

# Persian Community and Faith

*“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Matthew 18:20*

Having now completed three months in the field, we have been overwhelmed by all God has done here so far. Last week, we had the largest baptism class in Chemnitz with nearly 40 participants. Many of the refugees continue to participate in such events for many reasons long after they receive the sacrament of Baptism. Many want to have a better understanding of their new faith; many want to have community with their fellow Persian refugees.

We have had the privilege of working with Pastor Dittmer, of Trinity Congregation, for the past month and a half. This God-loving, God-fearing pastor really has a heart for the refugees. Pastor Dittmer and the Trinity Congregation took on the Chemnitz refugee mission over two years ago, and since that time, Pastor Dittmer has consistently traveled about an hour away to Chemnitz to hold Divine Services, conduct baptismal instruction, and handle refugee issues like court appearances for asylum determination. Pastor Dittmer’s rapport with the refugees is remarkable. He makes every single refugee he encounters feel like he has been their pastor all their lives. For many of the refugees, this is their first Christian experience. Many come to Christianity for a number of reasons. Some are seeking true faith, and some are simply looking for religious asylum under the law. As Christian missionaries, we know our job is to bring the Word of God to them and let the Holy Spirit fill their hearts with the love of the Lord.



## Taufe (Baptism) Class with Pfarrer Dittmer at the Chemnitz Refugee Church

The Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) along with their partner, Bleckmar Mission Society, made a conscious decision to commit their resources to the refugees and ex-pats from Iran. The Iranians are some of the proudest people in the world with a history that dates back over 5,000 years. Any of you that have Iranian friends or acquaintances know firsthand just how proud they are of their culture and heritage. In fact, the vast majority would prefer to be called Persians because of the historical connotations associated with that nomenclature. In 500 BC, the Tribe of Judah was taken into captivity for about 70 years and

released by Cyrus the Great, Persian King. Later, after the death and resurrection of Christ, Apostles Thaddaeus and Thomas preached the gospel in Persia leading many to faith. The connection between Persians and Christianity is long and important.

Though Iran is a Shia Moslem country (and not Sunni like most of its Arab neighbors), the Persians speak Farsi (Persian) and not Arabic. These details make them a unique group of people that are seeking and open to the Gospel, while the Arab Muslims are less accepting and open. This brings us back to this notion of "Community." The Lord brought us to this uniquely situated community to share the Word of God, and help them in their faith journeys, as we continue in ours. It takes many years, a lifetime really, to come to fully appreciate what God has done for us in Christ's work on the Cross. For refugees who receive God's gift of faith by grace, it will be a lifelong pursuit to grow and share the Good News. Therefore, our mission of evangelism transforms into discipleship, and will continue for as long as we are here with the Persian Community in Germany.

On another note, as a part of our on-boarding, we are taking a daily German language course. We had an introductory course in Virginia that helped us get started, but living in the former East Germany has necessitated that we really learn German in order to be effective. We have learned so much in a short period of time. Our language comprehension has gone up drastically, but we still have a lot to learn. During our language training, the Lord is bringing people into our lives with whom we can share our faith and participate in the mission that brought us here. Recently, at our language school, a 12 year old unbelieving Norwegian boy asked us a number of questions about our faith which we were able to respond to. We are thankful for these opportunities to share about the love, grace, and mercy of our Lord and pray for more such opportunities.

Moreover, we are experiencing the hottest and longest heat wave to hit Germany in decades, maybe longer. Our past experience living and visiting Germany taught us to bring a raincoat or light jacket for the frequently chilly times. No such need this summer, as we are averaging over 90 degrees! Unfortunately, such warm weather has consequences for our environment. Additionally, we move into our 2 bedroom flat in about three weeks and are very excited. This is just before we get installed by our supporting SELK church, Trinity Congregation at St Petri, Dresden.

#### Prayer Requests:

- For refugees to hear God's Word and share it.
- For us to learn German quickly to better help refugees with legal requirements.
- For the Chemnitz refugee church to flourish.
- For the Pastors and our congregation who serve and support this mission.
- For the Cecils to be a light for the refugees and the German community.

***We really enjoy hearing from you, so please let us know what questions you may have for us! Your questions may be featured in future updates.***

Blessings from Germany, Carl & Karen



St Petri, Dresden

