

GREECE CAN-GO REPORT

Trip Location: Several Locations in Greece

Trip Dates: May 30-June 10, 2022

Written by: Jim Le Shana

C for Champions:

Before:

- Potential champions – Team Members: Kenn and Lisa Dirrim, Josiah Muhr, Libby Penrose, Ron Maestas, Jim Le Shana, and Jan Cammack.
- Praying – Same as above, plus Ron Stansell, Gene and Myra Pickard, Tiffany Van Dame, Jeanine Le Shana, David and Becky Le Shana, and perhaps others.
- Who is God Calling? Possibly Josiah Muhr, Libby Penrose, Tiffany Van Dame, young man Matt Macy knows, and maybe Kenn and Lisa Dirrim? Perhaps others? Taylor Mabry?

During:

The team met with many individuals who are working with evangelism, discipleship, and relief work among refugees. Although most of these individuals are currently engaged with other mission organizations in the area, we also found a great openness and acceptance to our questions and potential for future partnerships and mutual support. In a sense, all of these would be part of the prayer “team,” and more.

After:

- **Champions** – same as above, although perhaps strengthened during this trip. In addition, the NWYM Global Outreach Board has now fully supported and endorsed Greece (and Islamic refugees there) as a potential mission field and is recommending full acceptance by EFM. In addition, this is one of the three that NWYM as a wider body at our annual sessions, from the Superintendent and other reports, has publicly supported.
- **Praying** – same as above, except for more people especially in NWYM.
- **Who is God calling?** We believe that God may be calling Kenn Dirrim to serve as the first apostolic missionary to lead the pioneering church planting efforts among refugees in that country. As recent as October, 2022, Kenn has affirmed an interest in this kind of role. He does not see himself as the church planter. Neither do we. His gifts are in teaching, coaching, leadership development, networking, cultural bridge-building, and administrative oversight (a contribution that Lisa especially brings to the table). What Kenn could help us with is to allow us to build on all of the groundwork that he has already laid in terms of connections, insights, potential, respect, and cultural credibility, and to leverage his ability to raise up and send out workers. He has already been doing that (many of the church planters we met with were ones that he had taught/discipled/coached). Obviously, EFM would need to affirm this call, but we see the potential for it. More than that – as far as we can tell at this moment – all of our recommendations hinge somewhat on this decision.

- **Who would be the church planters?** For the most part, we believe the most effective church planters will likely be those who are refugees themselves. Harvesters from the harvest field. Kenn has a bi-lingual translator who serves closely with him in teaching and Bible Studies. He may be the perfect first official “church planter” for Friends – if Kenn is able to be his mentor/overseer. If Kenn is in that role, others from America, like Jan Cammack, could potentially have a church planting ministry in terms of supporting the efforts, perhaps starting a business that church planters could work out of, or perhaps to support other basic evangelistic efforts.

A for Affirmation:

Before:

- **Partners/ministries Already Present** – Helping Hands, One Collective (International Teams).
- **Discernment Impressions** – There is a sense that this may be a door that the Lord is opening. So many intersections of people, callings, ministry experiences, genuine need, and fresh opportunities to plant churches that didn’t exist previously. We have two seasoned Friends missionaries in country who are praying about their next steps, a number of Barclay College teams who have gone there each year (starting with one led by Jim Le Shana when God closed the door to Ukraine), and heavy investment/interest by leaders in three Yearly Meetings.
- **People with Resolve to partner/send** – NWYM is exploring this possibility.

