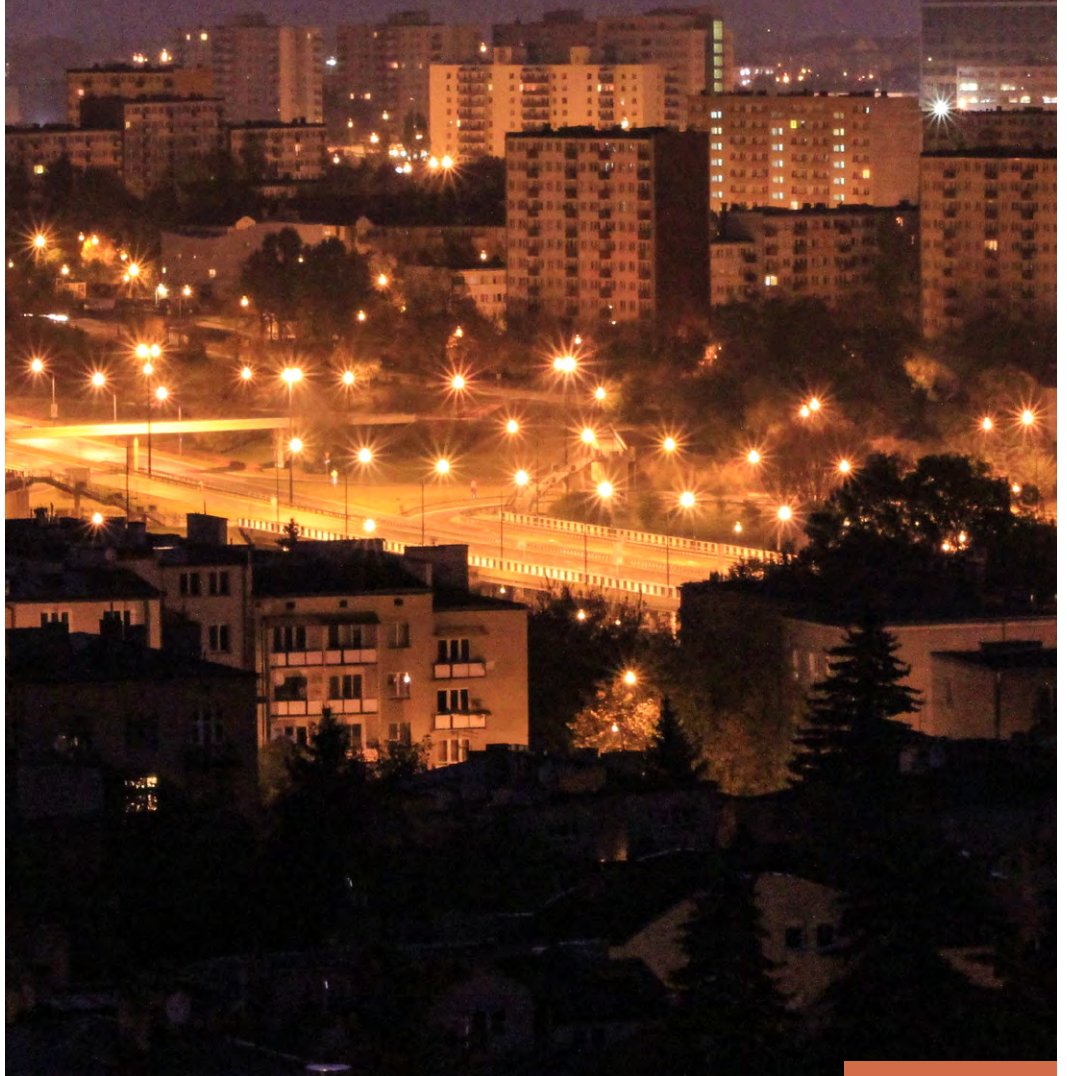


CONNECT

AIM's journal for prayer, reflection and growth



How do we love our neighbours, proclaim Christ, and equip churches to work with the African diaspora?



**AFRICA
INLAND MISSION**



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A PART OF THE ANSWER

I will never forget the article I read about a teenage girl who had to bury her mother and two sisters in the desert sand.

Shafa, 14, was the only survivor of 92 migrants who were abandoned by their traffickers in the Sahara Desert. Each one had paid for passage to Libya, where they would wait to cross the Mediterranean to Europe in hope of a better life.¹

This article haunted me. I asked, “Who is on the other side of the Mediterranean welcoming such a victim of human suffering? Who is there to embrace her and offer her hope and healing?” I knew part of the answer needed to be me. How could I not be a part of the response to the growing number of refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and international students flooding the cities of Europe from the African continent?

14 million African-born immigrants already live in Europe, making up over 40% of Europe’s total immigrant number.² 2015 saw the greatest surge, where over one million Africans made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean.³ This provoked AIM and our partners to action, and we mobilised short term teams to serve these new arrivals. Partnering with local churches and ministries we offered hope and healing, as well as necessities such as clothing and food.

On the first day of training one such team in 2018, we prayed earnestly that the Lord would lead us to those we could serve. None of us imagined how the Lord would so immediately answer this prayer. Within hours, the hostel where we were staying became a main receiving centre for over 100 African migrants rescued from the Mediterranean Sea. It was amazing to see our team jump to action with our local Spanish partners in Jerez de la Frontera. The majority of those rescued were women from Morocco and West Africa. They were traumatised. They had been pulled from the sea and had lost everything. Many had been separated from their loved ones by the traffickers and appeared hopeless. It was too difficult for them to retell their stories of the trauma they had experienced. Our team was equipped to offer compassion. Utilising the long hours of waiting for medical checks and asylum processes, ➔

If you would like to receive our weekly prayer email with seven daily prayer points, designed to provide you with up to date prayer and praise items, you can sign up at: eu.aimint.org/pray.

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How to reach out to your diaspora neighbours.

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☪ we showed the *Magdalena: Released From Shame* film in French. Tears streamed down women's cheeks as they embraced the love and compassion of Jesus that was communicated through this film and the sharing afterwards. The next day, my wife, Maureen, and the team transformed one of the rooms into a boutique where they pampered the women. It was beautiful to see these women open up, smile, bond, sing and dance.

