



## MP News – March 2019

### Pioneering in Cyprus

There are just a few countries in Europe where Baptists are not yet present and until recently Cyprus was in this number... Only 2 years ago Faith Baptist Church in Nicosia got officially registered and this young congregation still needs assistance.

Pastor Anton Balakumar Sinnathamby initiated a visit to Cyprus in 2013 which he made with a friend. They learned of an influx of Sinhalese and Tamil people who were migrants - refugees after the civil war in Sri Lanka. Following that they performed more visits with a purpose of sharing the gospel. This resulted in a prayer meeting at a private house and within a few weeks the services moved into a rented hall because of the increasing number of attendees. The ministry has been developing under the oversight of Anton who visited regularly and grown local leaders.



Anton (R) preaches in Tamil, Kumar interprets into Sinhalese



Niluca leads worship

Anton reminisces: *“Initially, the Sinhalese denied me because of my Tamil identity and I felt like Apostle Paul who had been denied by Jews. Soon after I started this mission, my own Tamil community became suspicious. It was stressful but later, after a long fervent and continuous endeavor, the Sinhalese population welcomed my activity and enabled me to establish the fellowship which later turned into a church.”*

Anton has been an ordained pastor in the Baptist Union of Norway and also served as a board member. He has a clear vision for planting new churches and raising leaders. He also coaches them how to lead the congregation as well as trains in evangelism and discipleship.

The church planter and pastor of new planted congregation in Nicosia is Chandra Kumar (37), native Sri Lankan – Sinhalese with a Christian background who has stayed in Cyprus for several years. He is married to Niluca and they have two small children. Kumar is fluent in Sinhalese, Tamil as well as has the knowledge of English and Greek, which all is important for this ministry. Kumar’s wife – Niluca plays very significant role there, and rightly so since

the majority of congregation are women. Niluca has very warm personality and is evidently respected by members of congregation.

The couple lead a group of ca. 30 - 40 persons, mainly women who are migrant workers in Nicosia. Most of them care for an elderly people, however some are refugees without work. The group has functioned for the last 5 years and only 2 years ago got officially registered under the name of Faith Baptist Church. The registration process was difficult because there are no other Baptist churches in Cyprus nor Greece, and this presented an additional challenge for the local authorities. The new group has been educated and organized according to Baptist principles which naturally led to affiliating them with a Baptist Family.

The services are on Sundays and besides biblical preaching comprise a lot of passionate singing in Sinhalese and public prayers are raised between the songs. The meetings hall is packed and the spirit of the service is fervent and joyful. After the sermon people usually come forward asking their pastor to pray with them for personal issues. After each service there is a fellowship around a tasty meal prepared in a Sri Lankan way.



*Baptist congregation in Nicosia in a Sunday service*

The congregation is managed by the leadership team chaired by Kumar and Niluca. Last year the church organized a large outdoor event with a pastor whom they invited from Sri Lanka and about 300 people turned in. The plan is to repeat a similar event this year although an issue is always the funding. The group also regularly goes to a nearby park to sing Christian songs and make contacts with some new people. The target group are Sinhalese but also the Tamils are welcome. Personal evangelism is the most effective to make new contacts.

The relationship between the church plant in Nicosia and the mother church in Oslo is well bonded both spiritually and personally. The members of the mother church pray for the church plant and stay in good communication with each other. Pastor Anton personally visits the church plant in quarterly intervals and connects weekly with the church planter via Skype.

This is the very first and the only Baptist church in Cyprus. The members often emphasize that the church is their comfort house. As these believers are far away from their home, they are affectionate of having fellowship with their own people who speak their mother tongue;

about 90% of them are converts from Buddhism which presents a challenge. Some of them have to return to Sri Lanka as the work permit expires. Those who returned keep in touch and continue in faith.



*Kumar with an anniversary cake (L) and with his family (R)*

The biggest blessing is that these Christians can share their faith with others, especially when the testimony is well received. The dream for future is to acquire a bigger meeting hall to host more people.

The members of the congregation earn very low wages but even though they give sacrificially. The collections from Sunday meetings are barely enough to pay for the rent and the leaders appreciate partnerships with EBF and BU of Norway.

The simple and fervent faith of these Christians is indeed stimulating! They are foreigners coming from the lowest levels of society and given the circumstance they show an excellent attitude of pioneering in order to influence their countrymen. This church is reality like a missionary training school!

As they function in the very outskirts of Europe, both geographically and culturally, so they naturally look to EBF and other stronger Baptist bodies with much expectation for the partnership to strengthen their own witness for the gospel.

In Christ,  
**Daniel Trusiewicz**  
**EBF Mission Coordinator**

**Planting new churches together!**  
**For the glory of God!**

