

## Working Together, Sharing Good Ideas

*By João Pedro Martins,  
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Partnerships are a very important tool in the Christian life. Networking is the key to achieving better results and involving more people. Good ideas and collaboration cross national borders. Here is a story of ideas moving...

Micah Challenge is operated with a small team in London and in 40 campaigns around the world to mobilize Christians to be the voice of the poor and add 100 million Christians to pray in a day.

[www.micahchallenge.org](http://www.micahchallenge.org) It was my privilege to help create Micah Challenge Portugal.

Spain is a strategic country in Europe to establish the bridge between the Latin world. Ideas from Spain spread. This is what made having a Micah Challenge Campaign in Spain so important.

In recent year, the Spanish Evangelical Alliance has produced excellent resources on human trafficking and has worked with humanitarian agencies to support Haiti victims. Meanwhile, Micah Challenge Portugal has drawn together 14 national patrons including the Portuguese Evangelical Alliance, Salvation Army, Teen Challenge, REMAR and other key movements working with poor communities.

Last April, the Spanish EA general secretary and his assistant visited Portugal to share information, learn together and replicate the model of the Portuguese Micah Challenge campaign in the Spanish context. We could pray and dream together for a day and look to future partnerships, listening to God's heartbeat for the Iberian world. We remain in contact by e-mail, sharing dreams and learning.

Networking is cheaper, easier and avoids unnecessary conflict. If Portugal and Spain can share dreams and work together, across Europe we can build a stronger network of Christians for the Kingdom of God and have a greater impact on local communities.



*Micah* 2010

# IMPACT <sup>in</sup> the Nations

## Changing times and attitudes in Albania

*Pastor Fitor Muça, President, Albanian Evangelical Alliance*



"After communism, VUSH was registered in the Court of Tirana, and today it has 127 churches and Christian organizations as its members."

The Evangelical movement in Albania has its roots in 1843, and in 1892, the Albanian Evangelical Alliance (VUSH) was established. However, when you talk about Albania, it is impossible not to recall it as the only country in the world where its communist regime included in its Constitution the denial of faith in God. During that time, religious gathering places were destroyed, hundreds of clerics were persecuted and imprisoned, and for almost 24 years, even mentioning the name of "God" was forbidden. Evangelicals in Albania suffered the same consequences.

After communism, things changed. In November 1992, VUSH was registered in the Court of Tirana, and today it has 127 churches and Christian organizations as its members.

Albania is a country that displays an exemplary religious harmony among religious communities. Four religious groups, namely Muslim, Christian Orthodox, Christian Catholic and Bekstashi (an Islamic Sufi order) have the official and favoured status of traditional religious communities. It was officially decided that no other community could be given this status in case it would destroy the historic religious harmony.

From the early 1990s, the Albanian media referred to Evangelicals as a "sect," and implied we were like Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs). VUSH's response was to devise a clear, detailed strategy to change attitudes, including drawing a distinction with JWs.

In 2005 we undertook a national action calling for all the churches to give blood for Tirana's Blood Bank. In Albania there is a great need for blood for children suffering from Thalassaemia, an inherited blood disease. In response to our call, hundreds of people gave blood. We set a record, with 200 people donating blood in a single day. This dispelled the confusion with JWs, given their strong attitudes against blood transfusion. .

Another focal point for VUSH was to build relations with state institutions. Part of the structure of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports is the Committee of Cults. They serve as a link between religious communities and the Government. Establishing good connections required patient sharing of information and coping with bureaucracy. However, in a short period of time, the Committee of Cults opened up and allowed us to foster very good relations with them. We were also able to meet the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports and present VUSH's activities.

We would also like to mention that, during the Kosovo Crisis in 1999, VUSH (and all Albanian churches) were active in the support offered to Kosovars fleeing the country. VUSH was able to give 15% of the national assistance contribution. This gave Evangelicals a new image as a group that gets involved in social actions. This also served as an opening to re-introduce to the public that Evangelicals are not new to Albania, that the country apostle Paul refers to Romans 15:19 is Albania (at that time Illyricum) and visited. Also, we have been instrumental in our country's education, and contributed much to the years of Albanian Renaissance.