We have a lot to learn from African missionaries in Europe and therefore I have invited several to partner with AIM and train our members. Twins, Hamid* and Hakim*, grew up in a large Muslim family in Darfur, Sudan. Faith in Jesus came to them through their older brother Hassan*. As a result of persecution and regional insecurity, Hassan brought his twin brothers to Cairo, where he was leading various ministries. From there he worked hard to provide for their needs

“Who would be on the other side welcoming these victims of human suffering?”

and education. The brothers grew in faith, but Egypt became increasingly hostile to Sudanese, especially Christ-followers. Hassan encouraged them to pursue a promising future in Europe, and so after securing funds, they bought passage to Libya to then cross the Mediterranean for a future life in Europe. After months of abductions, imprisonment, and paying human traffickers, they finally made it to Paris. They were homeless and riding on trains at night. A divine encounter with a Christian worker serving refugees and migrants in Europe eventually led the twins to be a part of an international team reaching people unreached with the gospel in France.



MIGRATION IN THE BIBLE

Throughout the Old Testament we can see instances of migration woven into the narrative. People moved for different reasons, such as when Joseph was trafficked to Egypt to become a servant, or when the Israelites were taken into exile in Babylon. Sometimes people moved in response to God’s calling, as in the case of Abram. Whatever the reason for their travels, these events were all part of God’s plan for the overall redemption of mankind.



Have you, or any of your family, recently moved, either within Europe or to Europe from further afield? Or, do you know people who have moved recently?

Read Genesis 12:1 and Hebrews 11:9.

Can you think of some of the things which Abram’s faith caused him to give up?

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God did not just ask people to move and then leave them. He was concerned to see that they flourished in their new locations. The Bible contains advice for people who are migrating, and for those who are welcoming migrants.

Read Jeremiah 29:7 and Leviticus 19:34.

As you read these verses does God bring any particular thoughts to your mind?

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Why not explore our free Bible study series: eu.aimint.org/resources.

Three years of dedication and hard work later, the twins are now supporting their family back home as they pursue their calling to make disciples of refugees, people they are uniquely suited to reach.

What I know is that the harvest is truly plentiful in Europe and he is calling us to increase our efforts and work force. Join us in asking the Lord to send us more labourers who can embrace these new neighbours. It was clear to me that God was calling me to be part of the answer, and I am so glad I responded because my life is made so much richer through those I get to serve among and with. Will you join me?

JOHN BECKER

Europe Diaspora Area Leader

¹⁻³ You can find the references for the footnotes by visiting: eu.aimint.org/part-of-the-answer.

*Names changed for security reasons.



WHAT IS DIASPORA MINISTRY?

“So don’t be fooled when the sun finally appears!” she told me, with a twinkle in her eye. Mama P had become my best friend since we moved to northern Finland. She had just finished telling me how, in her first winter here, when the sun finally made an appearance again in her balcony window, she had run to throw open the doors, expecting at least a little of that warm sun beam feeling. Only, instead of being greeted with the usual temperature of around -20, she was greeted with a temperature of -35! We had a good laugh as we reminisced about the warm Congo sun that we both knew so well.

She had fled from DR Congo years ago, and we had lived there as missionaries. We were both in agreement that though we did not miss the violence, we sure did miss the heat and sunshine!

I have heard people say of refugees that “they just need to hurry up and adapt, give up their old ways, after all, they chose to come here.” It makes me sad to hear because often that isn’t correct. We have only worked with refugees for a short time, so we don’t claim to be experts, but we have learned a few things along the way so far.



MUCH TO GRIEVE

The refugee didn't actually choose to come to wherever they are now. They fled something horrible, were luckier than those who died along the way, often lived for many, many years in a refugee camp, still having to fight for their lives, and when their turn came to leave the camp, they were matched with whichever country was up next to take refugees. While the refugee is likely very grateful to be out of danger (though persecution may continue in their new country), they are still grieving a great loss. They are grieving loss of family members, friends, culture, language, home, and loss of any dreams they might have had for their life. Even if they have an education, they are usually limited to jobs for the uneducated due to an unwritten class ceiling. They

He gives justice to orphans and widows. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:18)

also frequently end up feeling excluded by their host country. Here in Finland, many have lived for years without having been invited into the home of a Finn. They are trying to adapt, but it is hard if nobody helps them navigate the new culture. They also, understandably, don't want to let go of everything that makes them who they are. ➡



📍 A LOT TO LEARN

When God suddenly (in our minds) moved us to Finland, we found we were quite ignorant to all this and even had vocabulary to learn! Starting with the word ‘diaspora’, which is a group of people who have been spread or dispersed from their homeland. We then had to understand the difference between migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, partly because we learned they would be found in drastically different situations.

We had to understand the difference between migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, partly because we learned they would be found in drastically different situations.

A migrant is usually hired by a company and may or may not be in the country all year round. However, some people do migrate permanently into a country for work or through marriage. I am a migrant.

Then there are refugees and asylum seekers. This took us a little time to wrap our heads around. A refugee is selected by their host country from an official refugee camp where they have been staying. We know one family who was in a refugee camp for 18 years before being selected. An asylum seeker is someone who manages to get into the country by their own means and then applies for asylum. A refugee will normally be completely legally accepted by the host country, with everyone assuming they are there to stay. An asylum seeker is usually granted certain things by the host country while they await a decision. A decision which may be, “sorry, you’re on the next plane back to the country you ran from,” or “yes, you may stay.” An asylum seeker, in addition to their other stresses and traumas, is also suffering from the fear of not knowing if they may be sent back to whatever they ran from, which could quite possibly be to their death.

SO WHY IS DIASPORA MINISTRY IMPORTANT?

First of all is the obvious reason, which is that every individual is important to God. But there are other reasons too. These folks tend to have family and friends all over the world. Because of the connections that our diaspora friends have, over the course of a week, Timo will be online teaching brothers and sisters in places like Finland, Canada, Australia, Zambia, Congo, and another country that can’t be named for security reasons. Many of these connections come from refugees who have spent 10-20 years in camps and have maintained those friendships, despite being separated as they got selected to go to different countries.

So, as your paths cross with diaspora in your own community, consider that the life they have led, and are still leading now, may be unspeakably tragic. They may have already learned they are not welcomed by many in your country. Their burden may be too heavy for them to engage with the outside world. Often, refugees are happy to talk if you show that you care. Once you have developed a friendship, if they are Christian, you may find they have much to teach you. If they aren’t, love them towards Jesus.



