

ECM NEWS

..... WINTER 2020

**GOSPEL MINISTRY IN
THE EPI-CENTRE P4**

**LOCKED DOWN
LOOKING UP P7**

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WAYS TO PARTNER WITH OUR MISSIONARIES

DURING THE PANDEMIC



PRAY

This is the most important means of support! Pray that God would bring an end to the sickness and deaths in Europe, and cause people to turn to him. Pray that God would meet the different needs of the missionaries during this period. And pray for a deepening trust in God's purposes through this time of uncertainty, grief and suffering for many.



GIVE

Some of our missionaries' regular supporters may be finding their incomes challenged. You may not be in this situation, or are even saving money by being at home more! This might be a time you can give a one-off gift to the ECM general fund, or to a specific missionary to help with increasing needs. See the inside back cover for details on financial giving.



CONTACT

While online methods mean we can get in touch easily, it's worth keeping in mind that missionaries may already be feeling 'Zoomed out' from lots of online interactions in their local context. But it's worth offering a catch up conversation. Sometimes just sending a short message, Bible verse, recommendation for a book or podcast can be the best encouragement.



SEND

We can't send missionaries at this time! But you might want to send a care package to a missionary to brighten their day. With postage costs from Australia being very high, we recommend making use of online orders or local businesses where they live. Gift vouchers for online book companies like Amazon can mean that they could order an ebook they've been wanting to read.



GATHER

We've all suddenly become proficient at online means of gathering. So why not invite some friends, your Bible study group or church to gather virtually and pray for our missionaries during this period. Contact the office if you'd like some information to be emailed to you with points for prayer. Also make the most of the opportunity we have coming up for our Zoom Prayer Meeting (see back cover).

EDITORIAL

EUROPE NEEDS YOUR PRAYERS



On 16 March, the *ECM News* committee met by Zoom to discuss this Winter issue. That morning I had read a newsletter sent from the Embroiderers' Guild of NSW that was seriously out of date. The editor was expressing delight at the green grass after the bushfires and she was enthusiastically endorsing upcoming classes that I knew would be cancelled. It read like some kind of bad joke. That very morning we were waking to rumours of a new reality. The death and tragedy in Italy, once seemingly far off, was arriving on this side of the world.

My opening comments of that meeting were to suggest we not produce the Winter issue of *ECM News*. I was concerned that any news we offered, going to print several weeks before you'd receive the news, would be as wildly outdated as the Guild newsletter. I was concerned that the postal system might not be operating once June arrived. I was concerned that our printer may no longer be in business! The rest of the committee reminded me, that with all the caveats in place of potentially outdated news, Europe was after all the epicentre of COVID-19 and perhaps we as European

Christian Mission should have something to say about that!

In this issue you will find reflections and reports from the ECM Director, Matt George, along with many of our missionaries in Europe. We left gathering that material to the last possible moment. However, we trust you'll understand if some of it proves redundant by the time you're reading it. It should remain a helpful insight into the experiences of those on the front line of what has been the very centre of the crisis. Most of our missionaries were under significant restrictions and lockdown weeks before we were in Australia and New Zealand. They may well still be under those restrictions as you read this.

We pray that this issue is encouraging, informative and thought-provoking. We trust that it will cause you to pray fervently for our missionaries and for the spread of the gospel in Europe. God's ongoing purposes are never out-dated. His purposes are always perfect at any time and in any situation.

May our hearts and those in Europe be all the more turned to Christ for God's glory.



Sharon Hall
Editor – ECM News

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pointing their index finger at a small, vintage-style globe on a desk. The globe is positioned over a map of Australia. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with greenery and a building. The text is overlaid on the image.

