



**DYNAMIC GOSPEL
NEW EUROPE**

CONVERSATION
AND GATHERING

April 2021 Conversation



Table of Contents

Welcome	3
Instructions	4
Podcast: A Vision for Church Planting in Europe Today	7
Church Planting in Europe: Perspectives of an African Pastor in Romania	21

Welcome

This month's Conversation provides two complementary perspectives on church planting in Europe today. We will hear from a dynamic Norwegian church planter who has helped to catalyse the planting of hundreds of churches across Europe. But we will also read about how God took a young South Sudanese student from a prison cell to planting an intercultural Baptist church in Bucharest, Romania. Both stories are incredibly powerful so this month's Conversation and Impact Groups will be very stimulating.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email us at conversation@lausanneeurope.org

And if you are just starting your Impact Group, or are confused about what they are about, then check out the introduction pages to the [Conversation](#) and [Impact Groups](#) to find out more.

Instructions

1. Introductions and Prayer

Give time for everyone to introduce themselves if this is your first Impact Group. Ask someone to pray that God would speak to us as we meet together.

2. A Vision for Church Planting in Europe Today

Our principal resource for this month's Conversation is a podcast with Øivind Augland. Øivind is the founder of M4, a church planting training process which began in Norway but which is now present in 15 European countries. M4 works across denominational and theological boundaries to see new communities of faith formed that will display the goodness of God to the people around them. The interview is 35 mins long but is full of wisdom and insight so make sure you listen to the end!

After listening to the podcast interview with Øivind we would now like you to discuss in your Impact Group the following questions:

1. In regard to the role of pastors and denominational leaders in encouraging a culture of church planting, Øivind said: "I believe they have to understand that church planting, or multiplying and reproducing the gospel, disciples, leaders, and new churches, will be the key for the future". Do you agree, and if so, what should we be doing about it?
2. The podcast introduced us to two young people, Elias and Bendik who are living in a Discipleship House next door to Øivind and his wife. They talked about the joy of making home with other Christians, having opportunities to read the Bible and pray together, but also of the importance of developing rhythms of discipleship and community, of expectations and accountability. What can we learn from this example of simple Christian community? How would it look if you were to do something similar?

3. Øivind had a message to all those who are discouraged or disappointed with church ministry: "My message to these people is relax, it's not your church, it's not your ministry. It's God's. Enjoy God in your personal life, live with God, be close to him. If you lose the joy of God in your personal life, you lose the joy of God in the ministry." What can we learn from that advice?
4. Another issue that was mentioned in the podcast is the importance of inter-generational relationships. How can we encourage mentoring relationships between generations within our organisations and churches?
5. Were there any other insights from the podcast that you found particularly challenging or encouraging?

To find out more about M4 Europe and their training process you can visit the website [here](#).

3. An African Perspective on Church Planting in Europe

The most active church planters in Europe over the past thirty years have been Africans, Latin Americans, and Asians. Their experience and their voice is vital as we seek

to understand what God is doing in Europe today. Peter Rong is one such voice a South Sudanese church planter working in Romania.

After reading Peter Rong's article we would like you to discuss the following questions together.

1. Peter Rong's story of how he came to Europe and how God used a time in prison to call him to ministry sounds like something out of the New Testament. How has God used extraordinary events to change the course of your life to fulfil His purposes?
2. Peter's story of church planting is one of responding in faith to an opportunities and challenges rather than strategic planning. What does this teach us about the practice of church planting? What opportunities are there in your local context that you could respond to?
3. What impacted you on reading Peter's diagnosis of the weakness of the European Church? Do you agree with his observations?

4. What do you think European church leaders need to hear or learn from church leaders from the Majority World who witness alongside us in Europe today?

4. Prayer

Always make sure that you leave enough time to pray together every time you meet. Here are the prayer points for this month's Conversation:

1. A prayer of thanksgiving for the churches that have been planted across Europe during this pandemic. Also, pray for continued encouragement and growth for these church communities and their leadership teams.
2. A prayer of repentance- May we deeply and urgently repent of our complacency and dividedness as the Body of Christ in Europe. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us (The Church) on the path of reconciliation and restored unity in Christ.

3. Pray for Christian leaders who will be willing to mentor and disciple the next generation of young people who have a call and a passion for Church Planting.
4. Pray for God to pour out His Spirit and revive the Church in Europe with a vision for an 'Acts 2' Church.