During:

- **Partners/Ministries** – As stated above, we met with several church planters and some leaders of ministries (of course, Kenn and Lisa Dirrim being chief among them, but also Yasir, Matt, Javad, Sahar, Ilir, Kiki, Nikos, and several others). Everyone was friendly, and also shared with us their concern for Islamic refugees. Some were particularly engaged with us, providing counsel for what we might consider in terms of a church planting in the region. Sahar, herself a refugee who has planted a church strategically connected to a medical clinic, recommended that we plant using a similar model of business/missions (but perhaps starting a market for refugees).
- Meeting with several church planters and key leaders, reinforced in our group that the time is now to plant churches. Whereas the door for church planting seemed closed previously, in largest measure because of the transient nature of refugees, due to a variety of circumstances (including Covid and the lack of friendliness of other countries), more refugees seem to be staying in Greece for longer. That is especially true if they can find jobs (which fed into the above strategy potential of starting a business and church simultaneously as a strategy).
- One church planter in the north, outside of Thessaloniki (Mylotopos), stood out in particular. As we met with him at his home, in a group of 13, he specifically asked us (using these words): “Come over and help us!” It was somewhat startling. We were sitting at that point in what was ancient Macedonia. Literally, what he was saying to us

echoed Paul's vision, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" What we learned specifically is that this region not only has refugees living in it, but that the country of Greece plans to relocate more of them there in the future. It would not be to join his ministry per se, at least not in the long run, but to share in a partnership in the gospel by doing our part for the Great Commission and church planting there.

- **Discernment impressions** – although at least one church planter seemed to suffer from "Sending Sunburn" (discouragement that it is challenging to disciple believers in a new church, only to have them leave), our general sense of the need for church planting, evangelism, and discipleship was strengthened. The need is great, even as some challenges continue. Two different missionaries (Matt and Ilir) emphasized similar things - that it would be challenging for an American to move there and make something happen. They said that someone would need to learn the language/culture, it would take time, but that it could be done. One interesting and cool thing to consider: as some refugees move on to other countries – they take the gospel and "church planting" is already happening through them in other countries in Europe. That exponential spread in Europe could happen for the Friends Church, too.
- **People** – by the end of the trip, it started to become evident that this Luke 10 team had an "Ace" in our pockets: Kenn and Lisa Dirrim. They already have been serving as missionaries in country for 15 years, and if they would be willing to become EFM missionaries (and if EFM would have them), it would be a game changer – allowing this long-term bridge-building effort to eliminate a number of start-up years. What if their years in Greece already, while meaningful in and of itself, was also a part of the ramp up preparation for starting a new church planting mission field? In addition, during the trip, one of our members (Jan) began to sense that she might have a potential ministry as a missionary in country, if the pioneering foundation was already laid (if she could partner with someone like the Dirrim).
- If the Dirrim were to serve as EFM missionaries there, perhaps FSW and NWYM would be their "sending" Yearly Meetings (since that is already where they have some support), Jan could potentially be sent from NWYM (with not as many financial needs as a retired professor), and that would open the possibility for current or future young adults or others (such as Josiah, Libby or others) to partner for shorter term ministries.

After:

- As stated above, we believe that God is opening this door at this time. We see Kenn Dirrim as stepping into an apostolic leadership role, and he seems interested/willing to consider this possibility. Their family has had some personal issues since we were there in June (a close friend with cancer, and an elder/ailing father), which might cause Lisa to not be quite as engaged, but that would not hinder Kenn from serving in this kind of strategic role.
- We see other potential missionary roles/callings/positions/ministries/people, stemming from this beginning.

N for Need:

Before:

- **People/Place** – thousands of Islamic refugees come to the country every year (especially strong before Covid). Christians are the main ones who provide care for them. Up until recently, most missionary efforts focused on relief and evangelism, with little room for church planting (for various reasons). That seems to be changing.
- **Ministry Need** – Could be relief work (but this is done already, so it may just be partnering with what already exists), and evangelism/discipleship (again, this may be partnering with others). What is missing is an overall strategy of church planting that fits contextually. But the door seems to be opening for that (this is what we hope to explore).
- **Most convincing evidence for need/the gospel** – From what we can see today, very few groups have strategically been planting churches among Islamic refugees. This seems to be the next logical extension from the relief/evangelism work that has been going on for several years. This may also present a pathway for evangelism among family members (in Iran/Afghanistan) who have not yet escaped into Greece, or who have gone on to other places in Europe.

