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The Local Church Reaching Muslims



By Lamond Banks

Sometimes a church or individual comes to what seems to be a “closed door” and there seems to be no way through. If we can see with spiritual eyes; change can present itself as the entrance to the closed door. Are we willing to press through the difficulties or distractions that keep us stymied? Are we willing to “press on” in order to find the entrance to the future by embracing “change?” If so, God will give us the “keys” to be a church that touches the nations.

The Lord has allowed us to see incredible open doors to our Muslim neighbors. For me it began with these words “change...wonderful...soon.” We were missionaries home on furlough and I was on a morning prayer walk through the neighborhood when I heard those words spoken to me. It was not an audible voice, but in my spirit. As the word “change” came I asked, “what?” The response was “wonderful” —

which came in an instant. As soon as the word “wonderful” came, I asked, “when?” And in that short instant came the word “soon.” I persisted with one last question, “In or out of missions?” The answer came with a creative twist in the intonation with the word “in.” “Change, wonderful, soon, and in missions in some kind of way.” I could not wait to share with my husband what God had spoken. He responded, “If this is God He will show us.” I have to admit, in the time spent waiting I would ask the Lord, “How quick is soon?” It did not come in fast motion, but step-by-step the process of change began to happen.

In about a year we found ourselves in Evergreen Park, a suburb of Chicago, being voted on for the pastoral position at Maranatha Chapel. This great church had been mothered by the Stone Church of Chicagoland. From the beginning,

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Hausfeld
International Director
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



Global Initiative has had an outstanding year. The Holy Spirit has prophetically led us into places that are front-page news today.

The “Why?” of Global Initiative is: “Every Muslim must know the truth about Jesus.” The need for this truth could never be more missiologically front and center than today. Military, economic and political solutions are like Band-Aids, and secular humanism is impotent to face the spiritual nature of Islam. The truth about Jesus is the only hope for Muslims. Every believer and every church needs to be equipped to pray for, love and engage Muslims with the truth about Jesus Christ.




Traditional missionaries alone will never be able to reach the Muslim world for Christ. With 1.6 billion Muslims on the planet, the numbers of missionaries sent from North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia are far too few to complete the task.

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass., calculates that Christians (from all major church traditions) sent out approximately 400,000 international missionaries in 2010. In the last four years these figures have trended upwards, and that is good news. A major reason for encouragement is that nearly half the world's top missionary-sending countries are now located in the global south. The United States sends 127,000 of the above total number.

However, in the mid-1970s, missiologist Ralph Winter pointed out that evangelicals have an imbalanced distribution of global missionaries between the reached and unreached populations of the world. In *All Humanity in Mission Perspective*, a study of 253,000 missionaries, only 24,300 (9.6%) were pioneering among all unreached peoples. Today the number of evangelical missionaries who are on the ground in mission to Muslim unreached people groups totals near 3%. Though the disparity continues to improve, still the task is daunting. Nevertheless, we are encouraged that more young people than ever before are stepping forward to engage Muslims with the truth about Jesus.

Three vitally important global trends demonstrate the genius of the Holy Spirit. First, the worldwide Church is praying for Muslims as never before in history. Global Initiative's Jumaa Prayer Fellowship (www.jumaaprayer.org) has been leading the Church to pray for Muslim peoples since 1981. Next, God is calling national churches from almost every region of the world, especially the global south, to go to Muslim peoples, and they are positively responding. Last, He is calling the local Church worldwide to engage diaspora Muslims who are coming to their communities. All these trends result in more and more genuine apostolic efforts to reach Muslim peoples with the truth about Jesus.

Global Initiative team members are ready to come to your church to help train your people to share the truth about Jesus with Muslims in your area. Remember: Missions is not where, but whom! 

Muslim World News



Islamic Council's Right to Intervene

Malaysia

The Malaysian Court of Appeal has dismissed an application by the Federal Territories Islamic Council to intervene in a Christian's case over her fundamental right to use the word Allah.

Jill Ireland, a 33-year-old clerk in Sarawak, had eight “spiritual” CDs seized at an airport in 2008, as she attempted to bring them into the country from Indonesia. They had the word Allah in the titles.

Her case has been going through the courts at the same time as a much more high-profile case over the right of the *Herald* Catholic weekly paper to use the word Allah for God. However, the *Herald* editor, Rev. Lawrence Andrew finally lost a seven-year legal battle when the Federal Court finally ruled he can no longer call God “Allah” in the publication.