5. Make Your Contribution to the Conversation

We really want to hear back from your Impact Group after each session. Please find a few minutes to summarise what you hear from God, the highlights of the discussion, and any questions that were raised, in the comments box immediately below. See you next month.

[GO TO THE CONVERSATION](#)

Podcast: A Vision for Church Planting in Europe Today

By Krisitan Lande

[Go to the article online](#)

Kristian Lande

Hello, and welcome to the Lausanne conversation podcast. My name is Kristian Lande. And today we will be looking at church planting. And specifically; how do we mobilize and train church planters and other pioneers for the growing harvest in Europe? With us we have someone I would call an expert on the topic, who has least been working on it for many, many years. Øivind Augland; very welcome.

Øivind Augland

Thank you.

Kristian Lande

It's great to have you here. First of all, we would like to get to know you and your story a little bit. And through that, I think also a bit of church planting. 30 years ago, you and your wife set out on quite an adventure. I guess you didn't know what was waiting. But you planted a church in one of the suburbs of Kristiansand, Norway. Why did you start on that journey?

Øivind Augland

You know, sometimes it's not always about you. It's about the culture you grew up in, and in Kristiansand, our city, there was a culture of church planting. The Kristiansand Free Church, the main church in the city - there was

planted five, six churches out of that. And so, I grew up in a church plant, which I came to faith in. And then there were many stories in my denomination. So, when I was 24 years, I went out - newly married with my wife - planting the first church. And I will say it was not - well I had some entrepreneurial skills - but I grew up in a culture where people was talking about church planting. So, the stories convene me and my personality to say: Well, I can do this. And then I had some people who really believed in me. So, I was sent out as a church planter, from the kind of church plant - Randesund Free Church, to plant in a suburb three kilometers away from the mother church. And I was strongly believed in by the senior pastor in the local church.

Kristian Lande

Thank you. There's a lot of interesting things in that answer. We will bring with us a lot of that for the coming questions. But first of all, what did God do as you went on to plant that church?

Øivind Augland

Well, we saw a church emerge in the suburbs. And I think, honestly, again, I had, luckily, people around me. I had a senior pastor said to me, if you succeed, we love you, if

you don't succeed, we love you even more, just do it. And then I had people around me who had planted churches who had a lot of experience. So, moving out, I did some of the things that was learned in my denomination from church planting already in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. So, we had a strong core team, we had a clear vision of planting in the suburb, we knew what model we want to plant. And also, we had a clear expectation and commitment from the core team that was planting. So, we did some healthy thing in the beginning that was quite good.

Kristian Lande

Great. And what mistakes did you learn from when you look back?

Øivind Augland

As I said, I think in some way on church planting, I think we did quite well, we did the right thing. I didn't know about it, but the people around me knew what I should do. So, I listened to them and followed them. But I think the most - we got three kids during the church planting journey in the beginning. So, newly married three kids, planting churches. So, I think it was more my personally journey of doing the wrong priorities: Not investing too much in our marriage, so we got some challenges in our marriage in

the midst of the church plant. And then that lead us to a journey where we stopped, and we took a sabbatical, and we develop that. And I think that's - I think sometimes doing the right thing in the planting, but it's also doing the right thing personally, in your own life and prioritize the right thing. I think that's what's more my challenge. I'm an activist. So if you are an activist, you often like to do a lot.

Kristian Lande

Yeah, I reckon - I can see myself in that. And I assume COVID-19 has been a challenging time for you as an activist?

Øivind Augland

Yeah, I find other things to do.

Kristian Lande

That's good. You know, since I met you for the first time, I think it's getting close to 20 years. I think one of the things I noticed is that you planted a church, but you are also very, very passionate about training others and investing in others. And one of the outcomes of that has been the M4. How does that look like today?

Øivind Augland

Well, just to say: The M4 emerged from Norway, and an ecumenical process of church planting and mission, that I lead for 10 years. It is borne out of Norway, so M4 is like a community project. And then it went to 15 nations. Around, close to, 400 churches has been planted the last 10 years through the M4 team-training process. Because we saw we need to not only train the church planter, but the whole team. And not before they plant the church, but when they are planting the church. So, it's in 15 nations, for the next 18 months we are moving to see 100 new church plants planted through the M4, until the summer of 2022. And 1000 are part of the M4-ready, a recruitment training system that is now implemented in 10 nations of Europe.