During:

All of our initial impressions proved true upon observation. Not only of the need, but of the actual potential for planting churches. Whereas this was not even much of a consideration 10 years ago (for a variety of factors), some groups are actually doing it. And we met with them and were encouraged by them. They are all still “new” church plants, so are definitely on the early growing edge of challenges, but the very fact of the existence of some church plants gives encouragement that others could grow there now, too.

After:

Our continuing sense is that the soil is ripe for church planting in Greece among refugees, and some are reaping a harvest. There would be plenty of challenges, and the door may or may not be open for ever – but the door is open now. Why not evangelical Friends as the ones who help to contribute to what God is doing there?!

G for Gifting:**Before:**

- **Interest/willingness** – we have a missionary couple there already (Dirrims), who will be of tremendous assistance, and will no doubt be exploring/praying about their role in whatever happens. In addition, at least two individuals are praying specifically about this (Josiah and Libby), and there may be others.
- **Gifts/Skills** – from what we can tell, there will need to be several types of gifts/leaders. It will not be a solo ministry. Leadership, vision, evangelism, languages, compassion, organization, missiological contextualization, and more.

- **How many** – we are not sure. We will need several no doubt, and possibly of differing ages.

During:

As stated above, both the people and a potential process for the development of a church planting effort by Friends in the region became clearer as we continued in our visits and conversations with residents, missionaries, refugees, and with each other.

After:

As suggested above, we believe that if we simply sent a missionary from the US to serve as a pioneering missionary, it could take many years to develop the foundation for a church plant, let alone a church multiplication movement. Thankfully, we don't need to wait (and believe that it is timely, and that we should not wait any longer).

We recommend that Kenn Dirrim be asked to serve as an apostolic leader, to provide oversight, leadership training, coaching, recruitment, and more for the development of a church planting mission field in Greece. He has already developed the gifts and skills to carry out this role, along with the requisite trust and respect of both missionaries and refugees that would be essential.

Beyond that, we can then see the potential for some additional help – and we would see the possibility of Jan Cammack to serve as a teammate to develop a ministry (perhaps missions through business), and others from the US could be in some supportive roles for shorter term relief work or other complimentary ministries. She is reluctant (understandably) to say “yes” to this opportunity, until knowing if the Dirrim would be in the lead role.

Having said that, we also see the first church planters (and perhaps perpetually) as those who are themselves refugees. We have one person in mind, but there may be others. If we turn Kenn loose in this regard, that is what we anticipate will happen. More leaders raised up, but then sent out to serve as Friends church planters.

O for Opportunity:

Before:

- It seems as though the soil is ready, based on our conversations and in-country observations. But that is part of what we hope to discover.
- Person of Peace – Already made independent contact with the leader of the Helping Hands ministry (Natasha Hayes), who seems eager to welcome us. We have not spoken yet with any leader/person from among the refugees.
- How Start – that is what we hope to consider/explore.

During:

- Readiness? Yes, this visit confirmed that the soil is ready. People are spiritually ready – with many Muslims already coming to know Christ on a regular basis through various

Christian relief/evangelism efforts. More specifically though, it seemed during our trip – especially by meeting with several people who are in the process of planting churches (or who have started them) – that the potential of taking the next step from evangelism to church planting is now becoming possible. This was one of our big questions ahead of time that was answered while there.

- As for people of peace – there were several. Every missionary contact was interested to be part of our supportive network – in large measure because of the trust that had already been built through the Dirrimis. That was also true with those engaged in evangelism and planting churches. They trusted us because of trusting Kenn.
- As mentioned above, the most overt invitation to come and help evangelize and plant churches came from the church planter in Mylotopos (outside of Thessaloniki). It doesn't get much clearer than, "Come over (to Macedonia) and help us!"
- During much of the trip, we were not certain how to begin, so we asked lots of questions and listened and shared and prayed. By the last night, the potential plan to get started came into sharp focus for us all.

