



# Reaching and Serving the Persecuted Church

## IN TOUCH MONTHLY

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Most of us can remember exactly where we were when we first heard of some tragic event, such as when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and plunged America into World War 2. Everyone reading this will remember the cowardly sneak attack six years ago this month on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by 19 Islamic terrorists, killing far more than died at Pearl Harbor. They brought the war to our shores. We must take the Gospel to them. *“How can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”* Romans 10:14

## New life on the other side of the river

### Poland

Poland’s third longest river, the Warta, slices through the thriving city of Poznan, Poland, as it transports a main necessity of life across the country. In Poznan, the Warta constitutes a physical and emotional barrier, dividing the southern third of the city from its northern neighbors. Although Poznan has efficient public transportation for crossing the river and a number of bridges span its shores, the river nevertheless delineates a unique community that is somewhat separate from the other part of Poznan.

The area south of the river flaunts the name of “the New City,” and its dynamic development, diverse infrastructure and frenzied activity make this part of Poznan truly worthy of such an epithet. The New City is home to areas seething with commercial enterprise where mammoth shopping malls, entertainment centers and factories spring into existence virtually overnight. Block after block of ugly high-rise apartment buildings that sprung up during the communist era are followed by new, rich

neighborhoods dotted with pristine family houses. Here tradition meets with commerce, and the past merges with the present. In the New City, the lives of the poor residing in the post-communist neighborhoods intersect with the intense strivings of a money-driven business community. While evangelical fellowships are few and far between in Poland, there has never been a church on the south side of the river...until now.

***There has never been a church on this side of the river...until now.***

When **Megi** and **Kris Sieliccy** married just over a year ago, they settled down south of the river. Megi is passionately involved in full-time ministry through one of ITMI’s projects, **Gospel Joy Workshops**.

Kris had recently graduated from seminary and was waiting for the Lord to lead him into his next phase of ministry. A naturally gifted shepherd, Kris is endowed with an ability to connect with people and generate a healthy, warm group environment where they can grow in their faith.

He demonstrated this talent in his work with **Bread of Life’s** Holy

*(Continued on page 4)*



# Islamic Eschatology – dangerous to your health

Most Christians have a Biblical position regarding prophecy – the Last Day(s), eschatology or “end times” and the return to Earth of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are different interpretations of Scripture concerning His Second Coming: pre-millennial, post-millennial and a-millennial. There are many dedicated, Bible believing Christians in each of these ‘camps.’

It is generally overlooked by Christians that our Muslim neighbors also have very strong views regarding eschatology. Ignorance of Muslim theology, especially as it deals with the Last Day, can definitely be dangerous to our health!

This eschatological aspect first hit me when I read that Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, after threatening to “wipe Israel off the map,” believes he can hasten the coming of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam, the Mahdi, by instigating a widespread conflagration in the Middle East, preferably with nuclear weapons. Sounds like the Iranian president believes that Allah is behind schedule in his march toward the Last Day and that he needs to give the lunar god a little shove.

Who is this “Mahdi” and what is his significance? He is their “Awaited Savior.” He is Islam’s Messiah. His reappearance is central to Islamic eschatological expectations. It is the crowning element of all their end-time narratives and is comparable in importance to them, as the Second Coming of Jesus is to Christians.

All across the Muslim world today there is a call for the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate – an Islamic theocracy complete with Sharia Law. The Caliph in Islam is regarded as the supreme political and religious leader of all Muslims. The Caliph is regarded as the Vice-regent for Allah on earth. When Muslims call for the restoration of the Caliphate, it is ultimately the Mahdi they are calling for. They see him as the future leader of the entire world. As Christians, we need to watch for him as the coming anti-Christ.

It doesn’t matter that we regard Islam as a false religion. The point to emphasize here is that this is the belief system of the world’s second largest and fastest growing religion. What they believe will dramatically affect our lives for many years to come. What then do they believe?

In his book, “**Anti-Christ – Islam’s Awaited Messiah**” Dr. Joel Richardson identifies five basic tenets of Islamic belief. After their fundamental belief in one god, Allah, the next most important tenet concerns the Last Day. There are three Major Signs leading up to this event: the coming of the Muslim Anti-Christ (*ad-Dajjal*) and most importantly, the coming of the Muslim Savior/Messiah figure Al-Mahdi, which in Arabic means the Guided One. These two events are followed by the

return of the “Muslim Jesus” (*Isa Al-Maseeh*).