GOSPEL MINISTRY

AT THE CENTRE OF THE EPI-CENTRE

MATT GEORGE

COVID-19 has dramatically changed the way Christians across the world do life. Christianity is all about community, we are saved into the body of Christ, we are not meant to be alone. So if God made us for community, what does community look like when we can't go near each other? Christians around the globe are wrestling with these questions but not more so than in Europe, dubbed the 'epicentre' of the Coronavirus. There have been over four million confirmed cases and almost three hundred thousand deaths. How might this pandemic change the way ECM does ministry? ECM Australia/New Zealand National Director, Matt George, has sought to answer some of these questions.

ECM has about 80 church-planting projects around Europe, all with their own distinct flavour and way of responding to the crisis. With the current ban on gatherings, they have all had to make radical adjustments to the way they meet, serve each other and their communities and proclaim the risen king.

Church-planting is a very relationally intense form of ministry. It's ideally about sharing life, community and the gospel with a relatively small number of people. In a strange kind of way the restrictions have reminded us that this, and not our programs and strategies for growth, are the essentials. I think what's happening will really shape us for a long while to come to be more relational and less busy.

Evangelicals in Europe often have a tough time gaining credibility or being seen as useful or relevant. The current situation has given many new opportunities for our Christian communities to shine as lights for Jesus.

The Batik church plant in Berlin, Germany, is reaching out to many single mums who need help to do practical things like shopping or childminding. Evangelicals in Spain have been making more surgical masks for

health workers. Missionaries in lockdown have had more time to chat to neighbours in adjoining apartments. This has created relational warmth and an openness about the hope Christians have.

Many of our missionaries have continued serving in healthcare as one way of serving Christ and his mission. An ECM doctor working in a Christian clinic in Albania encouraged us all recently by not going home to the UK

“The current situation has given many new opportunities to shine as lights for Jesus ...”

when he had opportunity. He said, “God sent me to Albania to serve in times like this.” Karen Laird continues to serve in the area of community-based palliative care in Waterford, Ireland, as an Occupational Therapist. These contexts are, of course, far more stress-filled at this time.

Our missionaries have observed local believers taking more responsibility for their own discipleship and that of their families. So often in churches we want to spoon feed people and slot

them into programs which often doesn't create strong discipleship, but unhealthy dependence. ECM church-planters, in addition to online preaching and services, are taking the opportunity to teach their flock to feed themselves through more intentional one-on-one mentorship and wise resourcing. Karen in Ireland has been encouraged in her kids ministry in her church, that parents have taken responsibility to teach the material she provides for use in their homes.

Mission is something we do in partnership under God (Phil 1:3-6). Through the blessing of the internet, we currently have a unique opportunity to get to know missionaries and their ministries. Chloe Wolfson in Spain, has been able to share in the livestream services of her home church in Sydney. We in Australia and New Zealand have enjoyed connecting with livestream services of our missionaries. We can also make use of up-to-date prayer points and opportunity to gather easily to pray, online.

As I've talked to our missionaries, I've noticed that most of the families are struggling with work and family-related demands in the same confined space 24-7. It is very easy to succumb to



Above: A young woman looking over Berlin. Isolation has meant new opportunities, but for many, struggles.

frustration or lack of self-control as normal routines and coping mechanisms are removed. God's patience and love are needed as many families experience weeks of lock down and home-schooling. One of our Dutch missionaries recently shared about this: 'After five weeks of being with five people in a house with only short trips to the shop and our vegetable garden, we had an eruption yesterday. A full blowout! No, not from the kids, but from their mum. I was done! A plea of "I love you all very much but just go away and leave me alone," came forth accompanied by many tears and sobs.'

There are ways we can help as a mission and as supporters. As a mission, we're doing our best to proactively care for people who are generally more needy. Feelings of anxiety, grief and fear are very common. We thank God for

godly, competent people in ECM who are responsible for member care, and for the prayerful, practical support of those of you here in Australia and New Zealand.

As a mission, ECM seeks to raise up gospel workers who can share Christ's love in Europe. The reality is we can't send anyone to Europe for the foreseeable future and I'm not in a position to plan much at all, today, this week, next month. I'm learning to trust the Lord of the harvest more, to slow down and not worry so much. That said, this season is a golden opportunity for us to invest in our own discipleship and those around us, knowing God better and growing in mission effectiveness with a view to future opportunities. Let's be zealous to support those who are already there and any God might send in the future.

