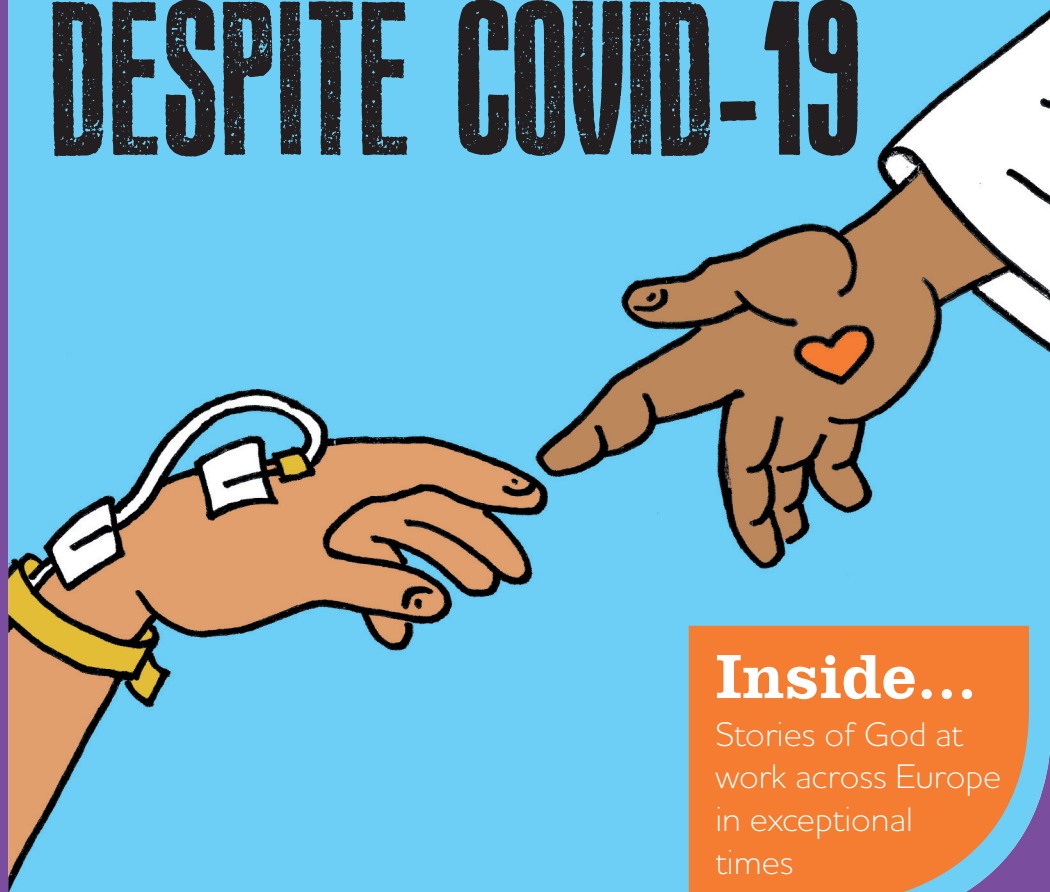


ecm outreach

newsletter of the european christian mission

www.ecmbritain.org

CONNECTING DESPITE COVID-19



Inside...

Stories of God at
work across Europe
in exceptional
times



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WE WANT TO SEE...

more people reaching UP to receive Jesus' amazing love



more people reaching OUT to share Jesus' love with those in need



more people living IN caring communities that show Jesus' love



more organisations working TOGETHER to love Europe for Jesus

CONNECTED NOTHING CAN STOP JESUS AND HIS CHURCH

From the British Director

Europe has faced many challenges over the last hundred years. A world war, the great depression, the rise of communism, the migrant crisis... And now the coronavirus pandemic.

For most of us COVID-19 may be the biggest adversity we have ever faced. Never before have we experienced our nation being confined to its homes, isolated from those we love, with many of our actions controlled by governmental decree.