This “Muslim Jesus” bears no resemblance either in person or program to the Biblical Jesus, our Lord and Savior. The Muslim Jesus returns on a day of prayer (Friday) to a white minaret in a Damascus suburb. He declares himself to be a faithful Muslim, subordinate to the Mahdi and makes the ritual pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca. He will endorse and enforce Islamic Shariah law universally and will lead many Christians to convert to Islam while he abolishes Christianity worldwide.

Richardson sees an Islamic Revival underway: “Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, growing at a rate four times faster than Christianity.” (p. 23) It accounts for 20% of the world’s population. “If present trends continue, half of all global births will be in Muslim families by the year 2055.” Also noteworthy is that 85% of American converts to Islam are African-Americans.

The author states clearly, “I believe that Islam is indeed the primary vehicle that will be used by Satan to fulfill the prophecies of the Bible about the future political, religious and military system of the Antichrist that will overwhelm the entire world just prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.” (p. 32)

What will be the effect on Christianity if Islam closes the gap and begins to grow exponentially? The author sees “Bandwagon conversions – confusion among faithful Christians will be the rule of the day. We cannot underestimate the power of a worldwide trend.”

Remember, the Bible warns of a *great apostasy* or “falling away” from the faith of our fathers on a significant global scale. II Thessalonians 2:3,4 “Understanding the Islamic perspective regarding the last days and specifically the Major Signs therefore is crucial if we wish to understand the central religious anticipations of the 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide.” (p.39)

Muslim scholars actually apply Bible verses about the Antichrist to their awaited savior, the Mahdi.

Richardson notes, “Several of the most unique and distinguishing aspects of the biblical Antichrist’s person, mission and actions are matched to an amazing degree by the descriptions of the Mahdi as found in Islamic traditions.” (p.70)

**To be continued**

Bill Bathman – Tempe, Arizona

Material for this article gleaned from: “**Anti-Christ – Islam’s Awaited Messiah**” by Joel Richardson. Pleasant Word Publishing: a division of Winepress Publishing, 276 pages. ISBN 1-4141-0440-5

Dear Team,

I determined long ago never to fall-out with another Brother over eschatology – something that hasn't happened yet! Personally, I am *pre-millennial*; it motivates me to preach the Gospel over the widest area possible and win the maximum number of precious souls to Jesus, before He returns.

That said, I recognize that we can't simply sell our stuff and sit on the housetop waiting for the Rapture. Since "*no man knows the day or hour* [that He will return]," we must take the long view and plant churches, make disciples, build Christian schools to educate children, care for the orphans, nurture the homeless and do all the other things that God has ordained for ITMI to do while He tarries.

It is interesting, in the context of eschatology, that Iran's President Ahmadinejad, on a recent speaking tour through every Iranian town, focused on a dual objective: the total annihilation of the Jewish State and Death to America. "The Zionist regime is a rotten tree that will be blown away by one storm," he ranted repeatedly. Sounds nuclear to me. Devoid of humility he asserts: "We don't shy away from declaring [that] Islam is ready to rule the world."

Obviously there are a bunch of people worldwide that are not ready (or willing) to live under Islamic rule or Sharia Law. Things are getting hotter. The 34-day war last summer was a prelude to the next stage which could possibly see a dusting-off of contingency plans to take out Iran's 23 nuclear facilities.

During the Cold War years Joseph Stalin forced many Crimean Tatars, who are nominal Muslims, out of Ukraine and into exile in Siberia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. Now they're going home. A Russian missionary friend says, "Today there are more than 250,000 Crimean Tatars moving back to Crimea and those villages and little towns are growing rapidly. They're building mosques," he says. **Russian Ministries** Regional Ministry center in Sevastopol, Ukraine recently held a conference to encourage the national church to take the Gospel to Muslim people, especially Crimean Tatars. Please pray for this outreach effort.

On a personal note, **Harriett's** 4-hour surgery last month to realign her fractured left ankle was successful. Now her left leg, below the knee, is in a non-weight bearing cast for 3 months.

We are grateful to Jason Corley of **Project CURE**, our good neighbor here in Tempe, for the loan of a wheelchair to make my Misses more mobile! We're grateful too for dear friends who have brought in meals, sent cards and e-mails and helped in so many practical ways to make up for the serious limitations of a non-domestic husband.

