



## A shoot in the desert comes to life



From left: Micah, Ali, Jed, Rich, Jonah & Gabriel.

### BY ALI M

“The fires have already blown through Europe. There’s nothing left there to burn.” So said a visiting friend recently, quoting a missiologist. Indeed, why go to Berlin with the task of preaching the gospel? It is the very place where only a short train ride away lies the birthplace of the Reformation. God’s word came to Australia from Europe. Why are we going back there? We are back there because the gospel needs to go to people who have not yet heard about it but also to people who have forgotten all about it.

After two years of living in Berlin, we can assure you unequivocally that

Germany is a hard land in desperate need of Christ and the rivers of the gospel of life. When we were involved in church planting work in Sydney we felt the comfort and structure of a strong church around us. A little bit like planting a tree amongst a thriving forest. In our church plant in Berlin, we feel like a small shoot, trying to press its way through dry and parched earth. But God is faithful. We have really been blessed to see his hand in many ways. We shouldn’t be surprised because we know so many are praying for us!

We have so much to learn in this incredibly diverse city. We haven’t just changed contexts; we feel like we are navigating many different contexts all

at once! One thing is certain: there is much work to be done here and it’s really a miracle that God uses even us.

So what have we seen? Berlin is known as the city of singles. We’ve met young people broken by ultra liberal sexually ‘free’ lifestyles. We’ve seen a culture where people are drawn to the latest ‘exciting thing’ but are then lured by whatever is happening next. We’ve seen chins drop to the floor when we tell people that we have four kids and have been married for nearly 20 years. They can’t believe that’s even possible anymore.

The Christian groups in the universities are very small. In the high

**CONTINUED PAGE 2**

## Can you help?

We as ECM have sent Richard & Ali to Berlin, trusting that God has raised them up to share the good news there and will provide for all of their financial needs. We give thanks to God for their faithful labour and want to do all we can to facilitate their work.

You can support them in this worthy cause by a gift of \$30, \$50 or \$100 per month for one year. Any donation can make a difference and is greatly appreciated.

Please see giving options below:

- For Direct Deposit the details are NAB, Australia. BSB: 0821 171, Account No: 509197512. Please reference gifts as “RAM + your initial and surname”.
- For cheques please make them out to “European Christian Mission” with a note saying for Richard & Ali.
- For credit cards please call the office on 02 9747 5446 or contact us through the link below.



# A SHOOT IN THE DESERT COMES TO LIFE

FROM PAGE 1

schools, the lunchtime groups are the territory of LGBTI awareness groups. In our kids' primary school, the Protestant scripture teacher teaches the 'values' of the Bible while maintaining that the events recorded in it aren't actually true. We've seen church plants that tolerate sexual sin in the leadership; established churches that have softened on homosexuality, and in the large traditional church down the road where Dietrich Bonhoeffer was once the pastor, a Star Wars-themed service was recently held.

However... in the small church plant we are part of, we have seen Muslims softening and open to hearing about and receiving Jesus. We have seen mentally ill people become noticeably calm and of a right mind. Many people have been surprised to experience 'real Christian love'. We have enjoyed a spirit of unity in our very diverse team. Younger members of the congregation are seeking to bring the gospel in their own mission fields of university or work.

We are constantly humbled that God is present with us and at work through our team here. It's a precious, precious gospel that He has entrusted into our very feeble hands. Be encouraged that God's fire DOES continue to burn in Europe. He hasn't forgotten about the generations here who haven't heard of Him or who have inherited a false and deluded picture of who He really is.

Thank you for your love and support! Ask the Lord where He would have you serve Him. Berlin is in need of the light of Christ.

## STAYING IN TOUCH



### Richard & Pinnuccia Wilson

#### Church leadership development in Trento, Italy

In April, the church at Trento finally moved into the new hall that it had purchased. Maybe it is appropriate to have the first Protestant owned church in the city where the Council of Trent was held, in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The hall is three times as big but costs less than the old hall we had been renting. All this extra room certainly gives a different feel to the services and it makes the Sunday School a lot easier to teach because the children have room to move. If you would like to see the hall for yourself, you can watch a video of it at <http://www.laparola.net/hall.wmv>

The church's desire is that the hall will not be just a meeting place once a week, but where many can regularly experience God's blessing. Pray for good relationships with the neighbourhood, that our ministries (university, refugees, sport, etc) can go from this hall to witness to others and that people will come to hear God's voice proclaimed.



