

ECM in Kosovo

Ministry Prior to 1999

Prior to 1999 few people had heard of the Yugoslav province of Kosovo. The dramatic scenes when the majority ethnic Albanians were expelled by the Serbian authorities and the subsequent war changed all that.

ECM has had a long association with Kosovo. From 1968, ECM had been broadcasting Albanian programs to Kosovo as well as to Albania. A number of our workers took aid and literature to people and churches in the province. One of our present ECM workers, preparing for outreach to Albanian speakers in the late eighties, trained in the capital, Prishtina.

The crisis of 1999 ended as suddenly as it began when the Serbian forces withdrew and the refugees returned home to Kosova (the Albanian name). Many returned home to find everything destroyed.

Initially ECM was involved, like many other organizations, in reconstruction projects and in counseling children and widows who were traumatized by the terrors they had witnessed.

ECM continues to work with children and widows through the church now established in the city of Peja. But the church is also making a much greater impact upon the whole area in and around Peja as they seek to make Christ known through both outreach and community projects. Life in Kosova

Prishtina, the capital, is a city of over 600,000 people, considerably more than before the war of 1999. Peja, where ECM focuses its work is a city of about 125,000 people. Although there is now some normality and peace, politically there is still great uncertainty about the future of Kosova and there is still a large UN contingent of troops and foreign police. The opportunities for sharing the gospel of Christ are great with open doors into the lives of many people. The evangelical church along with the other major religions have been granted legal status enabling us to operate largely unhindered. Bringing the Gospel

ECM made its presence felt in Kosova just weeks after the end of hostilities and assisted in the reconstruction of homes and helping the people in various places including the capital Prishtina and the city of Peja where our efforts are now centred. A property was acquired to be used as a Christian Centre for the work including the church, a home for our missionaries and premises for a variety activities. It had previously been an evangelical church and a home to its Serbian pastor who left during the war of 1999.

The work is very demanding often far outstripping our ability to respond but the small fellowship in Peja is making a very significant impact upon the community. Christ has radically changed the lives of a number of recent converts and the difference is seen in their attitudes and their relationships. Their living faith is in marked contrast to their prior experience at the hands of so-called Christians and its attractiveness is likely to bring about an expansion of this small group of believers. Every year we have a number of teams of people, young and older, from Northern Ireland, USA and elsewhere. They engage in outreach, building work, children's clubs, and evangelism, as well as enjoying the beautiful mountains and rivers close to Peja.

We ask your prayers that God would draw people in Kosova to the living faith in the Lord Jesus that the growing church is displaying. In all of this work it is important to recognize that Albanians have no church traditions and they do not know how to go about "being a church", so this is an exciting and challenging period. Potential Threats

There is growing opposition from Muslim groups often stimulated by external forces, although so far the threat is small. There is also pressure from within the close knit families for people to conform to their traditional religious practices. In communist times the population retained an attachment to Islam, which fundamentalist groups are now endeavoring to revive. Mosques are being rebuilt often with money from outside the country. Understandably, there is also a reaction against Christianity because of the perceived activities of the Orthodox community before and during the war. Muslim activities are beginning to influence the culture and generate some hostility to evangelical Christianity, as well as to western ideas. Others too, "undesirables", threaten safety and Christian ways of doing things as they seek to exploit the situation for personal gain and perhaps retribution for previous acts of violence. Constant vigilance by believers is therefore essential but today is a day of opportunity.