Kristian Lande

Amazing. I myself, and the team I was church planting, with was part of that. And it was a very big blessing for us, and a big help for us as a team. You got the opportunity to take a step back for two days. And just think and pray and get inspiration. It was it was really a blessing for us. So, I think that's been a crucial part of training for church planting. And then ..., I think, even that was definitely a big

blessing for us. I also see that, when looking back at my life, there are things I would have liked to know, and been trained in, which the M4 could not do. And I think it's connected with what you were sharing, you grew up in a church planting culture. It was part of your DNA. And I also see in my life that those that I've walked closest with, the people that's been following me, and I've been investing in - the once I had the closest into my life. Not just in theoretical training, but really close on my life, and my family's life, are the ones where I see the biggest growth in, and I see them moving on. And I know you have taken quite a drastic step in this, not replacing the M4, but just another way of training. Could you say a bit about that?

Øivind Augland

I think you are moving to discipling houses - discipleship house.

Kristian Lande

Yes

Øivind Augland

So, we started this up one year ago. And we have seven people living in the house, five in the upper floor and a couple with a small kid in the basement. And they are in

the neighbor house, so we are living quite close to them, and in some way investing into their lives.

Kristian Lande

Great. We actually have two of them with us here today, to join this podcast. Elias and Bendik: You're very welcome.

Elias Røsnes

Thank you.

Bendik Hermansen

Thank you.

Kristian Lande

It's great to have you here. How old are you guys?

Bendik Hermansen

I'm 22.

Elias Røsnes

And, I'm 19 years old.

Kristian Lande

Amazing. So, out of your experiences from the last year: What's the difference between living in such a discipleship

house, and other kinds of experiences you have of training?

Elias Røsnes

I've only lived at my parents' house before. So that's the only experience I've had. But when Øivind said to me: Elias, do you want to move into the discipleship house? I said yes right away. What I've experienced from the last year is that you have a home with other Christians around you that you can share your faith with, and they can relate to what you're talking about. And it's also a really big relief I felt, that I can come home and there are four other guys that I live with that meets me with a smile. And we can share the gospel with each other. We can pray together, and we read the bible together. So, I feel like the discipleship home has given me fuel throughout the days and the weeks, and it's been a really good experience for me.

Kristian Lande

Amazing.

Bendik Hermansen

I went to Bible college, and lived in our house with six other girls actually. So yeah, I'm ready for marriage after

that. But we didn't get so much time to read in the Bible as I wanted. We didn't get so much time to pray as I wanted. And after college, I moved into a house with four guys, and we were all Christians, but we didn't read so much in the Bible, and pray so much together. So, when I went to move to Kristiansand, and I got a house where I could read more in the Bible, I could pray with other guys, I could reflect on questions that are hard, I could get thoughts that I didn't think about myself. And that has been a path for me where I've been growing as a disciple. I've become a better Christian, I believe myself. I've become a better person. And I feel like I'm now trained to go out to meet other people with what I've learned from the last eight months.

Kristian Lande

So, what I hear is that the difference between what you're doing now and what you've done before - you have also lived with other people, like young people often do, beforehand, but now you're more conscious. You have a clearer vision for what this should look like. And you made some conscious decisions. Øivind, what's been your part in that? As the neighbor, and as the one who wants to invest?

Øivind Augland

Yeah, I think my part - not my part, Linda and me, my wife's, part. I think that they can say that it's not really my part, it's us - it's our part.

Bendik Hermansen

Yes. Absolutely.

Øivind Augland

We create a space, where we have some expectations. We have expectation of rhythm, of community/fellowship with each other, and of serving others. So, to move into the house there our expectation of rhythm of community and serving others. And that's clear upfront, when you move in. So, in some way, what we do as adults; we keep them a little bit accountable. Every month we are sitting down with them and talk: How is life? How are things going? We keep them accountable. Not to a super Christian kind of thing, you need to be a real. It's more to a more everyday rhythm, that they can, if possible, take with them into the normal life. So, what we try to do is to create a sustainable rhythm in a house, that make them work in some disciple rhythms, a disciple pulse into life, to be sustainable, also, in the long run.