TIMO AND LAURA previously worked for Mission Aviation Fellowship in DR Congo. Timo (from Finland) and Laura (from the USA) are now serving in Finland among the Congolese refugee population, sharing Jesus with them, and equipping Christian refugees to reach out to the Finns they live among.

FLEEING TO SAFETY

As Joseph* came to the Zambian border after running and walking through the night, he couldn't even think. His mind was numb. He prayed without words, wondering if he'd ever see his wife again.

Days before, the governor of the province had declared that everyone from Joseph's people group had to leave. The killing started instantly. His father, a godly man, had gone to a meeting to try to fight this evil in correct, godly ways. He was killed, and they came for his family.

Joseph and his new bride, Francine*, were living with his parents. By the time Joseph got home, his wife had fled. His mother was too stunned to move. Before he could get her out, someone was banging down the door. They beat his mother and there was nothing he could do. He woke up later having passed out. They probably thought he was dead too. He went to a Catholic priest who told him there was nothing he could do but run for the border, and pointed him in the right direction. His parents were dead. His wife was missing. His brothers and sisters were missing or dead.

He cried out to God and, miraculously, God led him to his wife, also at the border waiting to cross. Their reunion was one of relief but little emotion. She was also in shock. Her family had been killed too. One of her sisters might have got away, but to this day she still doesn't know. Together they walked to the first village, praying to God for help. They couldn't speak the language, but God sent a kind Zambian who understood enough or had seen enough refugees. They were exhausted and afraid, but he let them sleep and gave them food. The next day he found a trucker willing to take them to the city.

Again they prayed for safety and protection. And again God's hand was there. This man was also kind and took them to a church that helped them get to a refugee camp.

There, life was a new kind of nightmare. They continued to live in constant fear and danger.

Everyone was desperate, and there was a lot of suffering. People helped them with food and clothes and taught them how to stay alive. Violence and rape were the norm and no one was allowed to leave the camp without authorisation. Joseph knew they needed to try to live as normal a life as possible, so he began to be a pastor and his wife found some work.

They prayed to leave, but the months turned into years. Their children were born, and still they were living from day to day in the camp. Grateful to be alive, but wishing for something else. Sometimes a country would accept a certain number of refugees. After sixteen years, they received a notice that they were going to be moved to Finland. They were told that it would be very cold, dark for half of the year and the language is very difficult, but that they would have their needs met.

Arriving in Finland, they were taken to their apartment and given food and clothes. Every day they thank God to be here, but life is still not easy. Refugees are not readily accepted here. Their children, though they can speak Finnish now, still have no Finnish friends. Joseph and Francine have very few. Joseph is a pastor to the Congolese refugees here and wants to reach out to the other refugees and to the Finns, whom he has discovered are living in their own strange suffering, far from God.

Joseph has found the language and cultural barriers almost impossible to navigate, even with the few well meaning Christian Finns. Finnish is not a language one learns quickly. He knows there is a great need and opportunity within Finland to reach many people for Christ. He also never goes a minute without thinking of the great need he has left behind and how to send help back to them. He was excited when our family appeared out of the blue, because now he has someone to help bridge the Finnish worldview and the Congolese worldview.

**Names have been changed for security reasons.*





BEFRIENDING THE COMMUNITY

Derek and Claire* are active members in their church, which is located in an inner-city housing estate in the UK, close to the centre of the city they live in. Over the years, the demographics of the estate have spanned a huge variety of nationalities, with about 70 languages being spoken at the local primary school.

Our church has always sought to meet and reach out into the community, ever since it was founded in the early 1800s. We are not a comfy church. We're a small congregation, who are mission-minded, and everyone gets involved. Most of us are retired and we have seen a lot of changes in our local area over the years.

Retirement has given us the chance to help our church meet a number of needs and opportunities in the local community. Supporting people seeking to get into employment, teaching English to both parents and children, helping people with legislation and paperwork, schooling problems, and preparing for British citizen tests. We are befriending the community and seeking to support them in helpful ways.

In order to do this, we've had to actually go out to them, so most of our activities are done on neutral ground, in the local community centre or the school. It can be difficult for people of other faiths to walk into a church building. But people know that we are from the church, and our prayer is always

that there would be God-given opportunities to be able to speak about Jesus. Quite often, it is they who will raise the topic of faith. We have found that people have been quite open to speak about faith, about prayer, and often they will even ask how things are at the church.

The difficulty that sometimes arises in conversation is that people's perception is that this is a Christian country. They say that in this country there's a lot of corruption and immorality, and so that's what Christians are like. I think that it comes as a little bit surprising to them when they realise that we are Christians, that we have a love for them and want to befriend them. Then they respect us, they see us as people of true faith.

OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

It's easy to feel fearful stepping out of your comfort zone to reach out and meet someone on their ground. Last year, we ran a 'community outreach week', in partnership with AIM, to make contact and build relationships with the community and strengthen those relationships that we already have. One of the particular benefits of having the AIM team with us was that it gave us the confidence to go into places and to talk to people that we'd felt we weren't able to. That barrier can be difficult to get over, but then you find that actually people are quite friendly and are willing to talk to you. People soon get to know your face, so you are no longer seen as a stranger. Our community outreach week enabled the church to think, 'actually we can do this', and we are building on that confidence in communicating with people. As Christians we can go out, we can build friendships and relationships, and as a result of that, share our Christian faith with people. We don't need to be 'trained missionaries' who have been to Bible college, we can do it as a church.

We saw God work in many ways during our outreach week. One lady, after receiving support for her and her children, where we sat with her and cried with her, then asked for a feedback form. She told us, 'you've made us become a family again'. She was interested

...we can go out, we can build friendships and relationships, and as a result of that, share our Christian faith with people. We don't need to be 'trained missionaries', we can do it as a church.

to know whether we did anything else like this that she could come to, and one of the team still has ongoing contact with her.

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

There were times when God placed us in the right place at the right time to meet people. On one of our prayer walks around the estate, we got to a point where there was a path I'd never been down before, and I didn't know where it led to. We stopped and decided to take the unknown path. On the path we met a man. We told him about the outreach week and he opened up to us about problems he had with his son at school. We were able to arrange for his wife, who didn't speak English, to meet up with a teacher and someone who spoke her language, to talk through some of the problems. These 'right place at the right time' moments just kept happening over and over again during the week. Such God given opportunities to engage and talk with people were amazing. People in the community are beginning to trust us, to know that they can call us when they need help.

