

Changed Lives by Joe Dunn, GCE Co-Director

Over the past two years I have asked pastors and missionaries in Europe, "Why are you involved with your church, ministry or movement? What attracted you to it and why not others? What keeps you involved?" To an individual, they have all said that it was "people who read the Word of God and want to put it into practice." I expected a variety of answers--the vision and commitment to the mission, inspiring leadership or great strategy, maybe even good teaching and worship--and although any of these may have surfaced later in the conversation, they were not the primary reasons people were drawn into fellowship. What drew them and keeps them are the changed lives of believers who desired to obey God and to surround themselves with others who wanted to do the same.

Decisions I have made in my own life, especially significant ones, have been made as a result of spending time with God and the advice and encouragement of others. In the Netherlands, the church of Amsterdam50 calls this "obedience-based discipleship." I like this. Two things come to



mind in this phrase: obedience, an act of humility and worship exercised by faith in response to God and His Word, and discipleship, followers of Christ on mission living out their faith in the context of a community of believers or a church. These are two foundational aspects of our Christian walk: obedience and fellowship.

This edition of Europe Update is about lives that have changed through spending time with God in His Word and being willing to obey Him, and lives that have changed from living in community with other Christ followers. Although these are not new concepts, the depth and richness of our lives as Christians are rooted in these simple principles.

Listening to God's Voice

by Naomi Triggs, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Mirjam works for a Salvation Army housing shelter in Amsterdam. She sensed that God was nudging her to do a project with the women who live there. She has a good friend who works with street children in Bolivia, and a picture came into Mirjam's mind: making soap chains to be sold to raise funds for those children! Not only would this be a good community building activity for the women in the shelter, but it would also benefit her friend and the children who face poverty in Bolivia. Yet God had more in mind than Mirjam could have imagined.



Mirjam, Patricia and Naomi

Days after thinking of the idea, she met a man who bluntly asked her: "Do you have any need for soap?" He just happened to find large blocks of soap from a high quality bath company that no longer had any use for them - exactly what Mirjam needed to start the project! The women enthusiastically set to work.

The soap chains were then brought to churches in Amsterdam and other parts of Holland. Each of the women took turns attending these churches to raise money for Bolivia. Several of the women encountered God in personal ways during their visits. One woman, a Muslim, met another woman who had converted from

Islam to Christianity and was personally asked if she knew about Jesus. Hearts are being transformed in the process of selling these little soap chains!

Mirjam is in awe of all that has happened since she acted on God's promptings in her heart. It seemed like such a simple and small idea. Now Mirjam realizes the great blessing in obeying and listening to God's voice! She believes that this experience is only a small picture of what God wants to do in the future if she and others would only be quiet enough to listen and respond to God's calling.

A Challenge and a Promise

by Yaina Llano and Charis Gonzalez, Madrid, Spain

THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you; and surely I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE. (Matthew 28:18-20). With a challenge and a promise, and hands united in prayer, the summer began for Breaking Time (BKT), the youth group of our church in Torrejón de Ardoz, Madrid.



Spanish Team

During the summer months we went to different parks in Torrejón in small groups of two or three. Our aim was to meet young people on Wednesdays and invite them to basketball or other fun events on Saturdays. Our strategy to strike up conversations and share the gospel was a simple, four-question survey. It was amazing to see how many people opened their hearts and listened attentively to the message

of salvation! We were trying to impact others, and in the process we were also changed. We learned persistence, especially at first when there were just a few of us and we didn't see many results. We also learned to trust our brothers and sisters who, at the end of the day, are our partners in battle, knowing that they would support us when we were speaking with others. We experienced what it means to work as a team. And above all we have seen that our security lies in the fact that we are entrusted by

our Father to fulfill this mission, and He promises that His word never returns void. God confirmed to us that His love indeed impacts the world and His word is the sword we need. We are his children, His chosen people, and we have a mission: to humbly and lovingly impact Torrejón, Madrid, Spain, and Europe with the good news.

Putting Love into Practice

by Andrea Testa, Torino, Italy

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6) I love this verse, and the fact that faith works through love. God has been teaching me how to put it into practice with Alessandro, a 32-year-old Italian chef who first came to our community last summer.



Alessandro and Andrea

His background was not easy: problems with his family, drugs, anger. He was very religious, a devout Catholic who went to Mass every Sunday, but he was so disappointed by the hypocrisy he had experienced that he moved from one group to another, hoping to find real love and understanding. I tried to share the gospel with Alessandro, but the words did not seem to have any impact. He was not refusing them, but he was saying: "I know Jesus died for me, I know I am a sinner, but I cannot experience God's love, nobody loves me..." In the following months he had pretty much the same attitude – we were ready to share a verse or principle from the Bible, but his ears were shut.

I was reminded of Jesus' practical way of loving us: He did not say many words, but He gave his own life. I realized that words were poor if not accompanied by real, practical love. I invited Alessandro over to my house and he taught me how to cook a wonderful dinner. Then we talked and I listened to him. As time went on we had more dinners like that, and now he has started listening to me and to others in the church, as we encourage him to follow Jesus, read the Bible and put it into practice.

Just as Jesus showed us love in the most practical way one can possibly imagine, we are called to love people in a very practical way. Only then may their hearts be opened.

The Gospel Spreading in Poland

by Jack Stockdale, Poznan, Poland

Acts 10 says that Cornelius gathered his household (Gk. oikos) to hear a message from Peter. This household consisted of more than simply his wife and children. Dr. Tom A. Wolf writes, "An oikos is a social system composed of those who relate to each other through common ties and tasks. The New Testament oikos included members of the nuclear family, but extended to dependents, slaves and employees. The oikos constituted the basic social unit by which the early church grew."

While walking through a park last summer I met a guy in a wheelchair named Damian and his friend Mirro who was caring for him. They expressed an interest in spiritual things and thereafter met with us to read the Gospel of John. Eventually Mirro invited us to an informal group they call Ciupa (pronounced "Choopa") Club.

As a teenager, Mirro was part of a youth group which cared for handicapped people. The group met in the basement of a building which happened to have bars over the windows. The word "ciupa" in Polish is a slang term for jail, so some of the youth began to refer to themselves as the Ciupa Club.

Feeling that the group's leader treated handicapped people as "second-class citizens," Mirro decided to form his own Ciupa Club. Once a week they congregate in a small building Mirro rents at the main train station.

Since Joan and I started attending Ciupa Club we have met a dozen people in Mirro's oikos, many of whom the world says don't have the capacity to experience quality life. Mirro gave his life to Christ this past February. His girlfriend followed suit two months later. Praise God for how the gospel is spreading through these natural relationships.



Mirro(right) with his friend, Piotrek