PLEASE PRAY

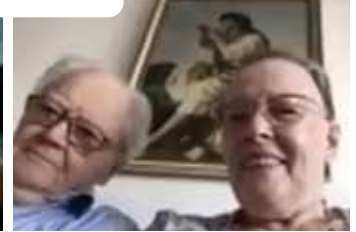
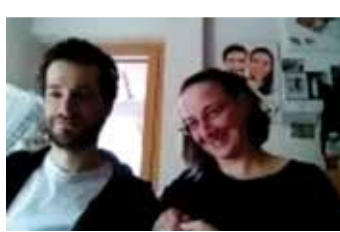
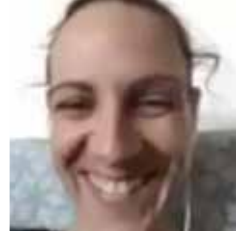
- Pray that our missionaries and their fellow local believers would grow as disciples of Christ and would be shining lights in a dark time.
- Pray for the missionaries' financial needs to be met as economies suffer globally. Pray also for those local believers who have lost jobs and struggle to pay rent. Pray for wisdom in responses to rapidly changing circumstances.
- Give thanks to God for the blessing the internet brings during this time. Pray that our missionaries would continue to make good use of the new ways this gives to reach others with the gospel.



LOCKED DOWN LOOKING UP



With most of Europe in significant lockdown restrictions for such a long time, instead of our usual *Prayer Fuel* feature we asked our missionaries to share their experiences. Please note the following pages' reflections were sent mid- April and so their situations may have changed since.



Above: The Pohns connect with others via video call in lockdown (see p. 13)



JAMES AND CAROLYNN WEBB

SPAIN

In Spain, we're in our sixth week of lockdown. Children haven't been allowed out of the house at all but thankfully from 27 April the Government has allowed a short daily outing to get some fresh air and exercise – we can't wait! Having said that, our boys have coped surprisingly well, enjoying more quality time with us. We thank God that we have a small patio, enabling us to get some fresh air and sun. We feel like we're in a little bubble while there's a lot of suffering around us.

One of our long-term aims had been to open a Christian hostel on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage that passes through our town. The day before lockdown we had a meeting with the Mayor of Zalla and he was very positive about the Council letting us use one of their buildings for the hostel. But now everything's changed and it looks unlikely that there will even be a Camino season in 2020. Plans were already moving forward slowly, and even more so now.

More positively, before COVID-19 we had been airing English radio programs for the local radio station and this has been something that we can continue to do from home. Each week we record two programs: one for kids to learn English, which our boys help with, and another with Christian music in English which we use to share gospel themes. We pray that they will help us to connect with more local people and that they will respond to the good news.

It has been terrible to see how overrun the Spanish hospital system has been and the

high number of deaths. Four members of the mother church who we partner with have had the virus, including the pastor's wife. They have all had a rough time but are thankfully



Above: The Webbs making the most of outside

home now. Other members of the church are now without work and this is very stressful with children to look after and rent to pay. The main church in Bilbao is also struggling to pay rent for the building.

One of our neighbours is the local Mayor and he is extremely busy and stressed right now. We try to encourage him and his family over the garden fence whenever possible!

We have been challenged that we had a weak theology of suffering, not always believing and seeing how God draws us closer to him through suffering. We are called to persevere through the tough times because God is using them to make us mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1). He is making us look more like Jesus through this crisis.



RICHARD AND PINNUCIA WILSON

ITALY

We have been on lockdown essentially since 9 March. After the initial flurry of activity and adjustments, life has settled down into a new normality. Even the extra hundreds of deaths per day are now normal rather than shocking. With all the family always at home, life is busier than usual, but it is always the same, with no additional activities or events outside of the house. We also have Pinuccia's parents with us. They were visiting us when the travel restrictions came in and can not return home to Sicily. They are a great help.