To encourage other churches in a similar position, I would say that retirement has given us a whole wealth of opportunities. Not only do we have extra time, but being older can be helpful too. In many of these communities age carries quite a lot of respect and kudos. The older you are, and the more grey hair you've got, the more you are respected. I would also encourage people not to be frightened to integrate with the community. Get to know the people who live around you.

**Names have been changed.*

JOINING THE TEAM

Sally* joined AIM's Community Outreach team which partnered with Derek and Claire's* church (pages 12-13) to support and encourage them in reaching out to their local, multicultural community. She tells us about her experience on the team.

It was a privilege to join with a local church who were keen to reach out to their African neighbours. We appreciated excellent Bible study, prayer and cultural insights and training in the mornings, and then had a chance to put these ideas into practice in the afternoons. This took the form of a children's art and craft club, ladies craft and chatter, and sports and outdoor activities at the local primary school. The church members had prepared well and invited families along, based on their existing contacts. Many others came along as word spread that there was a welcoming environment and a chance to meet others within the community. Many nationalities were represented, some recent

arrivals and others who had lived on the estate for decades.

We loved being part of a mixed team of AIMers and local believers who had a common purpose, supported one another in prayer and in practical tasks and used their gifts for God's glory. We had a truly cross-cultural experience without leaving the UK, and were reminded once again about those who live here who have not yet heard about Jesus or had the opportunity to respond to his offer of salvation.

**Names have been changed.*

JOIN THE TEAM

If you would like to know more about joining this team for future outreach events, you can find out more at: eu.aimint.org/outreach-week.



PARTNER WITH AIM



Would your church like to start a local ministry among diaspora people?

If your answer is yes, here are some things AIM could help with: We can assist you to conduct a survey to find out which people groups are represented in your local community. Next, we would help you assess what the potential opportunities are for engaging with these communities. Then, together, we would look at the resources your church has along with the resources which AIM has and see where they can be matched with the opportunities in the community you want to serve among.

Working together, we would help you to identify areas where further training is needed. AIM could either provide this training or act as a signpost to help you find it from other sources.

What happens next depends on a number of things, but AIM would be happy to remain involved in the work for as long as it takes to get your ministry established.

Work among the unreached is often more of a marathon than a sprint, and wherever the work is located, a key ingredient for success is a small group of believers who are willing to invest time and effort developing relationships with their local community.

THE IMMIGRANT IN THE MIRROR

At the start of his book *Serving God in a Migrant Crisis* (2016), Patrick Johnson explains that despite living in the UK and having an English sounding name, he is in fact of European descent. He says, 'When I look in the mirror, I see an immigrant.' His book suggests that before we consider our response to people arriving in the UK from abroad, we should first reflect on how we ended up living where we do.



It's likely that wherever you are reading this, if you go back far enough into your family history you will find some form of migration among your ancestors.

Perhaps another bigger question for us to consider could be: How does God see us?

The Bible records King David towards the end of his reign as saying the following: Read **1 Chronicles 29:15**.

As you reflect on these words, write any thoughts that come to your mind.

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Whatever our background is and wherever we are from, the Apostle Paul is clear. All Christians are one in Christ.

Read Ephesians 2:19.

What implications do you think this verse has for Christians living in a diverse country like the UK today?

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SHOWING HOPE AMIDST DESPAIR

We've all seen the pictures; desperate families walking away from destroyed homes, little children being carefully passed over barbed-wire fences, dangerously overcrowded boats arriving on European shores. The international response to the refugee crisis has been an unsettling mix of humanitarian compassion and nationalistic resentment. In this article AIM missionary, Jonathan, and local partner, Pedro, talk about how they are seeking to share hope with these displaced peoples.

In southern Spain, we have seen various waves of immigration come and go over the past seven or so years. After over a million asylum seekers caught the world's attention

by landing on the islands of Greece in 2015, the overflow soon moved towards Italy, and then beyond to Spain. In Jerez de la Frontera, we are blessed to have our NGO, Tharsis Bethel, authorised by the Spanish government for the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. We have a three-story building near the town centre that houses 40 asylum seekers. Just over a year ago, we opened an anti-trafficking centre south of town that houses around 15 women and some of their children. We also support a ministry to street children in Ceuta, a Spanish territory on the north coast of Africa. Through these different connections, we have been able to host short term mission teams as well as sending medical missions to Morocco.

Serving in a ministry like this has its own rewards. Even from a humanitarian standpoint, there is great joy in serving others. As a registered NGO, not all of our staff and volunteers are believers; some are simply professionals. Knowing that we are making a small difference gives meaning to our work. Yet, for a believer, there is a still greater meaning - to know that we are showing Jesus to people who have never heard of him or understood who he really is. There are tremendous opportunities to share the love of Jesus with people as yet unreached with good news, moving out of gospel-resistant nations and into countries where they can experience freedom of religion.

We have the privilege not only of meeting their physical and material needs, but offering the only true answer to their spiritual needs as well. We can show them love in a world that has hated them. We can introduce peace into their lives destroyed by war. We can display hope in their stories of despair.

There are tremendous opportunities to share the love of Jesus with people as yet unreached with good news, moving out of gospel-resistant nations and into countries where they can experience freedom of religion.

ABDEL AND ALI

Take Abdel* and Ali*, for example. Both boys were abandoned by their birth mothers and left to grow up in an orphanage. At the age of 18 they were sent to the streets to fend for themselves. These two and many of their teenage friends jumped the border wall separating Morocco and Spain and soon found themselves homeless, sleeping under a staircase in Ceuta. Tired, hungry, and wet from the rain, Abdel prayed one night to God to help him. The next morning, two of



our workers found him, spoke with him, and offered him food, clothing, and shelter. Abdel told them of his prayer and said that they were the two angels God had sent to help him. Over a hot meal, they shared with Abdel that he was not an orphan, that he had a Father in heaven who loved him, and wanted to adopt him as a son through his own son, Jesus. Abdel believed, and through tears, received Jesus as his Lord. He immediately went to his friend Ali and shared what he had heard. Today, both boys have been discipled and are working together to share the good news with other street boys in Ceuta. But sadly, they have begun to face severe persecution for their gospel witness and we are now seeking permission for them to come and live in our refugee center.