### Alex Kowalenko

#### Serving in Lisbon, Portugal

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is a big topic in Europe this year. Not only is Portuguese Bible Institute (PBI) preparing a preaching conference based on Romans, I too have been teaching about the Reformation at PBI and at church. This has led to interesting conversations about what the gospel is and what we should be doing in church. I noticed the youth leader being somewhat confused about this and have started to meet up with him during the week to discuss this. This is a positive step, as he is keen to learn more, but is limited in time due to his professional job.

The sad news is that the Reformation anniversary is being buried under the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of Mary in Portugal (Fatima) to three shepherd children. Pope Francis is to make two of them "saints" according to the doctrine of the Roman church. The government has given half a day off for all public servants, and there is full media publicity for his arrival. It is disappointing to see this highlighted in Portugal rather than how we can approach God through Jesus Christ, the truth which Martin Luther recovered during the Reformation.



### Stephan & Claudia Pohn

#### Serving in Dornbirn, Austria

In Austria, full-time-national pastors are a rare species, especially those that are fully funded by the church they serve. Therefore, when Stephan stepped out in 2012 as the first full-time pastor of this church, it was an exercise of trust in God's providence for all involved, prayerfully hoping that this ministry adventure would last beyond the initial two years. Thus, it is with much thankfulness to the Lord that the church welcomed 11 new members in April, almost five years down the track. These new members were already believers but joined the church for geographical reasons. It is our prayer that this growth in numbers and commitment will lead to growth that is harder to measure: growth in unity, maturity and witness to those around us who haven't yet heard and grasped the good news.

Another area of growth for which we are thankful, are the children. Nine children were brought forward by their parents to express their desire and commitment to bring them up in the knowledge of God. Pray for faithful stewardship of all God-given growth!



### Matt & Louise George

#### Serving in ECM office, Sydney

It has now been almost a year since returning from Portugal where we served for 12 years. There have been a lot of changes: "new" country, new ministry, new church (Ashfield Presbyterian and later this year, Scots church, Wynyard), new child, and for Anabella, a new school.

How is Anabella coping? She has a couple of good friends at school, and excellent Christian studies and Sunday School teachers, who along with us are nurturing her in the faith. However, she misses Portugal every day, especially the time when we were a tight-knit family of three. She is warming to her new life here and loves Cal, even though he is sometimes hard to handle!

How is Cal? He's a different boy from the one we got a year ago! When the Bulgarian social worker said that after a year of adoption he would probably be twice his body weight, we didn't believe her, yet that is basically true. He's gone from 9 to 17kg! Other marked changes: he concentrates much better, is saying a lot more words and has started to run and jump a little. Praise God for the way he is guiding and blessing our family through these changes.



### Mark & Gina Borg

#### Preparing for ministry, Malta

We are continuing to prepare for departure, sharing about God's beautiful work in Malta. We were overwhelmed by how many Maltese people we met during the Parkes Elvis Festival Gospel Service. Some were believers with a heart for their homeland and others curious about mission in a Catholic context. Aside from an opportunity to explicitly share the gospel with thousands, we had some great conversations and prayer ministry.

Regarding partnership development: God is faithful. He is holding us through the valleys and encouraging us with provision from unexpected places. In the same week we were dealing with some disappointing news, God provided a church seeking to support us, without our prompting. A real highlight were these words from a friend in response to our request for partnership: "100% yes, yes and yes for prayer support. And your SMS is so well timed - I was just saying to (my wife) that I am keen to find another family to financially support."

Also encouraging has been regular Skype contact with a new community of home schooling families in Malta.

## ECM UPCOMING EVENTS AND NEWS

# NEW BEGINNINGS

## ECM AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2017

4th - 6th of July

This year all supporters and friends of ECM will have the opportunity to attend during the day, our annual conference at Naamaroo, Lane Cove, NSW. Join us for any or all of the three days. The daily program will include a talk from Matt George from John's gospel under the theme of 'New Beginnings'. We will also hear from ECM-Australia's newest missionaries, Mark and Gina Borg (Malta). There will be a kids' program running 9.30am -12.30pm.