Kristian Lande

Beautiful, so I think you're quite hands on, and you're giving direction. And I think the fact that you actually gave a lot of clarity beforehand, so the guys who moved in, they knew what they were moving into. I think that's a pretty important thing.

Øivind Augland

And it keeps us young, because it's so fun, and they are amazing people to be with.

Kristian Lande

That's beautiful. And the fact that it's fun to train others in that way is actually quite important. And the fact that, you said, this is close to how life will look like when you're moving on. Whilst being in a bubble of a Bible School, for example, is quite different from what normal life would look like. Right, thank you. One of the things I'm involved in is; I'm part of, of the Lausanne younger leaders network in Europe, and a team who's leading that. We've realized, as a leadership team of those young leaders, that often there's a quite big gap between young and older leaders in churches and organizations in Europe. Young leaders often feel alone, they're struggling, and they don't know where to go. We found that the reason for it is more a

misunderstanding then people don't wanting. The younger generation thinks that the older ones are too busy. They don't have time for them. And the older generation, often tends thinks that the young - we are not relevant for the young ones. They are not interested in us, and our experience. Elias and Bendik, to start with you: Is the older generation relevant to you? And if so, in what way?

Elias Røsnes

Absolutely. I've grown up in this church, been in this church my whole 19-year-old life. And from I was a little kid to where I'm now the elder generation has encouraged me on my way with Christ's. They have prayed for me and walked with me through the services and other things we were doing in a church. They served us by being leaders at our groups when we were younger - we have inbetweeners when you're in the youth age - they were in our groups and they really saw us and saw the potential in us. And I think it was, like, two years ago, we were at this trip with the whole church. And I was leader of the youth group. And we had set up this meeting, where two from the older generation were talking to a group of younger youth. And they could share

their experience with Christ. And the youth could share back their experience. And it was an amazing experience, to see what we could share with each other, and how they have lived in their time as a youth, and how we are living now. To give each other advice throughout the days we are living. So, I think mixing the youth with the older generation is so important in the church, and in general in life.

Kristian Lande

And I love that this is not just when you were 12 or 14, that you wanted the older generation, but you still want it when you're 19. And probably when you're 30 as well. It doesn't stop. Thank you.

Bendik Hermansen

Yeah, I think they have a lot of experience that we don't have, because they have taken so many steps with Christ over maybe 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years. And that is making me interested in knowing what they have experienced, to grow myself. And when I lived in Trondheim, I had a mentor, and he was 70, and retired. He was a doctor before he retired. And he grew up in a non-Christian family. But met God and Christ when he was studying in Austria. And after that, he went to Asia, preaching about

God giving the gospel out to a lot of people. And for me, that is some experience, I want to feel, I want to know what he has been experiencing through so many years. And he was praying for me, I know he's still praying for me, he's sending me text messages still, and wants to know how I am. And for me, that is a way that I know that the older generation is so important for me as a 22-year-old guy. It's so good to have the older generation in that path.

Kristian Lande

So, the key here is that he's basically interested in you, and your life. Beautiful. I think that's an encouragement for me as well, as someone who's in between the young and the older generation, probably, you know that: Yeah, I would like to be to be interested in the young people and what's going on in their life. Thank you. Øivind, I know that you're a busy man, you're an activist, as you said, so you have a lot of things going on. But still, you're not too busy to start a discipleship house next door. What convinced you that that's worth the time? Because it takes time from your busy schedule?

Øivind Augland

So, I have an idealistic view of things, some things. I said, what you are going to model in your nation, you have to

do locally. And what you're going to model in Europe, you have to do in your nation. And I believe many are withdrawing from the real life. So, for me I have to be local, and involved in discipleship, in doing church and doing church plant, if I should have a voice in the European context. Talking about something I don't do is difficult. I have to do it. So, I want to be in the real life. And again, at the discipleship house is not my thing. It's our thing, it's Linda and me. Important to say.

Kristian Lande

Yeah, I know, from my marriage, that that my wife is so instrumental in building trust and relationship. Yeah, beautiful.

Øivind Augland

But honestly, I think we need some reverse mentoring. I think the younger generation can mentor us a lot. And they don't maybe understand this, but it's very - a little bit selfish, also, to be with them. Because I learned too much. I learn so much myself.

Kristian Lande

Amazing. Thank you, guys. I think this is something for all of us in Europe to take with us: Let's walk close as

generations. And yeah, let's not let this gap to grow, but let's do something to take it away.