SALMA

Then there is Salma*, a woman who fled from an abusive marriage and forced prostitution. She had a son who was one of four thousand boys living on the streets in Ceuta. Upon arriving in our care, she asked if we could help her find her son - an impossible logistical task, humanly speaking. Yet, through our contacts in the Spanish Red Cross and the government, the Lord worked two miracles in allowing us both to find her son and to receive permission to reunite them. They now live together in our women's center and have professed faith in this Jesus who proved his love and care for them.

TWO YOUNG MEN

Or consider the two young Nigerian men who arrived home one day to find their ➔

☛ entire village destroyed by Boko Haram. These two fled on foot, travelling thousands of kilometres across North African countries, walking for days on end, until God finally brought them to Spain to live in our refugee center. Both men hold on to their traditional faith in the Christian God, but struggle daily with the trauma they have experienced. They are now faithfully attending our local church services and we are working to disciple them into dedicated followers of Jesus. They have expressed a desire to reach out to other Nigerians in our area as well.

THE WHOLE STORY

Such stories, however, do not tell the whole story of diaspora ministry. The list of challenges that a diaspora worker faces should also be considered. Let's leave COVID-19 behind and not include all of the new issues that have arisen from this unprecedented global pandemic. In our area, we suffer from a very poor economy and the task of helping immigrants to find jobs that will provide them with the income and permissions to enable them to stay long term is incredibly difficult. Considering that the unemployment rate among Spaniards in the region of Andalusia is over 20%, the challenge of finding work for foreigners who have fewer credentials and less ability in the language is magnified even more. Most of our migrants who do find jobs end up travelling to more commercial centres like Barcelona or Madrid to make their livelihood.



This leaves us with a lot of uncertainty in working with individuals, for even 18 months is a very short time to develop a deep enough relationship to answer the spiritual questions [people] have concerning Jesus and our proclamation of his truth.

This leads to the second challenge, which is we never know how much time we may have with the people who are sent to us. For all its talk about welcoming refugees, Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected over 92% of all asylum claims in the year 2020. Some of our immigrants have been processed and denied within three months. Others have been able to stay for the entire 18-month period of resettlement. This leaves us with a lot of uncertainty in working with individuals, for even 18 months is a very short time to develop a deep enough relationship to answer the spiritual questions that a Muslim, for example, would have concerning Jesus and our proclamation of his truth. Once we had to watch a family with whom we were having very fruitful spiritual conversations pack up and leave the country because their papers were denied. Our challenge is to try to stay connected with such people as they spread out across Europe, trusting that we are just one small piece of the puzzle that God is working together to bring the unreached into his kingdom.

The challenges of diaspora ministry are great, indeed, but the joys far outweigh them! We invite all of God's kingdom people across Europe to pray for the unreached immigrants that God is bringing our way and we welcome your partnership for any who might be interested in coming to join our work in southern Spain.

**Names have been changed for security reasons.*





MY BIGGEST PRAISE

Political instability in Africa has meant that South Africa is one of the countries where many refugees go. Zara* works with a community from East Africa where most women do not speak English, yet their children go to the local schools.

The community I work in is very closed and can be very suspicious of ‘locals’ showing an interest in them, if they are not purchasing what is in their stores. For the first year, our team had a hard time finding people who would talk to us. But one day, I went to the office that deals with community concerns and asked for assistance in finding a language teacher. I was asked to teach English to businessmen, and they in turn would help me with their language. Then, I got invited to help their wives and children at home. That paved a wonderful way to live for Jesus in their homes.

Recently I ended up being away from my usual ministry for 11 months, when I had originally planned only to be away for one month. When I returned, even people who normally look away when we walk by wanted to know where I had been. One gentleman said, “Now that you are back, life can go on!” That meant a lot to me. This door is still wide open for sharing the gospel, teaching English, and helping with homework. But people move around a lot. Some want to remain in South Africa permanently, while others want to go to Canada, or to the US, to join family.

As a team, we are convinced that, ‘greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world’, so we are not discouraged by the threats from some of the people we talk to. The people group are known for selling clothes, crockery, and coffee. Sometimes we are chased out of a shop, so we go on to the next one. If nobody



wants to talk to us, we look around the shop and sometimes buy something, or we sit at a coffee shop until someone sits down next to us.

CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

When we walk around, our intention is known. There is an equivalent of the ‘Sanhedrin’ who keep us under surveillance and intimidate some of the women who are friendly to us.

We have been blessed with a friend who, when warned against us, told the leaders that every religion has good and bad people. We are ‘good’ Christians and her family had just been cheated out of their business by her countrymen. She is the only one who ignores the ‘Sanhedrin’s’ advice. The women who pay attention to us in public get asked to report on our conversations. There is also a warning not to accept literature from Christians.

We have a message to share, but on the other hand we do not want to endanger people’s

lives. The same people group is very active and bold in inviting people to be part of their religion. Recently one of the leaders I was talking to said, “Make sure that before you die you come to our side, otherwise you will be in trouble on judgement day.”

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Our desire is to have more people praying for the ministry, particularly on the days that we visit shops and homes. The devil does not want the veil to be removed from the eyes of this people group, so the war in the spiritual realm is fierce. Sometimes it translates to the physical realm.

All four of our team members are women. Occasionally we get visited by a brother, so we would appreciate your prayers for Christian brothers to join our team. One lady has successfully roped her retired husband into the work, but we need more men!

**Names have been changed for security reasons.*



GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

STUDENTS IN THE UK

African students make up around 8% of the international student body in the UK. Pray for those who are Christians, that they would be welcomed by University Christian Unions and the church. Pray for those who don't yet know Jesus, that they would have opportunities to find out more about him.

AFRICAN POPULATION

According to the most recent census, around 2% of the UK's population is African, most of whom live in London. Pray for those who move to London for work, and those who are settled in London boroughs as refugees. Pray they would encounter Christians willing to welcome and help them settle.



ASYLUM SEEKERS

In 2020, the UK received 37,550 applications for asylum (including dependants). This is around three times less than the number of applications received each by Germany (124,380), France (103,370) and Spain (108,225). Pray that those who have fled their homes and sought sanctuary here would know God's peace as they wait to hear about the status of their claims.