In that ruling, the Federal Court agreed with the government that the use of Allah in the *Herald* would confuse Muslim Malays and therefore adversely promote the Christian faith among them.

However, in Jill Ireland's case, in July 2014 the Kuala Lumpur High Court ordered the Home Affairs Ministry to return the discs to her. But the Kuala Lumpur High Court then refused to address her constitutional question on the right to use the word.

In a countersuit, Ireland has also sought a resolution on her constitutional right to use Allah because the High Court only ruled on the grounds of the CDs' return.

Convert's Appeal at Risk

Egypt

Egyptian lawyer Karam Ghobrial has managed to find and visit his client, Egypt's most publicly-known Christian

convert Mohammed Hegazy, in Cairo's Tora Prison. The whereabouts of Hegazy, the first Egyptian Muslim to fight a legal case to change his religious identity to Christian in 2007, had become a puzzling concern to his defense lawyer. Hegazy is now appealing against a conviction by a lower Egyptian court on three misdemeanor charges, all linked to his arrest in the city of Minya, 135 miles south of Cairo, in December 2013.

The last time Ghobrial saw Hegazy was at his Dec. 28, 2014, appeal hearing in the Misdemeanor Court in Minya. On that day, Hegazy was acquitted on two of the charges, which overturned the initial court's five-year jail sentence, but he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment on the third: “filming Muslim Brotherhood demonstrations without permission and spreading false news harmful to national interests”. In fact, Hegazy had already served more than a year in jail since his arrest, so he was immediately eligible for release, but the judge's written verdict is still pending.

Hegazy still faces separate charges for “insulting Islam” on an old case revived against him last July by the Supreme State Security Prosecution in a district of Cairo. Due to longstanding prohibitions against apostasy, a Muslim who abandons his faith is considered to have committed the ultimate blasphemy against Islam. According to a 2013 Pew Research poll, 88 percent of Egyptian Muslims favor the death penalty for anyone leaving Islam.

In early December, the Episcopal Bishop of Egypt and the Middle East Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis declared publicly that Egyptian Muslims who become Christians should be issued new personal identity cards and other official documents, just as the state routinely grants to citizens from other religions who convert to Islam. The Anglican leader noted that although the Egyptian Constitution guarantees freedom of belief, “not all provisions are enforced on the ground.” — *World Watch Monitor*

The Local Church

Continued



Maranatha Chapel was a strong missions-giving and sending church. The founding pastor and his wife, Steve and Vicki Warner, built a mighty church and had faithfully pastored for twenty-four years. As the Lord was changing their pastoral ministry to another church we were invited to share with this great congregation.

That night we shared our vision of what we saw the Lord putting together; congregations of varying languages and from many geographical locations. We would be one church with many languages. We did not want the members of the church to be surprised when change began to take place. We even asked them not to vote us in as their pastors if this was not what they desired. The church already had pockets of eastern Europeans, Hispanics, Arabs and Asians, but the majority remained Caucasian. For years many in the church had been praying for diversity.

In January of 1999 we were voted in as pastors with 99% of the vote. God was calling us to move the church to a new level of missions. There were huge cultural neighborhoods; Hispanics to the north; Arabs to the west, African-Americans to the east, and large groups of Eastern Europeans mixed in the neighborhoods.

We began our journey of change with much prayer. Through the leadership of my husband Doug, the senior pastor, new strategies unfolded that connected us to powerful resources. We sought opportunities to connect with ethnic churches in our area and intentionally planned meetings for the congregations to share worship together. We decided to have “Christmas Around the World” — and invitations were sent to a Haitian French-speaking church, a Spanish-speaking church and an Arabic-speaking church. Each was given instructions to share fifteen minutes on the subject of Christmas in their culture. Each group sang songs and gave a short narrative of how they celebrated Christmas. In order to encourage these congregations, each pastor was presented with a love offering from our Fellowship.

Next we accepted a wonderful challenge from Chi Alpha university ministries in Chicago. The challenge was to meet with Chinese masters and doctoral students — and help introduce them to American culture. It was called “Friendship Fellowship” and over 30 families were assigned students. We introduced the students to American food and different kinds of recreation. For the final part of the day all the families and students met at the church for a Thanksgiving celebration.