Even our churches are closed. Or are they?

Across Europe we have been seeing God use the pandemic to spark His people into new and creative ways of caring and connecting with others. Whereas church services were once contained within the walls of buildings, they now can go anywhere through the power of the internet.

This issue of *ecm outreach* is filled with stories of how God is using ECM workers to connect with those around them despite the barriers created by COVID-19. These connections take many forms, from singing on balconies to virtual Bible studies to delivering food and protective equipment.

All these vital ministry efforts have continued because people like you have faithfully supported us and our workers across Europe through prayer and financial gifts. So thank you for being connected to us and enabling us to connect with those around us. But mainly, we are all connected to Jesus. And he WILL continue to build his church, COVID-19 or not.

Stay up to date on what's going on in ministry across Europe with Twitter and Facebook for quick updates, YouTube for short videos, and of course ongoing news and more is always available on our website.

See you online!

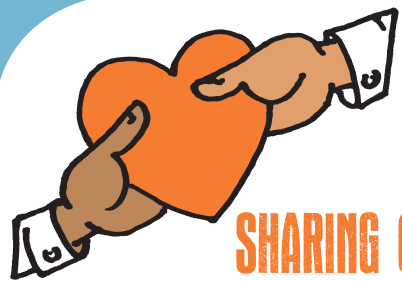


In Christ,

Kent Anderson,
British Director

PS By the time this prints hopefully many of our workers will be out of lockdown. We look forward to what the Lord has for us then!





HANDS ON

SHARING CHRIST'S LOVE ON THE FRONT LINE



COVID-19 has shone the spotlight on the needs in our communities. But while many people may want to help, for most just staying safely isolated is what's required. However some across Europe are managing to be involved in caring on the front line.



Serving with prayer and actions

In our last magazine we explained how the Good Samaritan Centre stepped out in faith when its minibus was destroyed in an accident to buy a replacement vehicle. And a good thing too! It is now fully engaged in the emergency response efforts in northern Córdoba, Spain.

After a request for help from regional health

authorities, the "new" van was driven almost a thousand miles while distributing protective equipment (some made by people in the local evangelical church, but most of them were made by volunteers in the town) to 24 nursing and assisted living facilities.

Having helped with health they moved on to meeting social needs. Many families in this region are unemployed, lack resources and shut up inside small dwellings with children. More than 260 individuals have now been cared for by the Good Samaritan Association and Pozoblanco church volunteers. Most of the foods being distributed was paid for by the local government (including the mayor, Mr Santiago Cabello, who has donated his entire salary for as long as the pandemic lasts).



Caring and training on the front line

Chris Downing works as a medical doctor in the Emergency Department (ED) of the Trauma Hospital in Tirana, Albania. As COVID-19 spread he helped hospital administrators to protect staff and patients by recommending clinical triage outside the ED and identifying a room suitable for isolating suspected coronavirus patients. Meanwhile, Sarah (Chris' wife) had to supervise the schooling from home of their four



Francis Arjona explains that they are "serving our community with our prayers and actions. And to this we add the spreading of God's Word – many people now want to talk about spiritual topics."

Everyone can make a difference

Jules Mercer-Wilson provides a personal insight into responding to the needs of the vulnerable in her local community just outside Madrid, Spain: "Today is day 36 for Sarah (her house mate) and I and a big day! During our lockdown, I've only been to the supermarket twice and the airport once, and she's only been to the fruit shop twice. Today, however, we went out and spent the morning with five others from our church. It was so exciting to see them and to talk

without using technology.

"We were helping with a project called Da Vida (give life), from Misión Urbana, which supports pregnant women and those with children under the age of three who are unable to provide food and nappies, etc., for their children. We worked unloading the van of supplies, stacking and storing them, creating a workable system, and bagging up basic, yet urgent, supplies for people.

"Others on our team of six were able to chat (at a safe distance of two metres) with the people to see how life's going for them. With some they were even able to pray."