Øivind Augland

I think I think it's also important to say that we are a generational church. So we believe what God work through generations. He is Abraham, Isaac and Jacob's God, he is a three generational God. We need to always work in generation.

Kristian Lande

Yeah. Beautiful. Elias and Bendik; a last question to you guys: Do you see yourself involved in church planting in the years to come?

Elias Røsnes

I mean, it's hard not to when your boss is Øivind Augland. No, but I think - when we live in a discipleship home where we can share our thoughts and share the gospel with each other. And we have Øivind and Linda, who have experienced all of this church planting, I think it's really inspiring for us as well to look for look forward and see what God can do in our lives. What use God has in us, because God has created us with a plan. And Øivind and Linda, they inspire us that in us; to look what God has put

in us. So, I think, if that's God's plan for us, then that's God's plan for us. And we will listen to God.

Kristian Lande

Amazing.

Bendik Hermansen

I really hope so. I really hope I can be a part of a church planting, because I'm blessed with having Øivind as my pastor, my boss, my neighbor. And I remember myself as a 15-year-old boy, I was looking at Øivinds videos of church planting, and six years later I'm here working in his church. Yeah. And he is an elite in church planting, he has so much experience with it. And I really hope I can be a part of his team in the next church planting here in Norway. Because I hope that's God's plan for me to be involved in that. Yeah.

Øivind Augland

I would love to plant a new church.

Kristian Lande

I trust you would. Amazing. It's been really encouraging to have this talk. And I see that the key word here is culture: That from long time ago, there's been a culture for church planting, and a passion that's been taken care of that it's

not dying - we want to reach more people, which is the key behind the church planting. It's not just planting an institution; you want to reach people. So, I think my prayer, as I'm listening: I want to see this culture all over Europe. That there's a culture in each church: We want to reach further, we want to plant more churches. And that as people are in discipleship houses, and in mentoring, they will learn and grow in this. Okay. Elias and Bendik; we will allow you to move on. And before we end the podcast: Øivind, I have some questions for you. More general questions about church planting. First one is; how has the covid 19 pandemic has impacted the church planting movement in Europe?

Øivind Augland

You know, I don't think anyone has the overview of that question. I think it will affect the church quite dramatically. The good thing which church planting is that often they are small. So, even if you are small - and often you start with small groups, and multiplying small groups - so many of the church plants just continue to be who they are: Small groups of people meeting together. And I think that's the strength. Some church plants have been finding ways of connecting with people in a digital world, and see

people come to faith through that. I see with the M4, some of the processes have led to postponing a little bit starting with new churches. But in Czech, they started in the middle of the COVID now, with nine new church plants within the M4. In Ukraine, they are starting with 10 new church plants within the M4, two weeks from now, or one week from now. So, a lot of the training have been online. So, we do online training, because they can meet off offline with their small teams. Yeah. So I think church planting is moving on, and probably because of the pandemic, there is a new openness for the gospel, and that is a new opportunity for church planting.

Kristian Lande

Yeah, but I totally agree. I think this time coming now, when things open up and starts getting normal, people will have so many questions and people will long for community. So, it's just the time to start church planting.

Øivind Augland

Yeah, but at the same time research from Switzerland, newly research last 14 days from Switzerland, show that probably 25% of the church who formerly were active in the church, will not come back. So, the traditional church could lose maybe 25% of their members after COVID. So,

that is also some of the research done now, which means that we could see a shift in how we do church in Europe.

Kristian Lande

That's interesting. Long term that might actually be a blessing.

Øivind Augland

Well, yeah, for some churches it will not be a blessing.

Kristian Lande

No, but for the church in general. It's kind of like a pruning. But yeah, that's another topic. One more question about church planting: Very generally speaking, you could maybe say that the harvest field in Europe can be divided into three groups. One being nominal Christians. The second one being secular post Christians, totally detached from church and faith. And the third one being believers of other religions, often immigrants and descendants of immigrants. And my question to you is; among which of these groups do you see that church planting is happening the most in Europe

Øivind Augland

Well, the most progressive church planters in Europe are

the Africans, and people from immigrant backgrounds. They are the most progressive church planters more or less in Europe. Then you have a lot - in Northern Europe, you reach kind of the fringe, people who have kind of a Christian background, or some kind of Christian ... And also in the kind of Spanish-catholic area, because that's the culture. But you also see churches really reaching - we call it sometimes conversion based church planting, you know, you win your team for Christ before you start the church. Because you are totally, either in post communistic area of Europe, where there are no people who know Christ when you're planting, you need to win your team for Christ. And you see church plants that that's coming from that place also. So, the question is, where in Europe, because Europe is so fragmented and diverse. So, it's difficult to answer. But in the northern part of Europe, immigrant churches quite a lot - and also reaching the fringe, not maybe the extreme secular people mostly.