Above: The Wilson family in lockdown

In the church ministry we've seen doubled attendance in our mid-week meetings. This is partly because there is more interest in meeting together in this difficult period, but mostly because it is easier to meet online. Both parents of small children can come, as can those who usually can't get out at night. There has also been a 40% increase in traffic to my Internet site on the Bible, with spikes of up to 100% every time there is a new government decree.

I think that more important than this temporary crisis, are the on-going effects in the future. Even after the end of the lockdown, we will still have to live with the existence of the virus for months or years. Social interactions and meetings will not be the same as before. There will be on-going economic effects which might be greater than the direct effects of the virus.

Another effect is the "virtualisation" of society. Many have discovered that things can be done as easily – if not better – online and will want to continue to do that, with more working from home and some schooling possibly online. People will ask for at least some church meetings to continue online, because they cannot attend a live meeting. It will be a challenge for Christians to consider how best to serve God and serve others in a new world.



KAREN LAIRD IRELAND

Ireland had its first reported COVID-19 infection on 29 February, from someone who had returned from holidays in Italy. Since 12 March we have seen closure of schools and increasing restrictions. Movement is restricted to within two kms of home for brief exercise, food shopping and work in essential services. We last met physically for church on 8 March.

No matter where you live in this world, we live in strange, uncertain and difficult times. Yet, our great God is unchanging, gracious and merciful and there is so much to thank Him for. The death toll in Ireland to date, while

testing, contact tracing, nursing homes and hospitals. I am grateful that, at present, I am still working in Community Palliative Care, adapting to new ways of working, while minimising face-to-face contact. I am thankful to God for health and strength, and even for restrictions which give good opportunity for refreshment. I am grateful for Spring-time, daffodils and cherry blossoms, which remind me that God continues to give life and beauty. I am grateful for church family in Ireland and throughout the world, for being able to connect and meet together online.

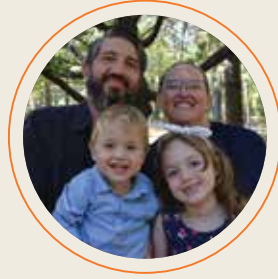


Above: Kids Church Easter craft in Waterford

much higher than Australia, has been much lower than was initially expected. The rate of spread has also been much slower than was predicted before restrictions were introduced.

In my Occupational Therapy work, there has been much talk of redeployment into

For the last six weeks Kids Church has been interacting on WhatsApp. I've kept it very simple! Each week I give the children a passage from the Bible to read, and they respond with videos and photos of crafts, songs, stories... It has been a real delight to stay connected with the kids. The family of a five-year old girl from church has been cocooning because of her father's serious underlying health issues. She became unwell during the week with her parents understandably very concerned. But she reminded them 'Jesus is in control'. She then, with her croaky, sore throat, sang them one of our Kids Church songs ('*Jesus is number 1, right at the top where he belongs*' – Colin Buchanan). Thank God it was just a throat infection! And thank God that He uses even children to speak back truth to us when we face fear and uncertainty.



ADI AND JENNIFER GROCOTT ROMANIA

With self-isolation in our homes you would think that we would have had abundant free time. But just like many of you, rather than daily life easing, it has intensified. We need great wisdom to know how to act and react in our particular circumstances. Thankfully, God promises to give wisdom to those who seek it. "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all ... and it will be given to you." (James 1:5)

The first significant change for us was the cancelation of the ECM Biennial conference in Croatia. We had been looking forward to it for over two years and also had a family holiday booked after it. Initially we were gutted, but it became clear very quickly that it was a wise decision. The planning team promptly went ahead and planned a 'virtual conference' for 1–3 April. Another knock-on effect of COVID-19 has been increased communication between our ECM Australian colleagues. It has been a great encouragement to hear how God has been using this time to draw people to Himself.

