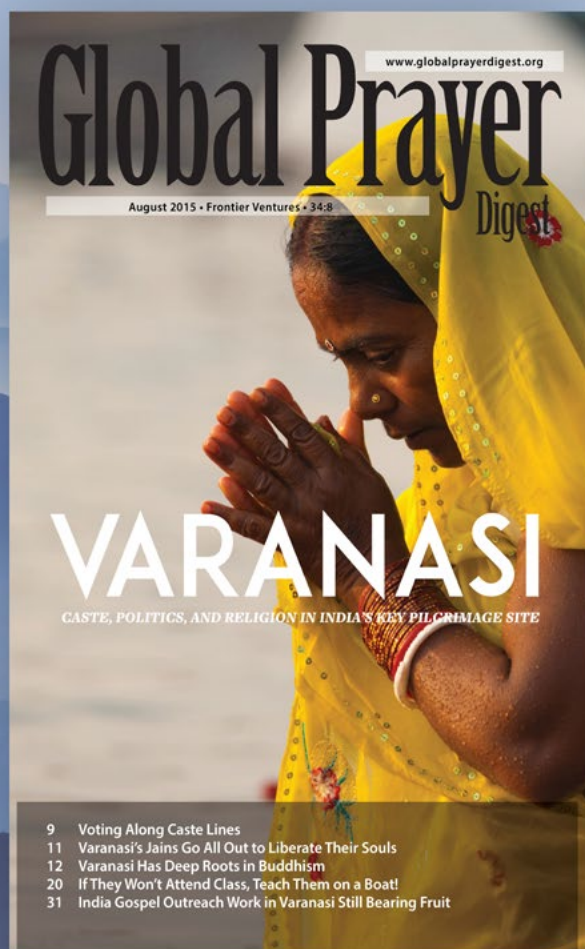


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