Kristian Lande

And which one of those three groups is the most challenging harvest to reach?

Øivind Augland

Again, it's different from place to place in Europe. You see that the post Christians, the people who have no idea about faith, they have never seen a Bible, they don't know the story of Jesus, they have no clue. Often, you see that you can share the gospel in a new way. Because you don't have the tradition, that is a filter for the gospel. So, the challenge is just different.

Kristian Lande

Thank you. You just spoke quite a lot about the culture for church planting within a church, and within a movement. What would you say to pastors, denominational leaders, leaders of organizations? What role do they play into in the church planting movement in today's Europe?

Øivind Augland

You know, I believe they have to understand that church planting, or multiplying and reproducing the gospel, disciples, leaders, and new churches, will be the key for the future. And I think I will say; start to invest in the one. Who are your apprentices? Who do you invest in? That's the first question: Who do you invest in? And at the same time, you know, as leaders, we need to give a visionary space where people can run. And give vision for church

planting into your denomination. Even if you think it's nearly impossible, but it is possible, because you have entrepreneurs, leaders, they want to do it. But you as a leader can either open the doors or close the doors. The denominational and national leaders can either open doors will close doors. The people are there. And the question is; if the leaders open the doors or if they closed the door? If they gave a visionary space for multiplication and reproduction of churches within their denomination and organization. But, start with the one.

Kristian Lande

Yeah, I can see that from my life. There were leaders in my denomination who casted the vision. And it gave space for me to get involved in church planting. And invested.

Øivind Augland

That's my story also.

Kristian Lande

Yeah, exactly. That's a good encouragement and challenge for those leaders. I've been involved in two different church plantings, one in Norway and one in the Czech Republic, the second one with my wife. When looking back, I can see we've had a lot of joys and

celebrations, but we have also seen some quite heavy disappointments, when you're just feeling like a failure. You can also see that in the Bible, lots of stories - from Paul's life, and other people's lives; disappointments. What would you say, to those of us who, from time to time, face discouragement, that feel like; achh come on - some people even lose faith in church planting in Europe? What's your message?

Øivind Augland

My message to these people is relax, it's not your church, it's not your ministry. It's God's. Enjoy God in your personal life, live with God, be close to him. If you lose the joy of God in your personal life, you lose the joy of God in the ministry. So, you know, ministry is something we are sent to, or calling is to be with Jesus. And if you lose that relationship ... You know, everything can be hard, life can be hard. And I will say; get back to the first thing, your intimate relationship with God, and really water that, and be there, then I think something will change.

Kristian Lande

Great, thank you. What would you say, is the most crucial breakthroughs needed to see the church planting movement in Europe accelerating?

Øivind Augland

I can phrase this in different ways. There is an evangelism urgency. You know, we need to start to believe in the Gospel again. Jesus died for my sin, he stood up for my righteousness. We need to preach the gospel and believe in the Gospel again. And I think that we have lost the gospel during the years of denominational, organizational, historical church. We need to start to preach the gospel again, and we need to start to make disciples. And we need to change the language of the church. Those who create the language owns the paradigm, and those who owns the paradigm leads the future. And we need to change the language of the church in Europe, to a place of reproduction and multiplication. We will never reach Europe the way we do church today. We need to start to reproduce the gospel, disciples, leaders and new churches. Even networks and bigger works. We need to come to a place where reproduction and multiplication become the norm in the language and behavior of the church in Europe. When that happen, we will see a shift. It starts with a gospel urgency, an evangelistic urgency, and that we understand that we need to disciple people.

Kristian Lande

Now. I hear that you again are talking about culture. You need to change the culture, to see a culture which is believing and preaching the gospel, and seeing multiplication as the normal thing.