After all these many efforts, Evangelicals are recognised in Albania. We are on the eve of signing an agreement with the Council of Ministers to be recognized as the fifth traditional religious community in Albania, by thus correcting the mistakes of time. We have asked to meet Prime Minister Sali Berisha to meet with us. So we would kindly request that your prayers join ours that this meeting will happen and that our purpose will be fulfilled. Blessings from Tirana.





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## Slavery in modern-day Ireland?

By Tom Slattery, Director of Operations, Evangelical Alliance Ireland

Irish men and women are familiar with St Patrick; many of us know he was a slave from England brought over in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. As Christians, we are familiar with the movie *Amazing Grace*, which tells the story of William Wilberforce and how he fought to get the slave trade abolished in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Irish Christians, however, are likely to be unfamiliar with the fact that almost 200 years later modern-day slavery is happening behind closed doors here in Ireland - men, women and children through deception, abuse, power and voodoo are bought and sold daily as lucrative commodities.

This ugly reality is not something we readily wish to think about but we are also conscious that we live in a fallen world where sin and corruption flourish. When Jesus started his ministry, he

quoted from Isaiah saying, "... He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners ... to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

Evangelical Alliance Ireland, through the Social Justice Group, were burdened by the gross injustices trafficked victims in Ireland suffer and so, passionately believing Jesus' words about setting the captives free; TIRZAH - *Helping Victims of human Trafficking* - was formed. TIRZAH (which means "beloved")

is a group of Christians who passionately desire to pray for the victims of trafficking, to create awareness of the problem here in Ireland, to advocate on behalf of the voiceless and to reach out through practical means.

TIRZAH - *Helping Victims of Human Trafficking* - was launched on 20<sup>th</sup> September this year. Please pray for us as we lay plans for the future to make a real difference to those who suffer so much.



## Religious freedom for all, including in Italy

By Leonardo di Chirico, Italian Evangelical Alliance



More than a thousand people marched joyfully in central Rome on 19<sup>th</sup> June, for religious freedom and for pluralism in the media.

The rally was called for by the Italian Evangelical Alliance, together with other faith communities, the Radical Party and other cultural movements to ask for full religious freedom in the country and for access to the media for all religious expressions.

Before the event, figures were released about religious coverage in RAI (the national media service): almost 100% of the time is given to the Roman Catholic Church, in spite of the fact that more than 10% of the population is not Catholic and that the law prescribes to RAI to reflect pluralism. RAI has a RAI-Vatican agency but not a

Religious Affairs correspondent. Moreover, although there is no longer a state-religion, politics, media, culture still operates according to a monolithic pattern, thinking that religion in Italy only means Roman Catholicism.

The same day of the march, the Mayor of Rome announced that the City Council is going to build 51 new Roman Catholic churches (with public money!), whereas other faith communities struggle to find suitable places for worship (paying for them themselves, of course).

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While marching, people used slogans like: "No privileges, nor special protection. We only ask for respect of the Constitution;"

"One, hundreds, thousands of convictions. RAI opens the televisions for all;"

"Pluralism is a resource. Italy, stop being backward looking;"

"Italy is a multi-religious nation. The media should respect this,"

"Let's give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Let's give to God what is God's."

The end of the march was at Campo de' Fiori, the place where "heretics" through the centuries have been burnt, several of them

because of their Protestant faith. Symbolically then, religious freedom was honoured precisely where it had been denied.

Evangelical theologian, Giuseppe Rizza, addressed the crowd, saying that caring for religious freedom is biblical (God created us with this original freedom), Christian (more than 80% of the violations of religious freedom are suffered by Christians around the world), and fruitful (when religious freedom is respected, there are conditions for justice for all and development).

Evangelicals care for religious freedom for all and for the welfare of the nation. From the

platform, greetings by WEA were read and appreciated. The Italian Evangelical Alliance has been raising the flag for religious freedom for decades now. Improvements are slow and the tide of confessionalism is still strong. However, the battle is worth fighting for, peacefully, joyfully but courageously, as the Gospel commands us to live.

For videos and full coverage of the march, see [www.alleanzaevangelica.org](http://www.alleanzaevangelica.org)

P.S. At last, the media noticed us! The march led to television news coverage, interviews and press articles.