On the home front

Some of our UK office staff have been able to minister to the needs of those around them by shopping for vulnerable neighbours, leafleting houses with details of help provision and collecting prescriptions. Ali Haddock (who combines working for ECM with caring for two school-aged boys) was able to help mobilise a leaflet drop for all the people in her local village.

AND OF COURSE THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU ARE DOING IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC!

children while handing over leadership of the local ECM team.

Now that lockdown has eased the number of trauma cases has risen again. Each day Chris sees people who have been injured on the roads and at work. A major encouragement this week has been that three junior doctors have joined the department for three months, working alongside him as they learn how to manage trauma.



VIRTUAL CHURCH

THE DOORS ARE CLOSED BUT THE CHURCH IS STILL OPEN

COVID-19 is driving innovation. Churches around the world are experiencing a revolution in finding ways to stay connected. Existing meetings are being adapted and new ones created to minister to people. Through technology our workers continue to broadcast the love of Jesus into people's hearts and homes across Europe.

Busy despite the lockdown

Sarah Deacon in Ljubljana, Slovenia, wrote earlier in lockdown, "Last night everyone received a text message saying that all public gatherings were forbidden and would result in fines. Most places are shut down and grocery shops are only allowing 20 people in at a time. It's surprising, therefore, that I'm still pretty busy.

"Most of my meetings are now taking place online and so I still have all of the work related to those to do. The big difference I'm finding now is that people are being a lot more intentional about the contact they're having with each other.

"Yesterday I was encouraged by my small group of teenage girls that I meet with regularly. One of the girls, Nova, had been reading Genesis in her quiet time and had questions. We were able to get together as a group to think through the issues together. This discussion was completely at their own instigation. It is definitely good news that they are using this time to try and understand what the Bible is saying."



Making discipleship last all week

David in Belgium writes, "We have seen an increase in new digital discipleship initiatives and people wanting to engage with them. Many believers are using this time to delve deeper into scripture and other aspects of their faith."

David's church in Kortrijk hasn't only taken its service online. Early every week church members receive a resource pack (which includes an audio sermon, recipes, a weekly challenge and more) themed to the next Sunday's service which helps them engage with God throughout the week."



Shaken by more than COVID-19

The pandemic isn't the only challenge our workers face, as Stephen Bell describes being in an earthquake in Zagreb, Croatia: "At 6.24 AM Sunday morning our world exploded, shook and trembled. 5.4 on the Richter scale may not sound like much to some, but when it is all happening directly underfoot it is rather different. 27,500 people had serious damage to their houses and 2000 buildings were not usable with 400 people displaced.

"All of this on top of the coronavirus crisis. Zagreb is in real lockdown and all access to the Adriatic islands is blocked to non-islanders. As 25% of the Croatian GDP comes from tourism, the crisis will outlive COVID-19. Now is the time to evangelise. Now is the time for the worldwide church to show its true colours and rise to the challenge."



Both challenged and encouraged

Berti Dosti writes, "In Lushnje and in the whole of Albania it seems like we're living in another world, with empty streets. Everywhere people talk about coronavirus; they are frightened and in panic for their lives.

"The 'Way of Peace' church is closed, but now we're having online services and also encouraging people through WhatsApp groups, sharing different testimonies and bible verses. We record the message of the week and share it with the groups using YouTube. It looked like social distancing would separate us from faith, but we see that Christians are encouraging, supporting and being close to each other.

"One of our important ministries is 'Victory School', which offers English, Italian and computer courses. It is now suspended, as are all other educational institutions, which has meant financial difficulties for the 28 employees that cannot get their monthly wages."



WE PRAY YOUR CHURCH IS ALSO FINDING EXCITING NEW WAYS TO CONNECT WHERE YOU ARE!



BUSINESS AS USUAL...?