Øivind Augland

Yes. And you have to start with the one.

Kristian Lande

This has been a lot of good inputs, and a lot of challenging thoughts. And my prayer and my challenge to all of you guys who are listening, and who's working on this, is to take with you all you heard today, bring it on, and look at; how do we see this culture emerging and flourishing in our country, in our church, in relations in our lives? Okay, thank you Øivind. Be blessed, everybody.

Church Planting in Europe: Perspectives of an African Pastor in Romania

By Peter Rong

[Go to the article online](#)

Introduction:

Church planting is a command from the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Master and founder of the Church who said: “I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). It is the best strategy for bringing the gospel closer to the people and fulfilment of the ‘go’ component in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18).

My testimony and calling to Ministry:

While a student in Romania, I was imprisoned alongside seven other students from South Sudan. That was the turning point in my life and my call to ministry. To make the story short, one day the Sudanese embassy in

Bucharest invited all the Sudanese students for “a meeting at the embassy”. Eight of us were Christians from the Southern Sudan that was fighting the Sudanese government to become an independent state. In that meeting the Consul told us that he had decided to send us back to Sudan, a decision we rejected. This led to an argument and a fight between us and the Muslim students. The Embassy then called the police, twisted the story against us, and the eight of us were arrested and put in jail. We stayed in prison for one and a half years.

While we were in Prison, Rev. Chris Newland an Anglican priest, who apart from providing for our physical needs, also got involved in following up our case with the

Romanian Government and advocating for our release. Thankfully, as a result, the President of Romania and his government gave us protection and refused to hand us over to the Sudanese authorities. Back home in Sudan, we were sentenced to death in absentia.

It was when I was in the prison that I spent more time reading the Bible and I gave my life to Christ in my prison cell. One night, I heard God's voice three times saying "you are my servant, I have called you." I told God "If I am your servant, set us free from this prison and I will serve you. May your will be done in my life." A short time after that, in 1994, we were released from prison. That moment, I left economics and took up theology.

Confirmation of God's calling:

Upon our release from the prison, the Romanian government granted us study scholarships and I chose to study theology. In 1995, I joined the Baptist Seminary in Bucharest where I graduated in 1999. My wife and I got married in 2000 and I was then sent to pastor a Church in the city of Medias where we had a fruitful ministry for seventeen months. After that, the Lord told me to return to Bucharest to plant an international and multicultural Church. This was not an easy decision to comprehend,

especially for my wife, but through prayer and submission to the Lord we returned to Bucharest in 2001.

Church planting and Pastoral ministry:

Any call to Church planting is initiated and commissioned by the Holy Spirit as exemplified in the call to plant the Church in Antioch by Apostle Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). The driving force behind any Church planting is God's love for the perishing world (John 3:16). When we see the world through God's eyes and love, we are moved by compassion to go out, plant Churches and minister.

My experience is that Church planting is neither dependent on finances nor on physical infrastructure like Church buildings. No! What we need is faith and trust in God and the faithful Lord will provide for His work. As Hudson Taylor put it, "God's work done God's way will never lack God's resource". It can start even in a humble home. Our Church is an example. We started a weekly Bible Study in our small apartment which multiplied and grew. In a short time, the space was not able to accommodate us. This was reported to one Pastor through his daughter Fibia who was attending the Bible study, and the pastor and his Church gave us a space in their Church

which we freely used before we rented our current facility in the centre of Bucharest.

Another Church planting ministry we had was in a refugee camp, which was accompanied by meeting the physical needs of the refugees. When the Director of the Refugee Camp saw the positive impact, he gave us a Room in the Camp which we used as a Church for the refugees. A Church was planted!

By faith, we started the Church in our apartment and the refugee Camp, and through sister Fibia, God provided the space in the Romanian Church.

In the last years, we have baptized people from many different cultural and religious backgrounds including Romanians who came to the Lord through our ministry (Mark 16:15-16). From the time we started in 2001, over forty (40) different nationalities have passed through our Church. Our Church is like a transit station where people come and go. The good thing is that people hear the Gospel and leave Romania with Jesus.

Challenges in our Church planting Ministry

As a Church planting ministry, we faced the following challenges that were expected.