TEACHING ENGLISH

Give thanks for the Christians involved in teaching English to migrants and refugees, and those churches who facilitate classes. Pray that through friendships formed in these lessons, conversations might turn to the gospel, giving Christians opportunity to talk about the hope they have in Christ. Pray they would speak truth in love.

ERITREA

The second highest number of asylum applications in the UK come from Eritrea. Eritrea's government is one of the world's most repressive, with forced labour and conscription, and restrictions on freedom of expression, opinion, and faith. Pray for a radical change in the country, and freedom from oppression for its people.



SEEING DOORS OPEN IN MONTREAL

Tianne* is from France, but has been living in Montreal, Canada, since the beginning of November 2021.

I joined a team who were already working among the African diaspora. They particularly worked with immigrants from North Africa; people who have arrived as strangers and even refugees, and who are in great need of knowing the love of Jesus. The task is immense, but the Lord reminds me that he asks us to come to him with our five loaves and two fishes. It is he who multiplies, he who bears fruit according to his grace.

I have the privilege and joy of being able to benefit from the advice and experience of others on the team. I am observing a lot, training with them and discovering a ministry full of joy, love, struggles and challenges; one that requires a lot of prayer, wisdom, perseverance and creativity.

I have only been in Montreal for three months, but I am enjoying seeing God at work in a practical way. The Lord is using the English classes taught by team members to make contacts. He opens doors in wonderful ways! For example, the pandemic has forced us to run the courses online (by Zoom) and this has enabled many women to enroll who were not participating before. Through these courses, I have met two women who I now teach in French. This is a great encouragement to me.

Lately, God has opened doors with several families to whom I provide schooling. For many who have left their country for a better future for their children, this is a need. It is a joy to help the children and I am aware that this help is a way to get to know these families. We can pray that God will open hearts to hear the gospel and that he will give me patience and wisdom in my discussions with them.

Ministry among the diaspora is full of challenges too. It is a relationship-based

ministry that requires time. Another challenge - which is a matter for prayer - is to create relationships that are not forced, but natural, leading to true friendships. This requires availability, flexibility, and therefore a lot of energy and perseverance. Finding the balance is not easy. It also requires knowledge and understanding of Muslim and local culture. I have a lot to learn!

Another challenge I am experiencing fully during this internship is the pandemic. The restrictions make it difficult to meet people. But the Lord is showing me that he is far above these circumstances and I am encouraged by the contacts I can have, despite the restrictions. Immigrants are eager to meet people and are often willing to participate in activities for their families, or even to share a coffee and spend some time with us.

Montreal is a large and multicultural city. There are not many workers and the task is huge. Pray that God will send workers. Pray that the Holy Spirit will convince Christians in Quebec of the urgency of the task. Pray that God will continue to reveal himself to these immigrants, through relationships with Christians, through miracles, through dreams, through his Word. He is not limited, as Paul reminds us: "To him who is able to do immeasurably more by the power that works in us than all we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and ever! Amen!" Ephesians 3:20-21.

TIANNE* is in Montreal for a six month internship with AIM as part of her studies in Transcultural Mission with the Geneva Bible Institute in Switzerland.

**Names changed to protect her ministry*



FINDING JESUS IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

When Tamara* left Africa to go to university in France, her whole life changed. She tells her story...

Two massive suitcases lay open on the floor. The living room was covered with clothes, shoes, toiletries and food items. “Have you taken your tablets for airsickness?” Mum yelled from upstairs. I am pretty sure she had packed medicine for every kind of disease possible in what we now call the medicine bag. Dad sat on the floor and now had the almost impossible task of getting everything into the two suitcases. “Don’t forget the family pictures.” At around 1am everything was finally packed and I was ready to go.

The next day, early in the morning, we loaded the two suitcases in the car and the

whole family drove me to the airport. Dad unloaded the bags, Mum made sure I had my phone, passport and wallet and my sister and brother were betting on who was going to cry. I, on the other hand, was determined not to let them see me cry because it was just going to make this situation harder. They all walked me to the security gate. Tears rolled down from Mum’s eyes and even Dad shed a small tear. My brother and sister both lost their bet. I waved goodbye and disappeared behind the airport doors.

“You just have to get yourself checked in.” I kept telling myself. I handed my passport and flight ticket to the lady at the check in gate. She took my luggage and handed me my boarding passes. I got through security and then it finally hit me. They were gone.



JESUS: A REFUGEE IN AFRICA

Jesus was born in turbulent times. His earthly family became refugees when he was very young as they fled to Egypt to escape Herod's soldiers. At that time there was a significant Jewish community in Egypt and Joseph may have expected to be safe there. However, their journey was almost certainly hazardous, and Joseph would have had little or no time to prepare for his family's night-time departure.



Read Matthew 2:13-18. How do you think Mary and Joseph felt as they hastily prepared to flee to Egypt?

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We are not told what kind of reception Joseph and his family received in Egypt, but as they stayed there some time, it is probably safe to assume that they were to some degree welcomed and shown kindness. However, the New Testament does tell us that Jesus was concerned about the plight of the marginalised and expects his followers to show compassion and kindness to those in need.

Read Matthew 25:31-46. How do you think Jesus expects us to react to refugees who have had to flee from countries in Africa or indeed other parts of the world?

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This was it. Tears streamed down my face and I sobbed uncontrollably. We boarded and I cried myself to sleep. Upon landing I had finally got a grip of myself. I was now in my new world.

I felt a mixture of excitement and fear. I had a train to catch to reach my final destination. With my two huge suitcases, a backpack and a very lost look, I started to make my way through the crowds to try and find the train station. I asked around for help and some kind people guided me towards the train station and the right platform. A three-hour train ride and a lot of asking for help later, I found myself in my new home. With what little energy I had left, I made my bed and once again it hit me that I was alone. I cried myself to sleep.

The next morning, realizing that the cupboards were empty and that my stomach was screaming, I made my way to the closest store. With a dictionary in hand, I walked around the store and picked a few items. ➔

☹ Feeling overwhelmed and tired, I went to the checkout counter. Putting my items on the counter, I watched the lady scan item after item. I patiently waited for someone to come and put the groceries in a bag (because in my country someone always puts groceries in the bag for you) but no one ever came. I quickly realized no one was going to come and I needed to do this myself. I hurried to try and pack the groceries away as quickly as possible avoiding all the angry stares that were coming my way. I handed the cashier a random amount of money, not understanding the amount she was asking for. She handed me the change and I ran out of the store. And there were the tears again.

