

World Missions Director's 2016 Annual Conference Report



The following is an excerpt from the AFLC World Missions Director's annual report. It gives an overview of the World Missions Committees thoughts and ideas in the area of Europe and Switzerland.

Europe/Switzerland

You may have read some articles in the *Lutheran Ambassador* or online about AFLC World Missions and Switzerland or Europe. We have been praying about reaching out to Switzerland and even greater Europe.

Our greatest desire is to make sure that it's God's will before doing anything. There are many challenges in starting a work in Europe, but if it is God's will, we don't want the challenges to prevent us from trusting Him and going forth in His power. If this is not God's will, we don't want to have any part in it. We will get mired down with it and will not be able to accomplish the things that God is calling us to do.

Because we want the Conference to guide us in knowing God's will, we will attempt to give you as much information as we can about this outreach.

Early in 2015, we received a request from Augusto Fiuri for his church in Geneva, Switzerland, to become affiliated with the AFLC. Our office gets requests like this on an almost weekly basis. This one was different because Fiuri was familiar to us. Pastor Fiuri was a lay pastor associated with the AFLC in Brazil, a third generation Christian whose whole family came to the Lord through the work of John Abel. His parents live next door to the ARCA and have housed many people from the AFLC when we visit Brazil.



Fiuri moved to Switzerland to find a job and better the lives of his family. After he found work, his whole family moved there. They were attending a Brazilian church, and Augusto was asked if he would help the pastor minister to the people in the congregation. In 2014, the pastor of the church returned to Brazil, and the congregation asked Augusto to become their pastor. He told them, "I am Free Lutheran." They replied, "We have observed your life and your family, and we want to be what you are." Therefore, Augusto became the pastor, while continuing to work fulltime at his secular job. Because Pastor Fiuri was serving the congregation, the AFLC of Brazil ordained him.

The services of the congregation are in Portuguese. The Swiss generally speak German or French. In Geneva, the common language is French. Because of this, the congregation is attempting to transition to French so that they can reach as many people as possible for the Lord.

After receiving their request to become part of the AFLC, the World Missions Committee sent an exploratory team to Switzerland in May of 2015. The team consisted of Paul and Becky Abel, Andy and Monica Coyle, and Del and Karen Palmer. As they met Pastor Fiuri and the congregation, the team realized that this congregation had a desire to reach out into all of Switzerland and even greater Europe. They also understood that the pastor was Free Lutheran, but they were not sure if the congregation was Free Lutheran in thinking.

During this time, two World Mission Candidate couples began to show interest in Switzerland and Europe. Both of these candidates were in AFLTS and would be eligible for a call on March 1, 2016.

The ministry of Pastor Fiuri was presented to the 2015 Brazil Annual Conference. The Conference made the commitment to pray, promote, and provide for the Swiss church as much as they could. It was a great joy for them to realize that they had a missionary in Europe.



At their next meetings, the World Missions Committee began to discuss what would need to happen if we started a work in Switzerland or Europe. It was during these meetings that we came to the agreement that if we were going to do this, it had to be God's will. Plans were made, and we determined that we would rely on the Annual Conference to direct us and help us determine God's will.

We also determined that we needed to make sure that the congregation was Free Lutheran by conviction. In order to do that, we would send Committee member Craig Johnson and Paul and Becky Abel for a second trip to teach our confessions and the Fundamental Principles. We found out that Pastor Fiuri had been teaching the congregation using the Manual Evangelico, the AFLC of Brazil's discipleship and confirmation book. It contains Luther's Small Catechism and other important doctrinal materials. Pastor Johnson and the Abels traveled in January of this year. Upon their return, they reported that the congregation was Free Lutheran and gave their approval to associate with that congregation.

The next month the World Missions Committee was faced with an important decision. The two missionary candidates who expressed interest were going to be available for a call. One was indicating that he may accept a call to a congregation for a season before going to the mission field. What should we do? Should we wait for the Annual Conference to direct us in God's will and allow these candidates to accept calls to congregations and lose them for a while, maybe forever? Do we call them without knowing God's will and place them somewhere else if the Conference deemed that we should not go into Europe? The Scriptures have many instances of people who were impatient and did not wait for the direction of God. We knew we only had one choice. We had to wait on God and not secure these missionary candidates.

The Committee did decide to send Matthew and Ednay Abel to Geneva for a short time to give the Fiuris an opportunity to travel to Brazil for the 50th Anniversary Conference. The Abels will be given the task to develop plans so that we will know what it would take to have a mission work in Europe and how we could reach out to the people there.



Therefore, we bring the question to the Annual Conference: Shall we embark on a new mission field in Switzerland and/or Europe? We are not looking for you to give us a rubber stamped approval. We are asking you to pray about this, discuss it, and help us to know God's will.

There are many considerations that must be taken into account.

Is there a need in Europe? We believe that the need is as great in Europe as anywhere else. We also need to consider the recent refugee movement into Europe. Could we reach and minister to these people, praying that they would be able to take their faith back to their home countries?

Will missionaries be able to get visas? Many countries are starting to limit visas for people coming to live there.

What will it cost? It is very expensive to live in Europe. Compared to Minneapolis, it costs about the same to live in some parts of France to 25% more in Paris. Geneva cost 65% more than Minneapolis. Can the AFLC afford to start a work in Europe? Are we soon at the limit of what the AFLC can do in missions? Are we looking at what we can do or what God can do? How do we balance all this? The real question is still, is this God's will?

You, the Conference, are being asked to help us. There may be many options. You may decide:

- No, this is not God's will.
- Yes, pursue mission work in Europe.
- Proceed with caution, make more plans and come back with even more information.
- Associate and work with just this one church in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Suggest some other option that God lays on your heart.

Fifty years ago we put our faith in God and went beyond what we could accomplish in our own strength. Is this our generation's Brazil?