1. Resistance and threats from people of other religious background:

One time while doing evangelism in refugee camp, a Muslim man threatened to kill me. He told me "if you come here again next week, I will kill you." I told him 'you are free to kill me but I will love you to the end and am praying for you because my God is a God of love.' When we returned to the Camp the following week, the very man who threatened me was the first to welcome us and he attended the Bible sharing.

2. Scrutiny from the security forces:

Romanian security forces were suspicious that I might be involved in illegal activities like document forgery and smuggling people across the border to other countries in Europe as they saw me surrounded by different nationalities. But after a long time of scrutiny, the security chief reached a conclusion that I am a Priest and teaching people to be good people in the society. Since then, the security forces stopped following me.

3. Ordination challenges:

Another challenge we faced was regarding my ordination as a pastor. In 2002, the President of the Baptist Union in Romania denied my ordination to be licenced as a Church Pastor, because I was not Romanian. But God changed their hearts, and I got ordained, and today our Church received the licence to operate. Who can be against us if God is for us? (Romans 8:31).

4. Visa challenges:

Before I received Romanian citizenship, I was not able to travel around in Europe due to visa restrictions.

The European Church as a Missionary sending Church:

The early European Church from the time of its establishment was a strong and mission-minded Church that sent missionaries throughout the world in obedience to the Great Commission. We Africans were evangelized by European Missionaries who played a positive role in bringing the Christian faith and education to Africa. I praise God for that!

What happened to the strong European Church? What went wrong?

These two questions are vital to our understanding of the

European Church in Europe today. As an African missionary in Europe, my observation is that the following factors contributed to weakening the European Church.

Complacency:

Complacent life came into the European Church probably after the Industrial Revolution. As life became more and more comfortable the European Church became lukewarm like the Church of the Laodiceans: "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). The focus of the Church at all times should remain "the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

Traditionalism:

When the Church gives importance to tradition more than the living Gospel, it leads to spiritual atrophy, moral decay, and lukewarmness (Rev. 3:16). It is for this reason that reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin came forward and challenged the traditional Church. Pastors and Bible teachers need to stand for the truth of the word of God "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20).

Influences of culture, other religions and paganism:

As an African Missionary in Europe, my observation is that the European Church has been infiltrated and weakened by cultural influences, paganism and other religions. Cultures everywhere influence the Church in many ways including the way people worship. Islam is now strongly encroaching into Europe. Another influence on the Church is the controversial contemporary issues like abortion, same sex marriage, euthanasia etc. The Church seems to be compelled by law to compromise and accept them though not in principle. When the Church becomes complacent and traditional, it becomes vulnerable to all these influences and is no longer the voice of truth. Pastors need to stand firm in teaching the sound doctrine. Jesus Christ might be standing outside, and knocking at the door of many Churches in Europe (Rev.3:20).

What went wrong and what is going on in European Churches today?

We all know what went wrong! It is that people left the Bible and the God of the Bible. My prayer is to see the European Church returning to "The Organic Church" model of Acts 2:42-47 with teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer in the centre.

The second problem is putting theology and tradition above faith and the Holy Spirit which makes the Church more of an academic and traditional institution than a place for demonstration of God's power. This puts the Church at the risk of dying. There is nothing wrong with theology but the Church needs to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The situation of the current European Church

As an African missionary living in Europe, I have witnessed great and positive move in the European Church in the recent years. God is in the move to revive Europe again! Will you not revive us again? (Psalm 85:6). God is working, and there is hope for spiritual revival in Europe again. This is evidenced by emergence of strong evangelical Churches and organizations like the European leadership Forum (ELF). God is also using the diaspora leaders like myself and others in Europe together with the indigenous European Leaders to strengthen the European Church.

Conclusion:

What does the European Church need at this point in time?

What Europe needs at this point in time is what happened in the time of King Jehoshaphat when people with a

sound knowledge of the Book of the Law were mobilized and sent to all the cities to teach the Word. That is what I call true revival, a sincere return to the Word of God (2 Chronicles 17:7-9).

The Bible Schools in Europe need to invest in teaching and graduating true men and women of God who will bring revival. Repentance and intercession are needed. Revivals are historically known to follow repentance, sincere seeking of God's face in prayer, fasting and humbleness before God (2 Chronicles 7:14). The European Church needs to seek God in prayer and stand in the gap (Ezekiel 22:30) and repent on behalf of Europe. God will always honour sincere prayer and repentance of His people and will always visit them. Once this happens, revival will come.