I spent the next two weeks in offices, trying to figure out all the administration work needed for my university and for immigration.

During one of the nights I called Dad and with tears in my eyes I told him I couldn't do it and that I wanted to go back home. If only life were that simple.

The next day I went to university, not knowing that my life was about to change forever. I walked up the steps that led to my classroom and there was this lady handing out flyers to invite international students to learn French and have pizza. There was something different about this lady. She had so much joy and I couldn't make sense of it. She was not like any of the other people that I had met.

We started reading and the text talked about Jesus! My heart skipped a beat. I was hungry and wanted to know more. I kept coming week after week and asked a lot of questions.

That evening I went to their event. The lady invited us into her home where she lived with her husband and two daughters. There were around 30 other students just like me there. The place felt so warm and for the first



time in a while I felt welcome. We started by playing some games and we laughed till our ribs hurt. We then divided ourselves into smaller groups and they gave each one of us a text. We started reading and the text talked about Jesus! My heart skipped a beat. I was hungry and wanted to know more. I kept coming week after week and asked a lot of questions. The couple invited me to go to their house more often and I started reading the Bible one on one with the lady.

As time went by, I was in a battle. I wanted to believe but then that would mean that everything that I had been told was not true and what would my family think? They had sacrificed so much so I could be here and I knew they had expectations. This internal battle raged on for over a year, but finally I could not deny it anymore. I wanted Jesus in my life. I wanted to follow him. One particular night I surrendered and I prayed and asked him to come into my life. I spent the next few months devouring the Bible and then got baptised. It took me a year to tell my parents. They were really angry and didn't understand. To them it was the worst possible thing that could happen to me. But I knew this was what God was asking me to do, and one day maybe they will be more accepting. For the time being I am going to stay here but I know one day God might ask me to go back. I know the price I will have to pay if I do, but I also know that it is all worth it.

** Names and facts have been changed to protect the protagonist's identity.*

GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

GOVERNMENTS

Pray for wisdom, for mercy and for compassion from those in power as they seek to provide places of shelter for refugees whilst balancing their own stretched budgets and responsibilities to their citizens. Ukrainian refugees flooding into neighbouring countries is adding an additional burden to limited resources.

SEA CROSSINGS

The UNHCR estimates that 120,000 people crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Europe in 2021, with approximately 2,500 losing their lives. Pray for those for whom this risky route provides the best chance of safety. Pray too for the coastguards and lifeboat organisations providing help and relief.

TRAFFICKING

People smugglers are paid to facilitate the passage of refugees. These operations are now a multi-billion dollar industry. Migrants are often abused and exploited, with smugglers capitalising on their desperation. Pray for justice, and for countries to work together to outlaw these smuggling networks.

EMPLOYMENT

Many countries in Europe are struggling with high unemployment rates. Refugees arrive into these situations, also looking for work. Pray that growing unemployment would not lead to greater backlashes against immigrants, and that the church would be at the frontline of showing a welcome to all who come.

WELCOMING

When refugees are accepted by a host nation, they have to learn a new language, local customs and culture, as well as navigating basic systems. Give thanks for Christians across Europe who are befriending and walking alongside refugees. Pray they will be able to share not only about life in their country, but about Jesus too.





FROM ETHIOPIA TO BELGIUM

Kevin and Els, with their four children, are Belgian missionaries serving the African diaspora in their home country. Here they share about their journey into this work, and the opportunities for all of us.

For five years we served with a Christian NGO in Ethiopia, particularly working among young people. We offered health education and life skills training, ran Bible clubs and Bible studies for young people and were involved with a centre for disabled children. The centre provided physiotherapy for the children and support for them and their families. It was through the centre that God began to break down my (Els) fears of sharing the gospel with Muslims.

When we offered physiotherapy to disabled children, we would ask the mothers to join in. Then they could learn about the exercises and repeat them at home. Women would come from all religions, but I noticed that the Muslim women often sat apart from the others. Now I had always said to God I would do anything for him, except work with Muslims. I was afraid that I would do or say the wrong things, cause offence and make problems rather than make inroads for the gospel. But when I saw these women sitting on their own, I felt drawn to go and sit with them. When sitting with them, I discovered that it was very easy to find topics to talk about. Very quickly it was possible to establish trust and openness, and with that a whole new world opened to me. I discovered that I could connect with Muslims and talk about my faith with them.

It became clear that our work in Ethiopia was ending, so we started praying about a new opportunity. We looked at various plans with AIM, but increasingly we felt led to return to Belgium, our home country to work among African diaspora there. We speak the language of many refugees in

Belgium – a lot of them come from Eritrea. We felt called to look for a house in a multicultural city and serve the refugees in our new neighbourhood. We try to model how a normal Flemish family could reach out to their neighbourhood. Obviously, we do a lot more because a normal family would have full-time jobs, but we are involved in regular activities, talking with parents at the school gate or inviting children over from multicultural backgrounds to play with our kids. Or just saying hello on the street to people we don't know.

We want to show the church that opportunities to share the gospel exist around us all the time.

Our big vision is to mobilise the local church to reach out to migrants living in their midst, just by members of the congregation each thinking of others in the way they do their lives. We want to show the church that opportunities to share the gospel exist around us all the time. For example, I (Els) attend a sewing class. Last week I was coming out of the class and putting my sewing machine in my bicycle basket when I noticed an older Muslim woman watching, clearly interested in my sewing machine. I ended up having a whole conversation with her about making clothes. From that conversation a friendship could start to grow. I didn't do anything special, I didn't go to the sewing class to evangelise, but I intentionally seek opportunities for conversations, to follow God's leading and be used by him.

Hebrews 13:2 says, 'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.' We've been talking ➔



☛ about this verse a lot as we visit churches and talk about diaspora work. Reaching out and loving strangers feels difficult but we've seen the difference in our lives as we've prayed and asked God to help us. Did you know that love for strangers is called xenophilia, which is the opposite to xenophobia? We are trying to model that xenophilia through little things, through being open to new people and listening to their views about the world, from how they dress and what they eat, to what they think about God. We're asking churches to join in too. If people just gave an hour or two a week to chat with refugees and migrants it would make a huge difference. It could even start a movement where your church becomes known for loving its neighbours and showing hospitality to strangers.