<b>WHERE:</b>	Naamaroo Uniting Venue, Lady Game Drive, Chatswood.
<b>TIME:</b>	9am to 1.30pm (includes morning tea and lunch).
<b>R.S.V.P.:</b>	11th June (please phone the office or email Amanda at <a href="mailto:admin.oz@ecmi.org">admin.oz@ecmi.org</a> ).
<b>DAY RATE COST:</b>	\$50 per adult (13 and above), \$30 per child (free under the age of five). Payment is required by 11th June. If cost is an issue please get in touch with us.

**ecm** EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN MISSION (ECM) *would like to invite you to:*

# CONSIDER EUROPE ?

It is estimated that 97% of Europeans do not truly know Jesus. Come and hear a Bible talk from Dominic Steele and testimonies from our missionaries about how Europe, the birthplace of the Reformation, needs to rediscover its central truths. Join us as well for cheese tasting and other European treats!

<b>WHEN:</b>	7pm on the 8th of July.
<b>WHERE:</b>	Village Church Annandale Cnr of Johnston St and Booth St.
<b>COST:</b>	\$5 per person (under 12 are free). Purchase tickets through <a href="https://www.trybooking.com/QFZM">https://www.trybooking.com/QFZM</a> (or by calling 02 9747 5446 or emailing Amanda at <a href="mailto:admin.oz@ecmi.org">admin.oz@ecmi.org</a> ).
<b>R.S.V.P.:</b>	29th June.

Meet Adi & Jennifer Grocott (and their three year old daughter Anna), who have been accepted as missionary candidates! ECM Australia will be sending the Grocotts to Romania, where they will be working in children's ministry. Please keep them in your prayers, especially with the impending arrival of their second child in July.



# Honour for prisoner turned preacher



Former inmate receiving award for prison ministry.

BY LINCOLN LAMBETH

Sentenced to a Spanish prison in the 1980s for armed robbery, drug trafficking and other crimes, Antonio Rodríguez Ortiz had hit rock bottom. The only use he had for the Bible was to use paper from the Gideons New Testaments to smoke marijuana. Yet God had big plans for Antonio. He heard the gospel for the first time while behind bars, and the truth set him free.

“When one of my old drug buddies told me of his conversion to Christ, and I realised I had used paper from the New Testament to roll a joint, I felt afraid and threw the

joint away,” he explained. “I saw that something really deep had happened in this friend, but I didn’t understand it.”

In February of 1988 Antonio gave his life to Christ. He experienced a radical transformation that led him to share Christ both with other prisoners and with his own brothers, who were also criminals and drug addicts.

Now in his 50s, Antonio has received the Bronze Medal for Penitentiary Social Merit in recognition of the ministry he has carried out in the prisons of Andalusia (southern Spain) since 1992.

Antonio Sanz Cabello, Delegate of the Government of Spain in Andalusia, awarded him the medal in Seville in front of political and law enforcement authorities and leaders of entities which collaborate with the work in prisons.

ECM’s Francis Arjona, who oversees evangelical ministry in the region’s prisons, commented: “For

all those present it was a very special moment, since in an ex-prisoner, the biblical passage of Jesus’ teaching, ‘You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,’ had become a reality.”

Antonio accepted the award in the name of the Autonomous Andalusian Evangelical Council and in the name of the evangelical churches, not only in Andalusia, but in all the Spanish state. “This award is for a whole team of men and women who faithfully carry out evangelical ministry in prisons,” he emphasised.

Ten years ago, there were only about 10 people in the region doing some prison ministry. Yet over the last decade, Antonio has developed teams for prison ministry in the region’s 17 prisons, which have a capacity of 19,000 inmates. Around 3,200 prisoners are seen each week with the support of 220 chaplains and assistants. Since then, 484 have been baptised, Francis said.



**European Christian Mission**

email [ecm.oz@ecmi.org](mailto:ecm.oz@ecmi.org)

website [www.ecmaustralia.org](http://www.ecmaustralia.org)



**AUSTRALIA**

PO BOX 15,  
Croydon, NSW 2132  
phone 02 9747 5446

**NEW ZEALAND**

PO BOX 19295,  
Avondale, Auckland 1746  
phone 09 828 6414

Spread the message! 'ECM News' is changing its look and frequency. Instead of receiving this publication bi-monthly, this will now be sent as a summer, autumn, winter and spring edition.

