

Planning for the Possibility of AFLC Mission Work in Switzerland/Europe



[PLANNING FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF AFLC MISSION WORK IN
SWITZERLAND/EUROPE]

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INTRODUCTION

This document is still in draft form. It needs much work and asks many questions that will need to be worked through by the World Missions Committee if planning goes forward.

IS IT GOD'S WILL?

Most importantly we must discern if it is God's will. The Bible has many examples of people who did seemingly noble things without discerning if it was God's will first. A prime example of that is Joshua 9 and the Gibeonite deception. Verse 14 states that they acted, "but they did not inquire of the Lord."

Everyone involved in this possibility must be in prayer asking, "Is this God's will." As we started the planning we asked, is the Committee praying, are the prospective missionaries praying, and are we praying?

DIRECTION

The direction must always come from the Spirit and Word of God. In the past we have gone into countries as God has lead various entities. Those entities have been or should be:

1. The AFLC – The Annual Conference should provide directives, be consulted, and give direction to new endeavors and fields of work.
2. The Committee – The World Missions can and should evaluate, plan and embark on new mission endeavors.
3. The missionary – They have sensed that God was leading them to a specific place.
4. An Invitation – Invitations come on a regular basis for us to come help in a specific ministry. There have been times when we have acted on those invitations. When we have partnered with people outside of the AFLC due to an invitation, it has almost always ended in a parting of the ways.

WHAT IS THE EL-SHADAI LOOKING FOR FROM US?

We have received a request from Pastor Augusto Fiuri of El-Shadai Evangelical Church (ESEC), Geneva, Switzerland to have fellowship with them. Pastor Fiuri is from our AFLC (AILLB) Church body in Brazil. He has served as a lay pastor and is now ordained by the AILLB.

Originally we understood from Pastor Fiuri that they were especially looking to associate with the AFLC so that they could register with the Swiss government ([see attachment](#)). In order for them to register with the government as a church they need to have a relationship with a denomination.

It takes three years to register a church. The process is:

1. Presentation of your bylaws
2. A representative from the government regularly visits to see if you're abiding by you bylaws
3. After three years you can be registered
4. Then you are tax exempt

FINANCIAL HELP

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ESEC has been renting space from a Baptist congregation. The Baptist congregation will no longer be renting the building in the near future. Therefore, the costs to remain in the building will soon increase substantially ([see attachment](#)).

There are recent hopeful developments that might work out for the church to rent another church building. [See Paul and Becky Abel's comments by clicking here.](#)

POSSIBLE ACTIONS

Since we have received the invitation to come and help the church in Switzerland, what are the possible actions? The sub points are also questions of possible actions which should be discussed and decided on point by point.

1. Do nothing
2. Help the Church
 - a. Help them register with the government
 - b. Help them in ministry
 - c. Help them financially
 - d. Send short term help with doctrinal guidance
 - e. Send a missionary
3. Start a denomination in Switzerland
 - a. Send missionaries
 - b. Organize to reach greater Switzerland
 - c. Include the current Swiss church
4. Start a denomination in Europe
 - a. Send missionaries
 - b. Organize to reach greater Europe
 - c. Organize to reach specific people groups in Europe
 - d. Include the current Swiss church

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE AFLC OF BRAZIL

At the last Annual Conference in Brazil the AILLB was challenged to pray for and financially support the congregation in Switzerland. They made prayer cards and Matthew Abel asked that each member consider giving at least a small amount every month.

AILLB President, Rev. Joel Mendes stated that he would personally travel to each congregation and place this challenge before them.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS? – THIS AREA STILL NEEDS WORK

We must define what are the goals? We should also ask which of the goals might be driving the other goals?

Possible Goals:

1. Planting Churches – The AFLC is congregational, the congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we might consider planting congregations as the primary goal.
2. School – Would we have a school?
3. Discipleship

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4. Refugees - Reaching the influx of refugees
5. Various Types of Compassion Ministries

PEOPLE GROUPS – THIS AREA STILL NEEDS WORK

What people group would we attempt to reach?

Accessibility to the Country – This area still needs work

WHAT COUNTRIES ALLOW MISSIONARIES TO COME AND SERVE?