Reaching Muslims

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At the celebration we sang hymns of thanksgiving and praise. Then several people from our church shared the meaning of Thanksgiving and what their family did to celebrate. Before concluding with desserts, coffee and tea, we asked if any of the students would like to comment about their experience. One student came to the front and gently and respectfully said, “I am Buddhist, but I have never felt so much kindness and warmth from anyone as I have felt this day and now this event tonight. Thank you for our time together.” As result of these intentional events the people in our congregation began to feel this was something they could do; meet people from different ethnic backgrounds and languages.

Our next step toward change included over 30 of our English speakers enrolling in our six-week long Spanish language classes. The students were excited and tried very hard to learn the language. It was such a positive experience that many of our people who had enrolled in the Spanish classes became teachers for our English as a Second Language classes (ESL).

The second year we progressed by starting church-based English as a Second Language classes. The classes were offered free, and became a bridge to different language groups. The bridge continues today, after 15 years, to connect with the lives of Africans, Arabs, Chinese, Hispanics, Italians, Lithuanians, Polish, Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, and Vietnamese students.

New immigrants come daily into our communities and each has come for different reasons. They come with different labels, some as social refugees, leaving everything behind, and still others come for economic reasons. Some are sponsored by families and have community connections that help them financially, and provide support for their acquisitions to their new communities. Many are joining family members already in the United States. Some have no support system within a language community; they simply come in order to survive. Whatever the reason, they continue to enter our neighborhoods with different cultures and languages.

With willing hearts and hands, Maranatha Chapel continued taking steps toward the different cultural groups. Exodus 35:21a, says, “Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing...” Then in Exodus 36:1, we read “The Lord [has]

put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service.” As we opened our hearts, the Lord opened doors. We began to see students filter into the various language congregations. It actually flowed both ways; some within the congregations were encouraged by entering the language school and others within the language school were encouraged by entering the church programs.



We had two Spanish-speaking families in our church already but we began praying for more. The Lord sovereignly began placing Spanish-speakers in our church. One particular week my husband received a phone call from Brother Hector Hunter, the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Cuba. It was short notice but he felt led to come and speak to our congregation on the following Sunday. That Sunday a couple of Spanish-speaking families joined us in our English service. We asked them if they were friends of Brother Hunter and if they spoke English. They said no to both questions. They continued “We simply felt compelled to come to this church today.” They had no idea the service would be bilingual; the Lord simply told them to come. That day our Spanish-speaking congregation was born!

About a year later, actually not long after 9/11, a mature group of Arab Christians were invited to be a part of our church. We explained our vision of one church/many languages. They were deeply moved that we would extend open arms for Arabs to be a vital part of our church, especially after the terror attacks in New York. That night the shekinah glory of God entered the sanctuary; where the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking congregations welcomed the start of the Arabic-speaking congregation. The very presence of God was drawing our hearts together.

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As the change began to happen there seemed to be an undercurrent pulling against the change. Through much prayer and fasting, God began to perfect His church. Sometimes this perfecting releases people from the church. Their vision is not the same and the Lord releases them. It came fast and furious; in one summer we lost an entire Christian education department. Many simply could not adjust to the change. But God was perfecting His church as the hues and shades of complexions changed within our church and its various “congregations.”


Along the way I grew frustrated that we did not have more Arabs in our English school. A U.S. missionary working with Arabs gave me some great advice. She told me to pray for a woman of peace to come to our school. As the Director of a church-based ESL program, I began to regularly pray for women of peace among the Arab community to come to our classes. They began to come — and in turn they told others about an English school that

accepts them and shows great warmth and kindness. This “cool drink” of English is offered in the name of the Lord and we have begun to experience a greater connection with more Arabic-speaking young adults. Our Arab pastor's wife has been given a God-appointed open door from Arab businesses. Many have invited her to leave brochures about our English classes in their business establishments. Through the English classes ladies have come to Women's Ministry events at our church and relationships have developed to the point that opportunities to share about Jesus Christ have transpired.

When a church offers hearts and hands to the Lord; He provides the skills to do all manner of work. Through language classes, cultural integration and language congregations, we have been the “church serving.” Using gifts of friendship, mutual respect and sharing, we have built bridges and friendships with our immigrant neighbors.