KEEPING THE MOMENTUM GOING



ECM has been sharing the love of Christ across Europe for 115 years. During this time we have seen a lot of challenges: world wars, the great depression, communism... So we know that this time too will pass. But for now, our workers continue to connect with people despite the obstacles.

Giving time to others

Edgar Alvarez in Madrid, Spain, says, "The virus has taken our communities in a direction that few could have imagined in a very short space of time. Conversations like 'what are your plans for Easter?' have quickly changed to 'how are you?' and 'do you need anything?' Chats with neighbours who often rushed passed us

on the stairwell have changed to personal chats each night on our balconies when we all clap our emergency services and catch up.

"Jane is also busy being a teacher from home, dealing with a whole system that her school put into place two weeks ago. Her students report to her daily and receive material and instructions from Jane for their work."

Still working, but in a new way

Gary and Ioana Stoll wrote, "The situation in Romania continues to get more difficult. The number of cases is growing and there have been doctors and medics infected with the virus, including an outbreak this week at the hospital in Suceava. And a pastor there has just recently died as a result of contracting the virus.

"But we are still working. Ioana is homeschooling Evelyne and Gary is working on the 'mission field' – however it is more like a 'digital mission field!'

"We have been sending vidoes of home-made children's clubs every week to children in the villages of Piatra Neamt, Bodesti and Bargauani. These videos don't compare with a physical meeting, but they have had an impact in that children and their families have received the gospel in their own homes.

"The youth have also been meeting via Zoom and videos have been made for them ahead of these meetings. We have also completed our Bible and Mission Training for the academic year using Zoom. Nine young people completed the course and will receive a certificate. These young people are actively involved in God's work amongst children and teens with us."



Pray for those ready to engage

David and Holly work in Belgium, where David heads up the national Mahabba network, Mahabba seeks to help Christians engage positively with Muslims by facilitating opportunities for prayer, care and understanding.

David writes, "I've managed to have some great online conversations with people about faith and hope in the midst of trials since this outbreak has started. Please pray specifically for Elias* and Harun* (who are both Muslims).

I recently spoke with Elias* for nearly two hours explaining why the son of man needed to suffer and die on a cross, and Harun* has expressed an interested to study the Bible together.

"On Wednesday we'll be live-streaming a short 'service' for people in the asylum-centres to watch. This is a new initiative from Mahabba Belgium and our partner Gave Veste. Please pray that many will tune in to hear a message from the Bible."

*Names have been changed

On the home front

Before the current pandemic, Rita Rimkiene organised a regular large multi-cultural gathering in Gloucester called World Cafe. Migrant or local, Muslim or Christian, it served as a mixing pot for cultures and a great way to build relationships over wonderful ethnic food. Since lockdown World Cafe has grown into the largest food supplier for refugees and asylum seekers in the city, supporting more than 100 families each week. Even though there isn't enough funding to keep meeting these needs yet, Rita is stepping out in faith and determination to serve her community in Gloucester.



REMEMBER THAT GOD WANTS TO USE YOU DURING THIS TIME AS WELL. KEEP LOOKING OUT FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO LOVE AND SERVE.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

WALLS CANNOT STOP LOVE



You've heard many a sermon on 'love your neighbour'. And you probably do want to. But it's a struggle to even know our neighbours in today's busy and insular world. Now, with COVID-19 challenging society's accepted norms, community spirit is opening up new opportunities all around us.

Bringing Jesus into the conversation

Terry and Christine Miller in Córdoba wrote, "Running an online English exchange discussion group has been a wonderful

incorrectly used the phrase 'we don't take death for granted because we don't like it'. To this Christine responded, 'No! Death is certain. We take having a tomorrow for granted'. His response was to agree that death was certain

opportunity to hear more of people's life stories and what really matters to them, their doubts and concerns and have an opening to speak gospel truth into their lives. Last night Juan Carlos asked Christine how she measured how good or bad she was. This gave Christine the opportunity to share her testimony of how it was God's perspective of who she was in relation to him that mattered most. Opportunities like this come nearly every week now that it's a reduced group and Christine is able to push back on people's responses.