Paul and Becky Abel have done some preliminary investigation into missionaries living in Switzerland. [You can find their insights by clicking here.](#)

COST – THIS AREA STILL NEEDS WORK

Although we must always depend on God. He has given us a good deal of intelligence. We as a universal church have been tasked with reaching the whole world. The AFLC cannot reach the whole world by ourselves, but we can do our part. What is our part? What will it cost, can we afford it?

The costs of our fields varies. We started tracking the comparison to live in each country compared to what it costs to live in Minneapolis in 2012. In November 2015 the following cost comparisons were noted with Minneapolis as the base.

Curitiba	-44%
Maringa	-51%
Cuenca	-36%
Aguascalientes	-46%
Kampala	-16%
Geneva, SW	+65%
Lyon, FR	-04%
Paris, FR	+26%
Frankfurt, GR	+01%
Lausanne, SW	+60%

CONTACTS – THIS AREA STILL NEEDS WORK

Who and what are the contacts that we have and how can they help us in reaching the goals?

PLAN OF ACTION

What do we need to do to accomplish our plan? When would we need to do it? We have missionaries who are sensing a possible call to mission work in Europe. How would God have us proceed so as to include them? This is spelled out in the document Europe/Switzerland Timeline.

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EUROPE

When it comes to Europe, what is our approach?

We have had an invitation to work with the small Brazilian church in Switzerland. They have stated that their desire is to reach out into all of Europe. Are they willing to change to be able to reach Switzerland and even Europe? What are the options in our approach?

1. AFLC/Swiss Church –
 - a. What would the AFLC do?
 - b. What would the church in Switzerland do?
 - c. How will we work as a team?
2. Widespread or Focus
 - a. How focused do we need to be if we are to begin this endeavor?
3. Possible Missionaries
We have several people who could be potential missionaries in Switzerland or wider Europe.
 - a. What are their gifts?
 - b. How could they fit into a plan?
 - c. Could we use a missionary from Brazil for a short time?

ADHERENCE TO AFLC WORLD MISSIONS STATEMENT OF FAITH

Before we would agree to any type of association with the ESEC we must ascertain that we are like minded in our beliefs. The statements below spell out our beliefs.

AFLC WORLD MISSION STATEMENT OF FAITH:

The members of the World Missions Committee of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations and its missionaries believe and confess the Holy Scriptures, the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, to be the Inspired Word of God, revealed for the salvation of men. They are the only infallible and inerrant source and rule of faith, doctrine and life for the Christian. The Committee and its missionaries also accept the Lutheran Church's Confession of Faith in the Apostolic, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism as correct expositions of the Word of God.

- Holy Scriptures - The canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, are the inspired Word of God, revealed for the salvation of men, and that they are the only infallible source and rule of faith, doctrine and life for the Christian
- Apostolic Creed
- Nicene Creed (Refute the Arian Controversy)
- Athanasian Creed (Trinity, Doctrine of Christ)
- Unaltered Augsburg Confession
- Luther's Small Catechism

Note:

- The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds are not listed in the Missions By-Laws but are listed in our Policy Book.
- The Fundamental Principles are not listed, but are required by AFLC-USA of churches joining.
- The Rules for Work are not listed, but are required by AFLC-USA of churches joining.

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- The Rules for Work require the following for congregations

The AFLC consists of congregations which, in their constitutions, unreservedly subscribe to the ancient ecumenical symbols, Luther's Small Catechism, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, Fundamental Principles and Rules for Work of the AFLC, and report the same to the secretary of the Coordinating Committee.

How will we associate with them in light of our "Statement of Belief, section III Church Polity"

In a free association of congregations such as this, neither its officers or conferences can negotiate the union of any or all of the congregations with another fellowship of congregations. This is an individual matter of the congregation.

ATTACHMENTS

EXCERPT FROM AGUSTO FUIRI'S LETTER – JUNE 7, 2015

Goal: Our goal is to transform our church, which today is basically a church of Brazilians, into a Swiss church that will be a base for future outreach to other cities.

How can we become a Swiss church? We would like to begin a class for teaching French to our members and to attract other people who need to learn French and use this as an evangelistic tool.

Motivation: We would like to be a part of a ministry called Mission Europe. We look forward to first establish a congregation in Geneva and later reach out to Lausanne (50 km. from here), then to Biel/Bienne (105 km.) and then to Zurich (117 km.) where German is spoken and etc....