After:

All of the above, with this added comment that developed at the very end of the trip, and then reaffirmed and expressed in more detail at our concluding meeting (a week after our trip), and in conversations with the Dirrimis since that time.

We think the potential plan to get started begins with a person – Kenn Dirrim. We believe that he is God's person to serve as the initial apostolic leader of this church planting mission field. We see that the past 15 years have essentially prepared him for this next step. And we believe it is timely. The door was not really open for church planting even five years ago, he would not have been ready, and EFM (let alone NWYM or other regions) was not ready.

Stated another way, our team has concluded that God has not shut this door for church planting, that the door is open now, that we are recommending that EFM take next steps to plant churches in Greece with refugees, the NWYM missions board (Global Outreach) affirms this recommendation, and we believe that taking the step to engage Kenn as an EFM missionary is the first step. In this sense, the "who" (this apostolic role) is the key factor that moves this decision to a 100% compelling conclusion that we must plant churches there now. Not someday, not in a few years, but soon, while the door is open. While the Dirrimis are still there and at a point of openness to this transition. The other "next steps" (such as engaging others from America to go, and recruiting prospective church planters, etc.) would follow.

Is this a CAN GO for EFM at this time?

Yes, completely and now. It fits all of the criteria, but also has a timeliness for several reasons stated above: the need is great now, the door is open now (and it was not really feasible to happen even a few years ago), the leadership is available and willing to make it happen now, we have some prospective additional "goers" from America who could be supportive helpers now,

and there is interest from not one, not two, but three Yearly Meetings now (FSW and MAYM, with NWYM taking the lead).

We do not know how long the Dirrims will be willing to do this – but they are nearing a transition point, so the timing is perfect for them. We don't want to waste this opportunity. If we wait for someone else to step into this apostolic role, it could take many years before we could launch anything sustainable. Kenn and Lisa, Friends missionaries from Rose Drive in SoCal, have already accomplished what would take others 15 years to do. They already raise up, train, and send out refugee church planters. Why not ask them to do it for Friends? The time seems like now for action.

Finances: Unlike some other start-up church planting efforts – the key missionaries already live there, they already have an income (a pension, and financial support mostly from Friends Churches for Lisa as the missionary of record with One Collective). The individual who would then potentially consider joining them in a support role, perhaps to start a missions as business enterprise, also has little to no financial needs (retired professor). There would likely be some financial investment required from EFM (perhaps largely from current donors, but also through NWYM and maybe FSW), but that would depend upon how everything was structured with refugees (which we would recommend financial counsel to investigate further), and visiting short term missionaries.

Again, compared to many new mission fields, not only does this harvest field seem ripe now, there seems very little to be lost in terms of investment to launch it now, and much great potential to be gained.

Which of the five criteria do we see the strongest? Which of the five criteria is yet to become convincing?

It is hard to say which is the strongest in terms of CAN GO. Perhaps it is in Champion - meaning – an incredible opportunity to partner with a seasoned missionary to give birth to something in a relatively brief time – while the door is open.

We see the greatest potential for success, if EFM takes action quickly to approve the Dirrims to become the lead missionaries there. Kenn is open to it, but our group did not have the authority to ask him officially. So, we asked, “if you were asked, are you open to this?” The answer has remained “yes.”

As for a weakness, it might be that the challenges of the transient nature of refugees will always persist. This may relate to “opportunity.” It all depends though, if the Dirrims are in the lead role, and if some steps are taken to help refugees choose to stay in Greece (such as supplying jobs and helping with other aspects of stabilization in the region that are needed on an ongoing basis). Again, although a challenge, it seems like this is the right time to try it and move forward.

Describe key points or stories in the process and affirmation/confirmation of God's call to Evangelical Friends to go to this particular people or place.

There are many stories, and a few holy ground moment ones for each person on the trip.

One was shared above, in Mylotopos, when the church planter gave us the Macedonian call to “come over and help us.” It was startling. It came at the end of a long conversation outside after a meal, about the needs and potential for ministry and church planting in that region among refugees. Far from discouraging us from coming, he saw ripe fields that were ready for harvest and that needed more workers.

