

## Introduction to Macedonia



The Republic of Macedonia, often referred to as Macedonia, is a country on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe. It emerged peacefully from the former Yugoslavia in 1991 and two years later was admitted to the United Nations. The capital is Skopje, with 500 thousand inhabitants, and the total population of Macedonia is ca. 2 million citizens. According to the 2002 census 64% of the total population declared themselves Macedonians and 25% - Albanians. Smaller ethnic minorities include Turks - 4%, Roma – 2,5%, Serbs - 2% and others – 2,5%. The majority (65%) of the population belongs to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Muslims comprise 33% and other Christian denominations – 0,4%. Altogether, there are at least 1200 churches and 400 mosques in the country.<sup>1</sup>



## Baptist work in Macedonia

The Baptist Union in Macedonia comprises only two congregations. The “Good News” Baptist Church of Skopje was founded in 1959. The congregation in Radovich is much older as it was started at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several foreign missionaries have attempted to plant churches which do not associate themselves with either of these congregations.

The beginnings of Baptist work in Skopje came difficult when 49 years ago the indigenous missionary Grozdanov started a new congregation in the capital city of Macedonia. The communist regime of Yugoslavia seriously hampered any evangelistic activities, but the additional obstacles were also caused by a devastating flood in 1962 and an earthquake which totally demolished the city one year later. In the



<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia online

70ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the church grew well and Dr Ivan Grozdanov took over the pastorate from his aging father.

The current pastor, Marko, represents the third generation of the Grozdanovs in ministry. He took over the leadership 2 years ago. Prior to that Marko and his wife Tina had studied theology in Osijek (Croatia) and at IBTS in Prague (Czech Rep) earning an MTh degrees.

The Skopje Baptist Church has outgrown its accommodation in the present building. Besides work typical of a local congregation, it has developed multifaceted ministry. Its effective methods of evangelism include the local version of Alpha-course and the Internet forum focused on faith. The ministry of publishing Christian literature has been particularly important – translations of English books into Macedonian and also books authored by Dr Ivan Grozdanov. By the way, this is the only Evangelical publishing house in Macedonia. The church also runs a public bookstore near the University of Skopje and regularly takes part in an annual national book fare.

### **Baptist Church Planting in Macedonia**

The newest Baptist initiative is to start a new church in the part of Skopje called Aerodrome - the district inhabited by 100 thousand residents. The goal is to bring the Gospel to the most densely populated part of the city where presently there is no Evangelical witness at all. The vision of the church planting team is to see people receptive to the Gospel who have Christian fellowship and will become future leaders. The initiative has the name - "Rainbow Ministry".



A group of 20-30 seekers participate in the "12 Pillars of Christian Faith" – the course led by the church planting team. Before the start of the course one year ago ca. 10 thousand invitations were distributed and now the group has its regular weekly meetings. Besides teaching and publications also occasional concerts, panels or quizzes are organized.

The church planting team has faced numerous obstacles. Prejudice of the Orthodox religion is very common: the typical mentality often associates a Macedonian with the Orthodox Church. There are few leaders who are mature enough to carry the load of ministry. High costs of printed materials and rented facilities are serious issues for local Baptists, who are neither numerous nor wealthy. There are too few people in the mother church who understand the need for church planting, and generally the

vision of growth is lacking among the majority of church members. Also some foreign missionaries are not sensitive enough to the needs of the indigenous work.

### **Typical “Rainbow Ministry” meeting**

The meeting room is located in a modern and well facilitated building. There are ca. 30 chairs, several Christian posters decorate the walls and a shelf with books which



may be borrowed by participants. There is also a table where they can make tea or coffee. The people who arrive chat with each other while having a drink. When Dr Grozdanov starts his lecture about 20 people are present. They listen attentively, from time to time a question is raised which the leader answers promptly. The meeting

lasts ca. 1,5 h and after it is over the participants chat with each other for ca. ½ h before they leave. It is evident that the initial stage of new church planting in Skopje is very successful and the people are responsive.

### **Prayer needs:**

1. Pray for a breakdown of prejudices among the population in regards to the Gospel. Pray that people may be more open to hear and learn about the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Pray for the further maturing and growth of local indigenous young leaders, who will become the backbone of the mission in the future.
3. Pray for a vision among fellow local and international Christians to support the ministry through prayer, visits, donations and long-term partnerships.

***Daniel Trusiewicz***  
***EBF Mission Coordinator***

**To help planting reproducing churches!**

**To help growing healthy churches!**

**For the glory of God!**