Thankfully the Romanian government saw the tragedy unfolding in Italy and acted swiftly. As time passed, restrictions were tightened and a state of emergency was declared. Currently, if you leave the house you need a personal declaration stating your reason for being out. People are still able to shop for essentials, but police and army are on patrol and anyone found without a personal declaration or to be lying can receive a hefty fine.



Above: Anna plays with toys at home

With all the changes, we have found that we have been quicker to get frustrated and lose our cool. It has revealed parts of us that we try to hide and ignore. This has prompted us to seek the Holy Spirit's empowering to change our attitude as well as the way we treat those closest to us. Understandably, the changes have been tough on the kids too. Poor Luca doesn't understand why he can't go out as normal and is distraught when Adi or I leave to do the weekly shopping without him. Anna understands it all a little better, but it is taking a lot of effort to keep her occupied to keep us all vaguely sane.

It is just wonderful the way that technology can be used to reach so many. Adi is currently working on ways to help our local church stream its services more smoothly and I (Jennifer) have been helping find resources to encourage parents to engage their children with a weekly Bible story.



MARK AND GINA BORG

MALTA

Our first case of COVID-19 in Malta was in early March and the authorities acted very swiftly with lockdown soon after.

It has been an emotional roller coaster for Mark, who loves to be around people. The kids have also been effected with many after hours activities cancelled. Gina is the optimist, most of the time, and comes up with different ideas to help people within the current restrictions. We are so thankful to God for technology so we can stay in touch with the world.

Everything is now online which is extremely hard for Mark as he wants to be around a table drinking coffee and chatting. We've had great opportunities to send a link of our music worship time or church services to relatives and others who don't know the Lord, with followup questions like, "What does Gina praying 'Jesus has nailed our sins to the cross' mean?"



Above and right: The Borgs, finding creative ways to bless their family and neighbourhood.

We have been using our music entertainment gifts to bring our little community some joy. Our family set up a PA system on our balcony singing gospel music and some Elvis songs.



Bible study numbers have increased and the ease of sharing weekly messages in Maltese is a blessing, with potentially so much more seed going out. It's been great to see the church helping one another and others in the community.

We've been learning about how comfortable we've been and how life can change so quickly. James 4:13-15 has really come to life: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"



CLAUDIA AND STEFAN POHN

AUSTRIA

Just before the COVID-19 breakout, Stephan had asked God to somehow take away just one of his commitments in April/May. Now we're in week six of lockdown! We were recently given a date for measures to slowly be lifted. Schools will partly re-open mid-May, and church-services might also be resumed. However, we're not sure yet what the criteria will be and whether we'll be able to meet those criteria in a rented community hall. It's all very tentative.

Our experience was one of shock and disbelief at first. Everything happened very rapidly and took us some time until we established new routines. We felt the emotional pressure of figuring out a way forward as a church and as a family. Stephan focused his first couple of weeks on "visitation by phone call", which was much appreciated by the congregation and for the time being we've settled on church-gatherings via video-call, and it seems to be working reasonably well.

In Christian circles here, there seems to be a real difficulty to acknowledge struggles and anxieties, even to each other. We've observed a quick focus on "how to use this for the gospel" or "how difficult this must be for people who don't know Christ" – but not much of an acknowledgement of personal struggles. Thus, on Easter Sunday Stephan looked at Psalm 22 to show the balance we find in God's Word of lament and hope.

Navigating this time has mainly meant an increase in acceptance: of more screen-time for the kids; of everyone's mixed emotions at unexpected times; of differing reactions to the measures our government has taken; of the grief over things being cancelled. We have also seen God's gifts in the midst of the frustrations, like finding time to read the Bible in the morning as a couple or talking to a neighbour on the phone for half an hour. We have grown in acceptance of this crisis as a gift from God, who works all things for good for those who love him.

- **Pray for missionaries as they face personal frustrations and challenges of being unable to connect in the usual way and being confined to homes. Give them strength and patience.**
- **Pray that through this crisis and the aftermath that God will open doors for our missionaries to be able to reach out with the gospel to their neighbours and communities.**
- **Pray that God would continue to guide and provide for missionaries' financial support and pastoral needs despite the challenges people across the world are facing.**

WHAT'S ON FÉY'S MIND?