Strategy: We would like to propose that this would be a ministry of the Free Lutheran church of America, beginning with the congregation that is already started in Switzerland. We would suggest that missionaries be sent to make this process go faster.

1st step

Constitution that will govern the Europe Mission (registered)

Constitution of the local church (registered)

Registration with the Commercial Registry for the purpose of renting.

2nd Step

Establishing the base church

EXCERPT FROM BECKY ABEL'S LETTER – NOVEMBER 12, 2015

At this point the greatest need of the congregation is for a continued place to meet. At present they are sharing rented space with another Brazilian church group. However, at the end of 2015 the pastor of that church is leaving, and they will no longer be renting the space. This presents a difficult challenge for Augusto's group because the other group pays the bulk of the rent. It is located in a convenient place downtown, which makes it easy for people to get to church. Rental facilities are very expensive in Geneva, and Augusto has not found any other place within that price range. Augusto is interested in trying to maintain the present contract that the other

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church has so that the rent will not be readjusted. If the WMC would be able to help financially in some way it would be very appreciated, but his greatest concern is not in receiving financial help. The best thing we can all do is PRAY that God will raise up people to help with this expense and bless the efforts of this new congregation for the glory of God.

SUMMARY OF PAUL AND BECKY ABELS TRIP – JANUARY 2016

PARTICIPATING IN AUGUSTO'S MINISTRY

We left for Geneva on Jan. 7, and spent 13 days before returning to the U.S. on Jan. 21, 2016. We were warmly received by the Fiuri family who invited us to stay in their small 2-bedroom apartment with them. Augusto and Deise gave up their bedroom for us to use, and they slept on the floor in the living room for two weeks. That's an example of the way this couple lives out their faith day-by-day.

We were impressed by the dedication of this family. Both parents get up before dawn each day and work long hours, Augusto making deliveries with a company truck and Deise cleaning homes and offices. They regularly put in 10-12 hour work days. Augusto does his work of preparing sermons and studies and visiting after regular work hours. He is taking a Hebrew class online once a week. They also take care of their four children, ranging in ages from 14-20, who all sleep together in the other small room of the apartment. The family works well together, and the children are all involved in the church ministry. Vitória is part of the praise group and Lucas takes care of the sound and projector. Angelo and Laura take care of making the youth feel welcomed at church.

The Brazilian Free Lutheran church was happy to receive us once again (we had been there in May 2015). They have Wednesday night Bible study, Saturday night home studies and Sunday morning prayer and worship followed by a fellowship brunch each week. Craig did a good job teaching about the Free Lutheran Church and about the pillars of the Lutheran doctrine. The next week Paul preached about what we believe as Free Lutherans and why it is important to know what we believe. His teaching on the Apostle's Creed and baptism went very well also. The Nicene and Athanasian creeds and the Augsburg Confession were mentioned, but not taught.

In between times there was much time for visiting and exchanging ideas and praying together. We sensed Augusto's strong convictions about persevering with the building up of a Free Lutheran church in Switzerland. Although there are many challenges he believes that God has brought him to this place for "such a time as this." We felt a "kindred spirit" with the congregation here – simple believers gathering together to worship and to encourage one another in a simple service of singing, Scripture, prayer, and preaching.

CHURCH RENTAL SITUATION

Before leaving for Switzerland from the U.S. we (Paul and Becky) had done some research and found out about a Lutheran International church in downtown Geneva. The church is pastored by a young man from Plymouth, MN, by the name of Andy Willis. He has been in Geneva for two years. We approached him about the possibility of using their facility for our Brazilian group to meet. He was extremely open, and told us that the church is presently used by several Lutheran ethnic groups - the weekly English service (involving 40 different nationalities), a weekly German service, a weekly Malagasy service, plus some services by a Norwegian group and a Finnish group. If a schedule could be worked out, he thought there would be a possibility to open their doors to our Brazilian group as well. We set up a time to visit while in Geneva.

Paul, Craig and I went to the International Lutheran Church of Geneva on a Tuesday afternoon to check out the church and meet the pastor. We left there feeling very encouraged. On Sunday afternoon we returned with Augusto and Deise and another couple from the church. We conversed about the possibilities and difficulties of this type of arrangement and ended our time in prayer.

