

STAGE 1 AND 3	EUROPE	BRUSSELS, BELGIUM	IRANIANS IN BRUSSELS
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A staff family began working with Iranians in Belgium in 2000/2001. The backdrop is an amazing work God is doing among Iranians who are coming to Christ in numbers until now unknown, often apart from missionaries. Joshuaproject.org reports that at the time of the Iranian revolution in 1979 there were possibly only 500 Shiite background followers of Christ. Today, many Iranian pastors suggest there may be as many as one million. One of the key people God has used is an Iranian pastor in California.

Dr. H. based in San José, CA. Dr. H. was born into a Muslim family in Iran. He came to the United States after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. After receiving his PhD, he began his career as a research scientist in the high tech industry. Through his personal study of comparing Qur'an and the Bible, he accepted Christ in 1980. He left his lucrative career to dedicate his life to spreading the gospel to millions of Muslims who are burdened around the world. In 1987, Dr H. co-founded the Iranian Christian Church (ICC) in Sunnyvale, California, which has since grown into multiple churches worldwide. Dr. H. is recognized as the "Billy Graham" of Iran in Joel Rosenberg's bestseller, *Inside the Revolution*.

The majority of the ICC is made up of former Muslims, and is the largest congregation of Muslim converts outside Iran. Alive Ministries, formerly International Antioch Ministries, was founded in 2001 by Dr. H. and was developed specifically to bring the gospel message to Muslims. This ministry has since grown to touch the lives of those who are seeking truth through satellite TV, leadership development, discipleship, internet chat, call centers, underground church planting and other outreach ministries. As a result, churches are emerging in Europe. Besides the two D. speaks about in Belgium, there is one in Turku Finland and at least five in major urban centers of Germany.

D. comments: "What is happening among Iranians in our day is pretty amazing! Churches are popping up with or without leaders, pastors, or anyone who has been a believer very long. It is very messy to say the least, but that is not unlike what happened in Ephesus too."

Messy but amazing. D. developed the church as an expatriate pastoral church planter. However, he says that the other two Iranian Churches in Belgium that he is in contact with are lay run. Usually we think of gospel movements as geographical connected, however a movement can travel along relational lines among Diaspora populations. This is what seems to be happening. I asked D. what his plans were for turning the work over to Iranian leaders. Here is his response:

"It is working OK to be pastor of the Iranian Church ,though one very serious drawback is that I don't speak Farsi, except some simple phrases, and I am outsider to their culture. For long-term viability of the church, there must be Iranian leadership. That said, I think it

needed an outsider to provide the stability to get it going. I really don't know where the leadership will come from. At this point, our only option is from within, and that has been our focus. Everything I hear from the larger Iranian community is that bringing an outside Iranian leader into a group doesn't seem to work, unless they are well known, and well respected in large circles. So we have been working with a group of guys to form a Counsel to lead the church..."

D. continues: "I actually don't have a transition plan as such. My hope and my aim has been to prepare the leaders or leaders-in-training at how to care for the flock of God and lead the rest towards growth in Christ. Last year for the first time, we had two Iranian Home Group leaders. I would really like to see these guys start preaching once in a while. Up until now, I have had a co-pastor from another mission working with me. He has been a bit better at formal training of people, where I tend to walk alongside people...both have their place. He will be leaving in January when we return to the field. That would be a good time to start giving chances to certain ones to try their wings. Frankly, it will be near impossible if they don't."

D. concludes: "So far, we have turned over the worship, the counting of offering money, and almost fully turned over the children's ministry to Iranians. The Home Groups last year were all Iranian lead...but the guys are hesitant this year as it takes time and energy. The big challenge now will be ministry from the word on Sundays...and the church recognizing the Iranian leadership as legitimate. I think I will need to publically bless them and commission them at some point. We have made public statements along the way, but I think it will have to be an act of conferring authority."