

# Mission to the Roma People in Europe



Most people have a stereotype image of the wandering Roma people (Gypsies). However, most of them today have settled down in different places. It is estimated that there are about 1,000,000-1,200,000 Roma in Europe alone.

Roma people were originally from a people of low caste in northern India. They left their homeland about 1,000 years ago moving westward, through Central Asia and the Near East to Europe and North Africa. Because of their ethnic difference from the Europeans, people thought they might be from Egypt, hence the name "Gypsy."

Today, we can find Roma people not only in Europe, but also in north and south Americas and even in Oceania. Although most of the Roma people have been living in their adopted countries for hundreds of years, they are still a unique people and have kept their own culture. They are known for their talents in music. But unfortunately, they still believe in fatalism (a residue of the teaching of reincarnation) and do not have the drive to improve their status. As a result, most of them are less educated, married young (at 14 or 15), and live in extreme poverty. Due to lack

of proper training, they are limited to do manual work and occasional odd jobs. It is not uncommon to see their unemployment rate as high as 60%-70%. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why pilfering and petty-crimes are rampant among them.

About half a year ago, we came across several articles on Roma people and Roma churches in Eastern Europe. The titles of the articles are: "God Works Among the Roma" (Christianity Today, May 2013 issue) "Loving Our 'Unwanted' Neighbors" (Mission Frontiers, May-June 2013 issue) and "Separated Peoples: The Roma as Prophetic Pilgrims in Eastern Europe" (International Bulletin of Missionary Research, vol.37, No.3, July 2013 issue). We are touched by the fact that the Roma is the most responsive people to the gospel in Europe as described by Melody



Wachsmuth, the author of these three articles. So, our staff began to pray for this most neglected unreached people group.

GCCI Hong Kong Board called a Prayer meeting in Hong Kong for the Roma People on September 17, 2013, the first of its kind in Hong Kong. During this prayer meeting, participants were touched by God and agreed to continue to pray for the Roma people and bring this vision back to their churches. Thus, GCCI felt God's leading in launching a fact-finding trip to Eastern Europe in November.

A 6-member fact-finding trip was organized to visit Serbia and Hungary on November 5-15, 2013. Through the arrangement of Rev. Viktor Sabo of Serbia, we had the opportunity to visit Roma communities in Subotica, Apatin, Belgrade, Jagodina and Leskovac. Rev. Sabo is a Hungarian decent Serbian. Although he is not Roma, he has a heart for Roma. Not only he accepts Roma into his church, he mentors several Roma pastors. Therefore, we had the opportunity to visit a number of Roma churches, Roma Communities and Roma Christians working in open markets. Roma people are friendly. When these Christians knew that we have the burden for mission to the Roma, they were greatly thankful. They even refused our pay for the fruits in their stalls.

Through the introduction of Rev. Sabo, we also came to know Rev. Albert Durko of the National Gypsy Mission of Hungarian Pentecostal Church. Their main purpose is "to help the

disadvantaged people to find their identities and to become a valuable and constructive member of the society." They establish elementary and secondary schools, and provide social services to the youth and elderly in addition to their church ministry. We had the opportunity to visit their headquarters, the elementary school, and met with their national leaders. Mrs. Durko is a Roma while Rev. Durko is not, but their child is studying in the same school with the Roma children. It is their hope to help change the mentality of the next generation of Roma through education and counseling. We were informed also that they have established 16 churches in different parts of Hungary. We had the privilege to visit 2 of them on our trip.



In view of the vast need of the Roma people, GCCI will work with several church leaders in Eastern Europe to organize a Mission Conference in 2014 for and to the Roma people. The conference will be held in Subotica, Serbia on

September 22-26, 2014. It is our hope to gather 100 Roma church leaders, 80 European church leaders who are working with or have the burden for evangelizing Roma people and 50 International mission leaders. The main purpose of Conference is to work alongside with Roma churches to bring the gospel to their kinsmen. More detailed information about this will be posted on our website in the spring of 2014. Your prayer for this significant event is much appreciated.