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Since we returned to the U.S. Augusto took his members to visit the church. They have written a letter of request to the Lutheran church requesting three weekly times to meet there. Besides changing locations it means changing their regular Sunday service time to an evening hour. Paul and I think it would be a great place for the congregation to meet without having the heavy financial burden of being responsible for a rental facility with the large down payment and large monthly payments. They will be expected to cooperate financially in some way, but it would be much less of a commitment. We are eager to find out if something will work out.

DOCUMENTATION FOR FUTURE MISSIONARIES

We also talked to Pastor Willis about documentation for Americans to work as missionaries in Switzerland. He was very pessimistic and explained how difficult it had been for him to receive permission to come. The church had to prove there was no one else in Switzerland that could do his job, and the Swiss church had to call him and give proof that they could support him. I found a Christian group online that does church-planting in Europe and sent an e-mail inquiring further about documentation for foreigners coming to Europe as missionaries. We will see what comes of that. We also found out that going to France (right across the border) might be an easier option. It seems that there is an agreement between Brazil and France for one-year visas for Brazilians to live and even work in France. We can check this out back in Brazil at the French consulate in Curitiba. If Matthew and Ednay were to go for a time this would facilitate the document difficulties.

SPIRITUAL CLIMATE IN GENEVA

While in Geneva we did a couple of interesting things. The first weekend we were there we did some touring downtown and went to the Reformation Museum. It's interesting to see so many beautiful churches and yet realize how meaningless most of them are. Only 3-5% of Swiss people consider themselves to be born-again Christians. It is against the law to share your faith publicly in Switzerland. If someone comes to you or to your church you are free to share, but one may not try to evangelize on the street. They identify that as pro-seletizing. We also took an overnight trip with Craig to visit the late Francis Schaeffer's retreat chalet called L'Abri where we had time to meet some other English-speaking Christians. During the second week we visited several of the members of the church and had time to cook meals and interact with the Fiuri family every day. Paul and I attended another small Brazilian church group one Sunday night and had an opportunity to talk with the pastor, Pedro Martins. He confirmed what Augusto had earlier mentioned about the instability and dishonesty of many Brazilian pastors and groups in Switzerland. He also mentioned the difficulty of being accepted as a church in Switzerland.

CHALLENGES FOR AUGUSTO

Augusto has a big task ahead of him as pastor of this new congregation. They have been meeting under his leadership for about one year now. Most of the people coming to the church work long hours and are struggling to make ends meet in a new land with the complications of a different language and culture. Kids are in school all day, too, so it seems there is little time during the day for ministry opportunities. Time during regularly-scheduled services and studies needs to be maximized. Even though some of the members came from a Christian background, most have not had much biblical teaching to help guide their lives and day-to-day decisions. Many are living the consequences of poor choices in the past, second marriages, children without both parents, etc. We all know that Jesus is in the work of transforming lives as people come to Him in repentance and faith. That's why the church is here – to preach the Good News of the Gospel to those who need to find their way out of the darkness into the Light.

On Monday, January 26, Augusto met with some officials to discuss the possibility of registering the church with the government. I translated a Model Constitution from the AFLC and also sent him the constitution of one of our Brazilian Free Lutheran churches as a guide for writing a constitution in French. We want to talk with Augusto

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about the results of the meeting before the WMC meets in February. Earlier Augusto had informed us that the process used in Switzerland is to submit the constitution and then be evaluated by the government during a three-year period to determine if the church actually abides by their constitution.

For the time being we think the major focus of the El Shadai church should be in Portuguese so that they can minister well to the Brazilians who are here. There is a common link with the people who attend the church now as they are all immigrants from Brazil needing someplace that feels like a “home away from home.” Certainly in the next generation the church will transition to French-speaking, but it seems a little early at this point. The gradual process is beginning to happen as praise songs and hymns are often sung in French.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING

We want to continue to pray for Augusto and his family and this new church. We hope we can help in some concrete ways as well. Augusto has asked for Portuguese Bibles, so one idea we had is to suggest that the Brazilian church send Bibles to Switzerland. Matthew has sent out two newsletters in Brazil updating pastors and members about the work of the Fiuris in Switzerland. He plans to continue doing this regularly. Pastor Joel has agreed to visit the Brazilian churches and share about the needs of the new church there. We can also help with that upon return to Brazil.