"Last week the group was looking at the phrase 'to take something for granted'. Juan Carlos again, who is a self proclaimed atheist,



Love over the balcony

Peter and Silje Lilly, who live in Montpellier, France, explain their situation: "This lockdown has meant that we have got to know our neighbours very well, especially the family living below us as our first floor balcony overlooks their garden. We play a lot of music on the balcony and have started singing with them most days! We have also been having Skype dinners with some of our other friends and have had yet others asking for prayer. COVID-19 also means that all summer music events will be cancelled, so people will be really eager to come to any music event that we hold when we are allowed to." *Get to know the Lillys better on page 14.*

but that he did take life for granted, and that he needed to change his thinking about these things. Please pray for these conversations that God will continue to move people to search for him."

"Even their daughter is involved. "Each evening Esther has also been giving a mini concert from our balcony to all our neighbours which has been well received and opened up conversations amongst the neighbours. Please pray for these conversations that God will open the door for opportunities to testify to our faith and hope in Jesus."

Love begins at home

You'd probably think that Rachel and Lemuel Feliciano in Lugo, Spain, already had enough to do. But despite facing the challenges of COVID-19, taking a busy youth ministry from face to face to online, and MS symptoms, they have welcomed a young woman who is pregnant and needed refuge from an abusive partner into their home.

NOW IS A TIME LIKE NEVER BEFORE TO CONNECT (AT A DISTANCE) WITH THOSE WHO ARE NOT AT A DISTANCE!



Hope and comfort extends beyond Easter

Jim and Christine Memory in Aguilar de la Frontera, Spain share, "Jim continues to write a daily devotional thought from the Psalms relating to life in the context of coronavirus, which is sent to a group of folk from our town not connected to the evangelical church. He had intended to finish on Easter Sunday, but they have been so well received that he is going to carry on for the time being. Please pray for these messages and that they will bring hope and comfort, and ultimately that people will come to know Christ in the future."



KEEPING ECM CONNECTED

A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES

Together despite the distance

In our last issue of *ecm outreach* we mentioned our international gathering planned for early 2020. Every two years everyone connected to ECM is invited to a "Biennial", which requires a two year cycle of preparation. Just a few weeks before it was due to start COVID-19 hit! Despite all the planning and bookings, we had to cancel – which was soon proved to be the right decision when borders closed and quarantines were put in place.

Undeterred, a team from across the ECM family went to work. In several weeks they developed a new virtual programme, organised speakers, recorded talks, planned breakout small groups... in the end connecting at least 200

A lot goes on in the background to support our ministries. No organisation can keep connected and successful unless it effectively manages people, supports projects and deals with administration. As the Bible says, we all fit together as one body with different parts. So how has COVID-19 impacted ECM behind the scenes?



people online for three days of worship, prayer, sharing and learning! We also had prayer rooms in five languages, chat rooms for 'coffee', and video and photo message boards where people could connect.

David James in Austria says, "this was the craziest thing we have ever done: hosting a conference from our sofa with one technician in our lounge and the other 1000 km away. But the feedback that we have received has been fantastic. It was clearly worth the scramble to make this work. People are so appreciative, that during this time of sadness, loneliness and with the disappointment of the conference not taking place in Croatia, they could come together as family."

CONNECTED



Still open for business

Here in the British office we have been working hard to be here for both you and our workers. Our office team is now working mostly from home, only venturing out for essential work such as banking or managing post. The very week before lockdown we went live with a new database (computerised system to manage our operations), which had been planned for two years. The previous one would not have been usable with remote working so we're grateful for God's hand of blessing in preparing us for this at just the right moment.

We have also adopted new ways of connecting between the office staff and with our field workers, increasing our use of

WhatsApp, Zoom and telephone calls. Hopefully you, our supporters, will have had nothing more than a slight delay on any administration and feel that we are still very much 'open for business'!