We had an Iranian family come to our church. They didn't speak any Dutch at all, but they did speak some English. A lady from our church who is in her 70s went over to them. She doesn't speak a word of English, but she hugged the children and spent time chatting away to them. Neither understood a word the other said, but afterwards the Iranian family told us that they just felt she was saying words of love. They've kept coming along to church.

These little things matter, and all of us can do them. Whether you come to Belgium and join us in our work, or inspire your church in the UK to reach out to your community, together we can reach the strangers in our midst with the gospel of Christ.



A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS

In the Bible we are often reminded that, although initially God chose to work through the people of Israel, his plan of salvation was always an open invitation to everyone. One example of this is his promise to Abram that he would be the father of many nations.



Another example can be found in **Isaiah 56:6-7**, where the prophet Isaiah tells us of God's desire for his house to be a house of prayer for all the nations.

Is the membership of your local church as diverse as the community in which it is located? If your answer is no, is there anything you and your fellow church members could do to help change this?

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Read Matthew 28:16-20.

These verses at the end of Matthew's Gospel are known as the Great Commission and they have inspired many missionaries to take the gospel to parts of Africa where Christ is not known. This has often been a difficult and at times risky task. Now recent trends in migration are bringing some people from these hard-to-reach locations to our doorstep in Europe. Are there things which you or your church could be doing to help these people to hear the gospel?

Watch the video about diaspora ministry at eu.aimint.org/diaspora. Spend a few moments writing down your thoughts.

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OPPORTUNITIES TO JOIN IN

We'd love people to come and join us, for a few months or even a year or two. There's no need to speak French or Dutch. Actually, not having local languages would be an advantage as you could join the same language schools as the refugees and immigrants and learn alongside them. Your ministry would depend on your hobbies and skills. If you play sports, you can play in the parks and meet Africans. If a particular country or people group is on your heart, we can direct you to where the populations and opportunities are among that group.

If you are interested in finding out more, visit: eu.aimint.org/belgium.

REACHING OUR DIASPORA NEIGHBOURS

SAME MESSAGE, DIFFERENT LOCATION

A dilemma faced by many missionaries is how do you effectively share the good news with those who for various reasons cannot access the Bible in a language which they understand. This may be because they can't read very well or because the Scriptures have yet to be translated into their language.

Ten years ago, Simon and his colleagues in the Africa Inland Church in Tanzania faced this challenge as they shared the gospel among the Datooga people. As a result, a small collection of Bible stories were crafted into simple English and Swahili, then translated into the Datooga language and shared orally in Datooga homes.

Ten years later, Simon, who has now returned to the UK and is serving among refugees in South London, faced a similar dilemma. How could he share the good news with some of the refugee men to whom he was teaching English? He then recalled the stories he had shared with the Datooga in Tanzania. With a little tweaking, he has been able to use the original simplified English version of the stories with some of his students.

The situation with Covid-19 has meant that Simon has often had to meet his students outside for lessons, which are usually conducted on a one-to-one basis. Sharing the stories on a cold park bench in South London feels different from sitting under a tree in the Tanzanian sunshine, but the message of good news has not changed.



Do you want to start to reach out and connect with members of the diaspora in your community, but you're not sure where to begin? Here are some starting points from people with experience that might be helpful...

1. PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES.

If you and your family moved to a very different country, you would probably hope local neighbours or colleagues would welcome you; help you to find your way around, learn the language, understand how things work, befriend you. That's what most diaspora people hope for where they have arrived or settled in our country. As Christians, we are to welcome the foreigner. We can share the gospel best in the context of real friendship.

2. LOOK OUT FOR NEW RESIDENTS IN YOUR AREA.

New residents will likely be glad if you greet them and strike up a conversation. Call round with a cake or flowers; invite them round for a cuppa. Be available to answer questions. Do they need any advice or practical help? Show that you're interested in them, their culture and language. Pray for friendship to grow.

3. BECOME KNOWN IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD.

We don't need to cross continents to get to this mission field, but we do need to go to parts of our cities we may otherwise avoid. Diaspora communities grow where housing is accessible, often in poorer inner-city areas. Engaging with them means either moving there or regularly spending time there.

4. MANY VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES EXIST.

Volunteering opportunities tend to open up once we're known. Diaspora people want to improve their English and want their kids to do well; they are looking for anyone who can help. Tutoring adults and helping children with school work are the best ways to get to know the whole family and build long-term friendship that can include talking

about faith. You don't need to be a teacher! There are kids' clubs, Mums-and-tots, youth activities, and social centres that often need helpers. Even just using the local shops and amenities or sitting in parks or cafes where local residents sit can open opportunities to make friends.

5. LIVE DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN

"We are told that Christians are bad people, but you are good people!" - comment from a six-year-old. Diaspora people often come assuming we British are all Christians. To share the gospel, we must distance ourselves from prevailing trends. We need to consistently display and explain Christian life in practice.

6. MINORITY GROUPS OFTEN LIVE IN CLOSE COMMUNITIES.

Their cultures tend to be communal. They depend on each other. They try to maintain as much of their heritage as they can. Religion is one aspect of that, so they often become more committed. Dissent may be regarded as personal betrayal. So questioning - let alone conversion - can be difficult.

7. READY TO WELCOME CONVERTS?

Converts may face being cast out of their community. They need to know that our community will welcome, nurture and integrate them. It's a big long-term commitment for individuals and the local church, but well worth it.

SOME GREAT RESOURCES FOR YOU AND YOUR CHURCH

- mahabbanetwork.com
- welcomechurches.org.
- *Friendship First* and *Joining the Family*: Video-based preparation for churches.
- *My Muslim Neighbour* by Stafford Allen
- *Come Follow Me*: Discipling course for Muslim-background new Christians or seekers.

• PRAYER MEETING •

26 May • 7.30pm

Join us for our online prayer meeting as we pray for the African diaspora.

You're welcome to attend as an individual or bring your whole housegroup, church prayer meeting or youth group.

**PRAY FOR
AFRICAN
DIASPORA**



SIGN UP: [EU.AIMINT.ORG/PRAYFOR](https://eu.aimint.org/prayfor)

Africa Inland Mission serves and partners with churches to fulfil the Great Commission and advance the gospel among Africans who have the least opportunity to hear about Jesus.

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