Another was at the refugee camp, when the men met with several refugee church planters. One (Javad) wore a T-shirt that read in English, “Pray. Give. Go.” It seemed prophetic, and his words to us were encouraging. He pastored a new church in Athens of 70-80, and also a small “church” in what he called the “jungle” (near a govt. refugee camp) outside of Athens.

Before we arrived, we were scheduled to stay at an Airbnb in Athens (in an area unknown to any of our team), but we were counseled by missionaries that it was going to be a rough area (and the women should not go out alone at night). When we arrived, we discovered that we were in the heart of the Islamic refugee area! This is a big city, and we believe God led us right to that place, in the midst of the very people who we were there to visit and pray about reaching! Language barriers prevented us from any meaningful conversations there, but we did meet one mother and child who we had connected with at the Helping Hands relief center. It seemed affirming to us that this was a people for us to pray for and build bridges to reach.

A final confirming story was our last team meeting before leaving for the airport to return to our homes. At dinner that night, we affirmed that this was a place and people group that needed new churches, that the right time was now, and that what made this convincing and conclusive was if one of our teammates, Kenn Dirrim, was approved to step into the leadership role. It was a beautiful moment as we essentially experienced a “clearness committee” and sense of approval from the Lord to “take steps forward.” However, we recognized that we did not have the authority to make an ultimate decision (let alone to ask Kenn to do this), but we went as far as we felt we were asked to go. We concluded to recommend that EFM take the next steps to see if this could be one of the upcoming new mission fields that we support.

What steps have you taken since returning from the trip or need to take in further discernment or exploration of this field?

Since returning, the team leader (Jim Le Shana) has confirmed with Kenn Dirrim that he is willing to be approached about serving in the lead role as described above.

If this is approved, there would be a number of additional steps (meetings with the Executive Director and Field Director of EFM to go through the approval process, meetings with constituent groups such as NWYM and FSW to discuss how a region would take the lead in terms of a wider EFM mission field, etc.). The Dirrim's themselves would need to then take their steps in transition, with Lisa undoubtedly moving away from One Collective. In addition, Kenn would then be enabled to take the steps that he would take to transition what he has already been doing, to doing it more strategically for Friends. Meanwhile, invitations would go out to people like Jan Cammack, so that they have a real potential ministry to consider (not just in theory).

Luke 10 Team Recommendation to EFM

After meeting with many leaders (including four Persians/Afghans who have just planted churches), staying in an area with a high refugee population in Athens (unbeknownst to us when we booked it), serving at Helping Hands with refugees, reviewing needs in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki as well as a more rural area where refugees are moving, and after many meetings of prayer and discernment, our team believes that God has opened a door for church planting now. Furthermore, we see a way forward and the means to accomplish it, both in terms of personnel and finances. Therefore, we recommend that EFM take the next steps to adopt Greece as one of its mission fields and begin the process to plant churches in that region with refugees.

More specifically, we recommend that EFM takes the step to invite Kenn Dirrim to serve as the first official EFM missionary in that country, with an apostolic, leadership development, recruiting, training, and coaching ministry for church planters from the refugee community, and with oversight of other potential teammates. In addition, we recommend that a pathway be explored and developed more fully for those who might become those missionary teammates, either for short or longer term commitments, in complementary ministries. Students from Barclay College, and relief volunteers from Friends Churches in America could become foundational in providing service, ongoing positive communication links to supporters, and a potential fishing pool for future missionaries. Others may be interested to begin longer term ministries in a missions-through-business format or other complimentary roles that would be developed under Kenn's supervision.

Our recommendation is that these steps begin soon. Not someday, not in a few years, but now, while the door is open. We believe that we see an exciting way forward that has great potential. The Global Outreach Board of NWYM affirms this recommendation. Along with them, the Greece Luke 10 team submits this recommendation for consideration by the wider body of EFM.