We've been able to connect with all of our field workers to offer them support and encouragement, even welcoming some into our new twice weekly Zoom prayer meetings. It's been amazing to see how everyone continues to be connected, in whatever way they can, to keep sharing Christ's love in Europe.



A reminder of why we're here

We do all of this so that people like Andy and Andrea Warner in Spain can do their ministry. They describe it as "a small international group of Christians and friends who identify ourselves as The Bridge, La Viña (The Vineyard) Castelló. Our former weekly gatherings have become weekly virtual gatherings, using Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, or any other tool that enables us to chat and maintain a form of community. At the end of the day, that is what all of our members want: to have relationship with one another and to be encouraged and equipped in knowing and sharing Jesus more. In fact our Sunday morning virtual meetings have encouraged friends from Romania, England and in a middle Eastern country to connect in and participate. Our 'attendance' has gone up, rather than down!"



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ONGOING FAITHFUL PRAYER AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT!





Missionary focus

NOT A TIME TO HIDE

Preparing for change despite the crisis

Recently we caught up with Peter and Silje Lilly who were still in lockdown in Montpellier, France.

Hi Pete and Silje! How are you coping with lockdown as a family?

We are now coming up to two months of lockdown. We've only been out to buy essentials for us and Silje's parents (as her mum is at risk) and for our son Gabriel to let off some steam.

What is the vision for ministry that the Lord has given you?

God has put a passion in our hearts to build relationships and share the gospel with secular French people. Most people here are spiritually curious but reject anything that looks like traditional religion. That's why a lot of our work is breaking down barriers so that people can have the opportunity to hear the gospel rather than just their own presuppositions. It's why we engage with people creatively through music, art, philosophical discussions and sharing meals – creating a safe space for conversation.

What initiatives have enabled you to keep serving despite the challenging situation?

The lockdown has had a big impact on our work. It's meant we've been unable to run our regular activities, like the art club, philosophical discussions and bible study. Despite this we've seen different opportunities opening up.

It's provided the perfect occasion to get to know our new neighbours downstairs. We've had lots of 'socially distanced' meetings as our balcony overlooks their garden and we've even started singing together! We've had Skype meals with friends we can't visit, where we have been able to chat and eat together. It's not the same as doing



it in person, but it means we can keep the friendships alive.

We've even had prayer requests coming in from unlikely people, and are thankful for the opportunity that this provides to share God's love in the midst of people's fear. Silje has been calling a lot of single friends who are especially isolated at this time.

We've also been exploring using technology to build relationships with our UK supporters, trusting that the Lord will provide the financial support we need as we come out of lockdown and scale up our work.

So what comes next?

This article is the perfect chance to announce that in June we hope to move to a new community that doesn't have a single evangelical church. It's named Maugiou and only is 15 minutes away from Montpellier. We want to take all that we've learned here and start a new work there, where the need is even greater.

This is not the time to be hiding away but to be preparing. God is at work and we want to be ready to move as new opportunities open up again!

CONNECTED IN OUR HEARTS

It is with sadness we report that Keith Granville Buckler MBE passed away with COVID-19 on 6th May 2020.

He, with his wife Janet's support, was a faithful supporter, donor, prayer warrior and friend to ECM Britain for many decades – even serving as chairman of our board of trustees.

Keith will be remembered for his unassuming manner, loyalty, hospitality, selfless investment of time, and generosity to people and projects, but mostly for his straight forward godliness. While chairing the Seedfield Trust he stimulated giving to many good causes including a national ECM worker in the Balkans for twenty years.

Pastor John Piper says that there are only three types of people in churches: goers, senders and the disobedient. Keith was certainly a sender and, while we are the poorer for his passing, heaven has gained an eternal worshipper.



HELP CHANGE EUROPE

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I wish European Christian Mission to reclaim tax on any gift I have given in the last 4 years from this date ____/____/____. I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give or have given in the last four years.

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