We welcome Rev. **John Jere**, Director of Samaritan Children's Home in Lusaka, Zambia to Arizona this month. ITMI's Director, **Steve Evers**, has arranged an extensive itinerary for him in several states and I know he will be a blessing to all who meet him. Please contact our office if you'd like to host a meeting for him or receive a copy of the touching 10-minute DVD on his ministry.

Please pray for **Brooke Nungesser**, the dynamo of ITMI's dynamic duo in Poznan, Poland. Last month she had a series of medical tests, authorized by her specialist, and will have some more in the near future. They covet your prayers, and should know something more concrete by mid-September. Our Heavenly Father already knows, so please have a word with Him on Brooke's behalf.

Yours in His grip,



Bill Bathman

(Continued from page 1)

Start breakfast. Every Friday morning, Bread of Life offers the homeless a hot breakfast along with the opportunity for prayer and worship. Out of this listless, disconnected group of irregular transients, Kris created an animated community, inviting them to Sunday services he conducts especially for them, so they can have a familiar, comfortable place to worship.

Always sensitive to the needs around them, Megi and Kris began asking the Lord if He would use them to fill the spiritual void in the New City. The Lord answered their prayer. Kris was recently commissioned by the Lord to plant a church south of the river.

This young couple has formed a group of 11 believers, who gather every Thursday for fellowship, prayer and to devise an evangelistic strategy. As the group grows they will begin having regular worship services as well. The men meet regularly to pray together for the fellowship as well as reach out to the community together.

Megi's brainchild for the women has been casual get-togethers, where they can talk about life's questions over crispy crescent rolls in the neutral setting of a Poznan cafe. The latest meeting on the topic of love languages was attended by 30 women.

While Megi and Kris are certain the Lord is capable of great things through their ministry, they are careful to learn from Dr. **Piotr Zaremba's** years of church planting experience and advice,

namely: start small and if the Lord is on board, it will grow.

Kris says, "We do not expect to do the big things in the beginning; rather, we would like to start with a small Bible group and then continuously grow."

Currently the little group meets in Sieliccy's home, however they will eventually need a larger meeting place. They asked us to pray with them that the Lord will show them the best location as they grow.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Warta, Megi ministers through Gospel Joy Workshops and Choir, an organization that has been reaching people with the Gospel for over five years. Gospel Joy jubilantly brings home the truth that Jesus wants to have a personal, intimate relationship with every living person. Despite the Poles' religiosity, many are not aware of this critical part of the Gospel message.

*Strefa Slowa* ("Word Zone" in English) is an informal gathering of people who came to the Workshops, heard about Jesus, and were ignited to know more about Him. Their thirst for truth has been quenched as they explored the foundations of Christianity through Bible study and discussion. Now the regulars themselves are becoming teachers of the newcomers. Their lives have been changed beyond recognition in a way

that only the Spirit could have accomplished.

One member shared, "Strefa Slowa is a place where I learn to love others, grow in faith and understanding of the Bible. The expression 'family in Christ' took on real meaning thanks to this fellowship. I cannot imagine a week without Strefa."

Another testifies, "I gave my life to God 9 years ago, but I have been really growing since...the time I started attending Strefa. Strefa ...is simply a group of people who get together because of Jesus! To seek Him, find Him, get to know Him, call on Him altogether."

Rivers have long been looked to as the *lifelines* of civilization. Along the Polish Warta River, the Holy Spirit is using this dedicated duo to bring Poznan to The Lifeline. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10 KJV He is using Megi and Kris on both sides of the river to deliver His greatest invitation ever – the invitation to drink from the River of Life Abundant.

Written by Summer Kelley



Strefa Slowa Bible Study.

## For Praise . . .

1. Spiritual growth taking place at Strefa Slowa as follow up to evangelism at Gospel Joy Workshops.
2. Successful corrective surgery for **Harriett Bathman's** broken ankle.
3. Marriage of **Mitruts** and **Alina** Stioapu's daughter, Ana-Marie on August 4, 2007.
4. Lives changed at the Stioapu's Plopu Camp in Romania this summer.

## For Prayer . . .

1. Veteran missionary **Tim Keller** and bride **Ashley** on an extensive African field trip.
2. Visit of Pastor **John Jere** to America and his itinerary this month and next.
3. The continued growth of the New City fellowship and guidance in finding a future meeting place.
4. For comfort, encouragement and strength for ITMI partners facing health issues.
5. Preparations for **Steve Evers'** mission trip to India this October.

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