

Among Arab immigrants in Belgium, church planting is a long-term strategy

Janeé Angel is looking ahead when it comes to planting the only Protestant church for Arabic-speaking Christians in Antwerp, Belgium.

“We knew that church planting where there are no believers would be a slow process, and we want to make sure that God is the one in charge of the process,” said Angel, one of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s field personnel.

Last March, she and her husband, Hary Khano, and infant daughter, Phoebe, moved to Antwerp from the Belgian capital of Brussels because they felt called to start a church to minister to the city’s burgeoning Arab-immigrant community.

Starting with a small core, they began a Saturday night Bible study.

“My husband, who is from Syria and a fluent Arabic speaker, and I began to visit in homes, invite families in our home and disciple anyone who wanted to know more about Jesus,” Angel said. “My husband and two other Middle Eastern men from one of the other Protestant Arabic churches around Brussels walk the streets of Antwerp each week and hand out copies of the Gospel of John in Arabic, Dutch and French.”

They now have moved the meeting to Sunday evenings, and have a regular group of about 20-30.

There are multiple challenges when spreading the gospel among Arab immigrants in Europe — and one is the fact that an evangelical understanding of the Christian faith is a new concept to Middle Easterners of Muslim and Christian backgrounds alike (Catholic and Orthodox



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Approximately 20 to 30 people meet on Sunday evenings at a church plant started by Janeé Angel, one of CBF’s field personnel, and her husband.

Christians are significant minorities in most Arab countries).

“I think the biggest challenge in ministering to Arabs is much like any other group of people: It is difficult for people to understand why a personal and active relationship with God is vital to their lives,” Angel said. “For the nominally Christian people who were born in North Africa and the Middle East, they grow up believing they are Christians because they were not ‘born’ Muslim. This limits them in their understanding that Christianity isn’t a label; it is a relationship. So they tend to remain distant in their beliefs and understanding and very defensive when we try to get them to grow in their understanding of God.”

Immigrants also face challenges in the

wider Belgian culture. Antwerp is in the Flemish (or Dutch-speaking) portion of Belgium, and the Flemish fiercely guard their culture from being overtaken by French-speaking Belgium. Some Flemish have not reacted well to the influx of immigrants from Middle Eastern and North African nations that were colonized by France.

“Despite any of the challenges, we are certain that it was God who called us to live and minister in Antwerp and we are certain that He will continue the work He has started in and through us,” Angel said. “We continue to pray for vision and direction as we look forward with anticipation to see what God will do.”

By contributing writer Rob Marus

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Learn more about the ministry of CBF field personnel on their web pages, which include photos, stories, videos and more. More on Angel’s ministry can be found at www.thefellowship.info/angel.