Because we made the choices to open our hearts to whomever the Lord sent our way, interesting things began to happen. One day while in my office I had the privilege to receive a phone call in which the conversation went like this: “Hello” the person on the other end of the line abruptly stated. Then “We are Muslims and want to convert to Christianity. Can you help us?” I spoke with the Arab pastor and he agreed to immediately contact the family.

While back in their home country, the husband and wife had decided they would come to America — and as a couple — they would convert. As they became a part of the church I asked them how they knew we had an Arabic-speaking congregation. They said they didn't and simply looked in the phone book. The only church number they saw was Maranatha Chapel. The couple is now a part of our Arabic-speaking congregation and both are studying for ministry. God did the impossible and used our church and efforts to accomplish His will and plan.

Our vision still remains one church/many languages. Ask yourself this question: “When will I, as a believer in Christ, step beyond the doors of my house and touch the nations within my reach?” And each church should ask: “When will we, as a body of believers in Christ, step beyond the doors of this church and touch the nations in our neighborhoods?” God has brought “the nations” to us. The church must find creative ways to reach them with the gospel. May He find us faithful in words and deeds! 

Prayer Profile: **Ruarha Bedouin — Algeria**



The economy of the 75,000 Ruarha Bedouins of Algeria is primarily based on raising livestock. At the core of their society is the need for migration, which is determined by the supply of water and the availability of grazing lands. Ruarha Bedouins are basically untouched with the gospel. They are 100% Muslim.

1. Pray that the Holy Spirit will grant favor to missions personnel wanting to reach the Ruarha.
2. Pray that the Lord will place the Ruarha on the hearts of Algerian Christians.



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Friday, May 1, 2015. Please pray

...for the softening of Muslim hearts when they see how Christians respond to persecution.
...for an Institute of Islamic Studies class at a major Asian seminary during May 4-9.
...for a Global Initiative team member who will conduct an Institute of Islamic Studies in Mongolia during May 4-15.

Friday, May 8, 2015. Please pray

...for the besieged country of Libya; 90% of its 6.2 million people are Muslim.
...for an Institute of Islamic Studies class at a major Asian seminary during May 8-16.
...for outreach ministries to immigrant Muslims in Western Europe.

Friday, May 15, 2015. Please pray

...for SAT-7 TV programs being broadcast daily to millions of Arabic-speaking Muslims.
...for the victims of Boko Haram's terror campaign in Nigeria.
...for an Institute of Islamic Studies class at a major Asian seminary during May 18-22.

Friday, May 22, 2015. Please pray

...for Muslim students in European universities to receive witness of Jesus Christ.
...for Muslims in Angola. Despite its location in southwestern Africa, Angola is home to approximately 250,000 Muslims.
...for Germany's 4 million Muslims. Germany has a larger Muslim population than Kuwait, Lebanon, or the UAE.

Friday, May 29, 2015. Please pray

...for expatriate Christian business people who work in restricted-access Muslim countries.
...for Bosnia/Herzegovina; 60% of its 3.8 million people are Muslims.
...for the 110,000 Kangeans in Java, Indonesia. They are almost 100% Muslim.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. – 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

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Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*



Friday, June 5, 2015. Please pray

- ...for an **Institute of Islamic Studies** in El Salvador during June 4-6.
- ...for the **3 million Tuaregs**, a Muslim unreached people group spread among eight African countries.
- ...for the **17 million Uyghurs**, a Muslim unreached people group, mostly in China.

Friday, June 12, 2015. Please pray

- ...for the **1 million Muslims** in the country of Georgia; with a total population 4.3 million.
- ...for **Somalia**, where lawlessness still prevails. 99% of its 10.8 million people are Muslims.
- ...for **South Korean missionaries** who are increasingly entering restricted-access Muslim countries.

Friday, June 19, 2015. Please pray

- ...for **protection and courage** for house church believers in Iran.
- ...for the **island nation of Fiji**; 7% of its 887,000 people are Muslims.
- ...for **Christian relief and development ministries** in Muslim countries.

Friday, June 26, 2015. Please pray

- ...for **Turkey**; 99% of its 80 million people are Muslims.
- ...for an **Institute of Islamic Studies class** at a midwest seminary during June 29-July 2.
- ...for the **Maldiv Islands**; 99.4% of its 351,572 people are Muslims.

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