In this issue we asked Féy Cotter from ECM New Zealand to share what's on her mind. New Zealand has had higher lockdown restrictions than Australia. At the time of writing, those restrictions are set to ease a little.

This past month I have been reflecting on the way different people have responded emotionally to the COVID-19 crisis, while also reflecting on what it means for God to be my Rock.

Some people don't seem to be affected at all by the current crisis and just carry on as they have done in the past, while abiding by the new restrictions. At the other end of the spectrum are those that are experiencing a marked increase in anxiety, anger, grief or fear, which is often expressed through social media.

For others this is a time to withdraw, to disengage from people and from the new ways people are connecting. Others have been focusing on

learning new skills or engaging more deeply with others in new ways.

No matter the response of others, I need to take care

“The word of God gives me hope and comfort during this time of unexpected emotional reactions and uncertainty about our future”

not to judge them but to focus instead on developing kindness, gentleness and patience (Col 3:12).

We have a picture on our wall which quotes Isaiah 40:8: “The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.” The word of God is the Bible and that word gives me hope and comfort during this time of unexpected

emotional reactions and uncertainty about our future.

The Word teaches me about God and his character; God is unwavering, he is solid, and he is unchanging. His word is the Rock, the firm foundation on which I stand, and because of his word I can trust that God is in control, even when it may seem as though he is not.

However, if God is going to be our Rock, he must be righteous. An unrighteous Rock is a mirage. The very thing that a global pandemic shakes is our confidence that God is righteous, holy, good. If God is not righteous in the midst of it, we have no Rock.

God's holiness (as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) means he is uniquely different, completely separate and perfectly pure. Being righteous means that God can only do what is right and that he acts with absolute moral consistency. God's goodness is shown through his generosity and his desire to bless people. This is the God in whom I trust.

QUICK SNIPPETS

Find out what God is doing through ECM!

■ The Biennial Goes Virtual!



By mid-March, it was clear that the much-anticipated Biennial ECM Conference planned for April in Croatia would need to be cancelled and re-worked as an online, virtual gathering. Missionaries and organisers were understandably disappointed. But the conference was still an encouragement to many. Highlights included hearing from some of the Aussies in their ministry videos, and meeting the new ECMI Director, Simon Marshall, and hearing his Bible talks. Some comments were as follows:

'Hearing the speakers and missionaries' ministry reports, it was clear that ECM is an expert in understanding Europe. ECM is quite well placed to share God's word in Europe.'

Samuel Ferreira, Intern and soon-to-be ECM candidate to Portugal.

'The Biennial helped me to see a bigger picture of ECM International.'

Rod Bishop, ECM Australia Business Manager

■ The Reeves on Home Assignment

In April, Josh and Ali Reeve and family arrived back in Australia for their Home Assignment after two and a half years service in Albania – exhausted, but safe and well. Due to the escalating nature of COVID-19 related cancellations of flights, they took 67 hours all up to get back, which might be an ECM record! After a period of quarantine they have been able to live in family owned accommodation in Melbourne. They have decided to remain in Melbourne to have their fourth child (due in July) so as to be close to family and because the restrictions on gatherings means the normal face-to-face support raising planned in Sydney has had to be put on hold.



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Sharing Christ's love
in Europe

response form



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Or you can give online at
www.ecmaustralia.org

FOR YOUR **DIARY**

Pray for our
MISSIONARIES

ONLINE MEETING | MONDAY 27 JULY

6PM AEST • 8PM NZST

In this season of COVID-19 more of our missionaries are able to make themselves more available to share their needs and pray with their wider group of supporters. We now need your prayers more than ever, so please join us as we commit Europe to our Heavenly Father.

Register to be sent a link. Contact 0422 557 689 or admin.oz@ecmi.org