



MP News – June 2017

Mission Conference in Georgia

European Baptist Federation (EBF) in cooperation with its partners organized a mission conference. The conference was held in Tbilisi, Georgia in May 2017 and drew indigenous church planters from Eastern Europe. The goal of conference was training, sharing experiences and fellowship.

25 participants from Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Latvia, Poland and Ukraine were welcomed by Revd Merab Gaprindashvili, the presiding bishop of Baptist Union in Georgia and Revd Asatur Nahapetyan, the president of EBF.



Program

The program of this conference was comprised of three basic elements: teaching sessions, sharing by the participants and informal fellowship.

Asatur Nahapetyan talked about the mobilizing leaders for mission and based his teaching on the example of Nehemiah. He underlined that Christian leaders ought to stand on the promises of God, demonstrate a humble attitude and express evangelistic passion.

He also shared an encouraging example from his own country. When in 1991 Armenia regained independence there had been only 1 local Baptist congregation and 1 ordained pastor. Since then, during the past quarter of a century, more than 500 people have been trained at the newly established Baptist seminary and many of them commissioned for church planting. Eventually more than 100 new churches have been planted during that period of time and now the total membership of Baptist Union is about 6 thousand. Asatur explained that this result owes much to the

incredible openness of the society in the 90s of former century which has been significantly decreasing during the last 15 years.

Daniel Trusiewicz, the EBF mission coordinator presented the overview of EBF Mission Partnerships illustrated by examples from different countries where the program has been present. The MP program was started in 2002 and more than 200 church planters have been facilitated in 25 different nations. He also taught about the basic principles of church planting like: the calling from God and how to recognize it, appropriate personality and attitude of a church planter, vision for ministry, effective team building, coaching - mentoring from others and raising the local support. Also some mistakes in church planting were discussed and how to avoid or solve them.



Kaspars Sterns, the mission director in the Baptist Union of Latvia talked about the new vision being implemented in this union which aims at the planting of gospel centered, multipliable and missional churches. He emphasized that discipleship should result in church planting and everyone can be involved in this work but not everyone can be a church planter... Therefore an assessment program helpful to discover the right person has been developed.

The assessment covers several areas: the character and calling from God that is confirmed by other people (in case of a marriage both spouses must agree), knowledge and competence in church planting, vision casting (good vision attracts people) and team building (equipping leaders), emotional intelligence (how to deal with a crisis) and overcoming obstacles.

The assessment interview takes ca. 3 hours for a church planter and a spouse. Three persons lead an interview: a leader assessor, an assistant and an observer. The final recommendation is based on the report which describes strengths and weaknesses in 3 colors: green – ready to be involved, orange – do some more training, red – not ready at this point (may need some more training etc. and may be involved in future).

The training for church planting is provided by the scheme of M4 Learning Communities. Its intrinsic part is the method of coaching - mentoring (a mentor is assigned to each church planter). The church planters are taught about the importance of: proper resourcing – human support, know – how from books, strategic partners, funding. The M4 strategy has already been implemented in several countries of Europe: Norway, Latvia, Estonia, Czech Rep, Romania and is currently being introduced to Poland and Russia.

Sharing from participants

Hagop is an Armenian Kurd from Aleppo, Syria who has fled from the war and now lives in Yerevan. In Aleppo he led a Christian ministry and many people became Christians. But the war badly affected this work and people began emigrating to Armenia, Lebanon or Western Europe. Now the borders are closed and he is leading a similar ministry among Syrian migrants in Yerevan.

Tengiz is a Yezidi that works with 13 Yezidi families in his home but the needs are much greater as there are at least 60 thousand Yezidi people living in Armenia.

Vasily of Grodno, Belarus has been leading a church plant during former 2 years. The vision to start a new congregation has been born in the traditional Baptist Church "Hope" which understands the need to multiply congregations as the Baptists in Western Belarus are scarce. There are at least 50 people involved in this work, most of them young and full of positive spiritual energy. They meet in another location.

Giorgi from Georgia 2 years ago was appointed to lead a mission station where 5 persons were involved. They have met regularly in a private house and the group has grown to 25 people. Now they pray for even bigger revival.

Eduard from Georgia is an Ossetian refugee and he has been leading the inductive bible study among local people and the group has been significantly increasing.

Oskars works in Oleine - Latvia, a town which is like "bedroom" for Riga. Oskars concentrates on building relationships with people and leads seminars for married couples as well as children camps in summer. The group organizes a service once a month in a culture house and a bible study twice a month. They also do regular evenings for men and occasionally the family weekends.

Nauris works in Roja on Latvian coast. There are 6 members of the mission team and the vision is to establish a Baptist congregation by 2020. The first steps in church planting work have been: making a research, building relationships and influencing locals. The research has shown that a new church is needed and the team started to build relationships with local people through running a meat shop and participating in the town festivals. They influence others mainly by Christian values: family, mission, service etc. The Latvian church planters reach out mainly to the secularized people.

Genadie from Moldova, after becoming a Christian in Chisinau, was sent to a small town of Bardar and began inviting people to get involved in the inductive bible studies. Every summer he also organizes sport camps with youth and children. Thanks to this ministry during the last 4 years the local people started to respect the Baptists. At least 100 people are involved in sport activities and weekly bible studies. Also 3 new groups have been started in the neighboring villages.

Pavlo from Ukraine, works in Troenshina - a district of Kiev. There are great social needs and the mission team developed a vision for congregation by reaching out to youth. Many local schools are open for Christian activities among the young people. The newest initiative is a youth club with some sport activities that draw over 50 teenagers every Friday. This new planted congregation has 34 members.

Sasha is planting a new fellowship in Ternopil, western Ukraine. The vision is to make disciples of Christ and the target group are students. Three families comprise the team and are accountable to each other as they meet weekly. The team can see that God is opening new doors, especially to work with youth and children. They

organize a bible day in a local school and one team member is a soccer trainer, so he organizes floorball games for teenagers. They also do some social ministry.

Conclusions

This conference was very important as the group of church planters from similar cultural background could meet, learn some new things about ministry and share their experiences. The participants naturally interacted between them and enjoyed sharing on personal level. Some of them had known each other from before and others were able to make new friends.

These church planters are very dedicated, they understand the principles of church planting and are conscientious in implementing them diligently. They admit that coaching - mentoring by local leaders helps them correct mistakes. They also value the scheme of accountability - reporting to EBF.

It is clear that generally the openness of people for the gospel has been decreasing in the respective countries during the last decade or so. Despite that the church planters may be still prosperous in their work but they need to be more creative and use different methods of outreach than those from the past, when by a mere distributing of invitations in the streets they could draw a significant crowd of newcomers to Christian events.

Now they need to work with passion which is accompanied by a more learned and reasonable methodology. According to the church planters' reports the "user-friendly" methods of mission work like: ongoing clubs, regular sport or art activities, educational and social programs, repeated camps and similar imaginative activities may be welcomed among the local people.

Prayer Requests

1. Pray that the new church plants in Eastern Europe will continue growing strong and overcoming obstacles.
2. Pray that the church planters will reach out successfully to those segments of societies that are open to the gospel.
3. Pray that the unions' leaders will develop the vision for creative planting of new congregations in the needy nations of Eastern Europe.

In Christ,

Daniel Trusiewicz
EBF Mission Coordinator

Planting new churches together!
For the glory of God!

