

Reaching Youth Through Youth: A Church Planting Strategy

by Maureen Menard

The world of the Apostle John was full of darkness. Pagan values ruled. Greed, lust and injustice raised their ugly head in every facet of life. The poetry and epic narratives of the day reflected a twisted worldview where gods were as unpredictable and self-serving as men. Life was to be lived for the pleasure of the moment. Not unlike the youth culture of today!

How did John and others break through this darkness to evangelize people and plant churches? He gave his testimony! Make no mistake. People were saved. Churches were formed. Minds were renewed. History changed because John, convinced of the reality of Jesus, simply dared to tell others about his experience of Christ. (1 Jn 1:1-4)

An international team of youthful DTS students convinced, like John, of the reality of the living Jesus at work in and through their lives is a powerful weapon in God's hand. Their testimony can penetrate the darkest of places and release the active presence of Christ.

When students are challenged to create with God by thinking His thoughts, praying His prayers, hearing His voice, speaking His Word and doing his works, there is little they cannot do. God seeks a people who will dare to enter into his dreams and implement them, irrespective of age. This is a report of God's work through some DTS students in the Balkans.

Phil, an Australian, had been a Christian less than a year when he came to the Amsterdam DTS. His folks were Seventh Day Adventist. He describes himself in his pre-Christian days as a "rebellious teenager, who played in a rock band". He became a Christian in Berlin, Germany following a "March for Jesus" rally. I first heard about Phil when his school leader asked me for advice regarding Phil's refusal to meet with the DTS group in any kind of spiritual activity on a Sunday. Phil said it was a pagan practice.

On his DTS outreach team in Budapest, Bulgaria and Istanbul, Phil formed a band with others in the group, making use of the simple instruments and sound system we happened to have with us. He even wrote a few songs, his first Christian lyrics, that testified of the reality of Jesus and the new life he had given him.

At some point during our trip, I ask Phil what he saw God doing in the Balkans. He said he could see hundreds of young people coming to Christ in cities all over the region ... youth connecting together, rising above national prejudices, uniting in their faith in Christ.

That was 1991. Today, Phil's band, called 5:20, has toured in several Balkan cities, multiple times, as well as numerous cities in Turkey. His lyrics are a prophetic word from God proclaiming victory over death and offering Life to all who respond. Hundreds have purchased tapes with lyrics translated into their own language. Many have made commitments to Christ. Friendships are forming; breaking down national barriers. New wineskins, youth oriented churches, are being formed to catch the fruit.

Martha, an American, came to the Lausanne DTS, after serving several years

in a frontier mission situation in the bush of South Africa. An obvious leader and gifted evangelist, she stood out from the rest of the student body. God directed the school to pray for the Balkans, especially Yugoslavia. For several weeks the thought of going to Serbia on outreach seemed to be only the school leader's idea until Martha encountered Jesus in an all night prayer meeting called the "Night of Power", held during Ramadan. Jesus came to her, asking her to lead the team to Nis.

Jeff, Joel and Angie, musicians and fellow students with Martha, were convinced God wanted to use their music on the outreach. They formed a band during DTS lecture phase. They asked God to give them lyrics that would testify of the reality of Jesus in their lives. God granted them a new drum kit and connected them to a man with a quality recording studio. They left for outreach with CDs and cassettes of their music in hand to use as a tool to reach the youth in the Serbian city of Nis.

Martha led the team into Nis. It was a group of 8 students (4 American, 1 Finish, 1 New Zealander, 1 Swiss and 1 Hungarian) with an average age of 23 years. Each student was convinced his testimony of Jesus was a unique aspect of what the team had to offer. Every one had a sense God brought them there for the purpose of making friends with Serbian youth.

Through daily team intercession, strategy was shaped and faith was imparted. Doors to youth hang-outs were opened. Both the team band and Phil's 5:20 band, which joined them for a few days, had effective ministry in clubs. Friendships were made. For the first time young Yugoslavian ears heard the name Jesus spoken with love and reverence through the lips of Western youth. Some eyes were opened. Some hearts responded. 35 believers were left in the care of two Serbian pastors. One of these young believers was named Sashe.

Sashe has finished his DTS in Thessaloniki, Greece, along with 2 other Yugoslavians, 3 Romanians, a Greek, Pole and Swede. Throughout the lecture phase God met them in their intercession for Bosnia. They expected God to speak to them about their outreach. By the time the final decision was made to go to Banja Luka, in the Bosnian Republik of Srbska, all were convinced they were on a mission from God.

Mornings started in Banja Luka with team times of worship and intercession. Ideas of how to contact the youth of the city were born and implemented through prayer. God led some to give conversational English classes at the University. He led others to befriend Serbian refugees. As God led them, weekly Bible studies, open worship times and street outreaches were added to the their schedule; daily activities includes time with their new friends. Soon, 5:20, the band from Budapest, joined the team to aid their evangelistic efforts.

Once again testimonies about a Living Jesus rang out from the lips of youth. One after another responded in faith to the Gospel. A partnership was established with a young missionary couple who had recently moved to Banja Luka. By the time the team left, the young church had bonded to them.

DTS teams can plant churches! Lets dare to believe that students, with a living relationship with Jesus, can do lasting work for God's kingdom! Let's listen to the dreams of those who take us at our word, that God can work

through them to change history. Even better, lets join them in their efforts to reach their generation with the Gospel.