## When youth pray – Changing society through prayer and unity!

*By Christoph Grötzinger, General Secretary, Austrian Evangelical Alliance*

Just recently, I looked at a brochure published by the Austrian Evangelical Alliance for the annual week of prayer in 1985. I received this leaflet from a former leader of a local alliance and it will finally end up in our archive. If you look at the layout, it is certainly outdated. But if you look at the content, it is still very much up to date. The chairman of the Austrian Evangelical Alliance at that time, Georg Emrich, wrote in his editorial: *"A missing personal time of prayer is the reason why many Christians are missing joy and strength in their walk with the Lord and why they are often full of fear. This is why nations are turning away from God. Our time is calling for Christians and churches, which will discover and practice afresh the gift and the power of prayer."*

How right he was. Let's move on a couple of years to January 2003. Youth leaders from different churches and denominations are sitting together for a whole night as an informal group at the private home of a youth leader south of Vienna – this was actually the first time something like this happened. Georg had asked me beforehand whether I would pray for this time, even though I was not involved in any youth ministry, I asked him whether I could participate as I sensed something special was going to happen. That night, those present opened their hearts. They shared about their lives and visions and spontaneously the idea to organize a youth prayer congress popped up.

Eleven months later the first Teen Prayer Congress, with more than 800 youth, took place in Schladming (Styria). For Austria this is an extraordinary number. To have so many young people from different denominations being excited to pray was an overwhelming experience for us. More congresses in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2008 followed. The next has just taken place 2<sup>nd</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2010 in Salzburg ([www.austrianprayer.at](http://www.austrianprayer.at)), organized by the Austrian Evangelical Alliance.

We are convinced that this prayer movement and the moving forward in unity will soon show results in our society.

### So, please pray with us

- ⊙ For the APC's future
- ⊙ For the start of new prayer initiatives among school kids
- ⊙ For a growing network of prayer among teachers
- ⊙ For a growing cooperation among those involved in youth ministry.
- ⊙ For people being of Austria being transformed by the gospel





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## **DO**minus Provide**IT** – God will provide

25,000 Christians gathered at the Day for Christ 2010 in Bern, Switzerland

*Hansjörg Leutwyler, General Secretary, Swiss Evangelical Alliance*

On Sunday June 13<sup>th</sup> 2010, over 25'000 Christians from all over Switzerland, gathered at the soccer stadium in the capital, Bern. It's a day organized every four years by three umbrella organizations of which the Swiss Evangelical Alliance is one. It's not a church day with lots of celebrities and dignitaries; it is a day to celebrate Christ. It's not about a special speaker or music group or artistic company but a colourful and joyful gathering of believers from all different denominations, expressing their thankfulness, adoration and worship of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



*The Swiss Day of Christ 2010 was a testimony to the public and a reminder to all of us Christians to be living a holistic Gospel.*

### **Reminding society of God's provision**

**Dominus Providebit – God will provide** – was the theme of the day. God will provide was Abraham's answer to his son Isaac, when He was asked where the sacrifice would come from. But **Dominus Providebit** is also engraved on the largest Swiss coin, the "Fünfliber", reminding the Swiss, to not putting their trust in money, but in the Lord. Thus the day of Christ with its slogan **Dominus Providebit**, was a reminder to the Swiss people, to renew their intention written on their coin to put their trust foremost in God. All the Members of Parliament received a brand new Swiss Coin and were informed in advance about the Day of Christ. Many of them wished us well or took part.

### **Reminding us all of creation care**

On June 13<sup>th</sup> the Swiss reminded themselves not only of God's Grace and provision in Christ but also to think about the responsibility Christians have to be part of God's provision to this world, spreading and living the gospel. **Dominus Providebit – do it:** Open your hearts to the lost. Open your houses to the needy. And also, open your minds to the care of God creation. So the day was organized to be carbon neutral. More than 98% of the 25,000 came via public transport, on bicycle or foot. Electricity was bought at additional cost from alternative energy sources. Be it transportation, public relations, food, waste, or whatever, creation care was observed and at the end of the day €20,000 were designated for CO<sub>2</sub> compensating humanitarian Christian projects.

This newsletter was edited by Julia Doxat-Purser and Christel Lamère Ngnambi  
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