Perhaps the U.S. could help the church in Switzerland by providing a small sound system and video projector if they decide to move to the Lutheran church as they are not equipped with these things. They presently use the equipment of the church they are renting from. We wonder if there might be any financial help for Augusto and Deise to travel to Brazil for the 50th Anniversary celebration in November. He has not been back to Brazil for five years (almost 6 years by the end of 2016). He hesitates even thinking about leaving Switzerland because he doesn't know who would take his place while he is gone. These are a few things to consider.

SENDING MISSIONARIES

Looking ahead to the idea of sending missionaries to Europe we wonder if it would be more logical to explore the possibility of going to France and working from there. The cost of living is much more affordable there. Everything is super-expensive in Switzerland! Some people we met at the church live in France and work in Geneva. We are not sure about all the legalities connected with this, but it sure does seem like a possibility. Augusto and Deise live only fifteen minutes from the French border. Another thought we had was about the way future missionaries could come and get involved. It seems that it might be easier to get a student visa and come to study French or some other subject while working alongside the church. We feel that the beginning of their ministry could possibly be with the Brazilian church to get some experience, but the goal would be to start somewhere else (possibly France). We can look into the possibility of contacting other Brazilians who formerly were Free Lutherans to see if they would be interested in helping establish a new work in some other part of Europe.

If someone like Matthew and Ednay would eventually be sent to Switzerland they could study French during the day and work with the ministry in the evenings and weekends when the people are free. Having a working knowledge of French would prepare them for work in a variety of places even if Switzerland is not their long-range goal. We looked into French courses offered by the University of Geneva and other cheaper ones offered by some other groups. It seems there are several options. Augusto sees a need for someone to work with the youth as he feels this is not his strong point. From our observations, the church kids seem to be doing well, but we realize they are immersed every day in a non-Christian culture. It would be a blessing to have a mature young couple invest in their spiritual lives and help them make important decisions as they wind their way through adolescence and young adulthood. When new missionary candidates arrive in Europe Matthew and Ednay could help them ease into life in Switzerland (or France) because they would have already had experience in studying and living and ministering in a European country.

SUGGESTION FOR CALLING MATTHEW AND EDNAY ABEL

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With this in view we would encourage the Mission Committee to consider sending Matthew and Ednay Abel to Switzerland to help with the work for a short period of time. Perhaps they could go before the end of 2016 to get a feel for the church work and take over for Augusto to be able to travel to Brazil for the Annual Conference. After Augusto returns they could work with him for a while and help out in other ways with the ministry, evaluating future possibilities of working in Europe. One of the men who is attending church (not a member yet) is named João Carlos. We have known him for years. He used to be married to Augusto's sister. He is single now and offered to share his 2-bedroom apartment with Matthew and Ednay if they were to come. He lives in France right across the border and would be willing to half the rent with them. He works long hours like the others and doesn't spend much time at home. This would be a way of having an affordable accommodation for a short time.

We realize that Matthew and Ednay are under-supported at this point, so perhaps they could return to the U.S. at the end of August 2016 to raise some more support in September and October before flying to Switzerland for a two-month "check it out" experience. It would be great to have them back in Brazil again for the camp season in mid-January 2017.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary:

1. We were happy to have the opportunity to visit Switzerland for the second time. Now we feel we have a more informed idea of life and challenges there.
2. We believe that Augusto is passing on the true biblical and Lutheran teachings and practices of the Free Lutheran church to his people.
3. We sense that we should continue to pray and support their work in some way.
4. We would like to encourage the WMC to continue to pray about sending two couples to begin a work in Europe, working together as a team. However, we think more research needs to be done before that big step is taken. We would encourage the WMC to get approval from the Annual Conference to proceed in this direction.
5. If the approval is given at the Annual Conference in June 2016, the whole situation could be studied and evaluated during the coming year with hopes of calling someone the next year. More research needs to be done as to documentation for missionaries and how churches are established in the various countries before proceeding with a call.
6. We suggest extending an invitation to Matthew and Ednay Abel to spend two months in Switzerland to do some more teaching and helping and evaluating so they can contribute their opinions before the next step is taken to send them for a longer period of time or to send a team of missionaries to Europe.

We continue to pray that God would guide the hearts and minds of each one of us, giving us peace, or the lack of it, to help us understand His will for the involvement of the AFLC in European missions.

Respectfully submitted, Paul and Becky Abel