

GREECE TRIP 2 CAN-GO REPORT

Trip Dates: September 20-30, 2023

Report Written by Jim Le Shana

The 2023 Luke 10 Greece Team met in Athens, Greece, September 20-30, 2023. The team members included a few alumni from the trip in 2022: Kenn and Lisa Dirrim, Josiah Muhr, and Jim Le Shana. The four new members included: Stan Leach, Thomas Moore, Jeanine Le Shana, and Leisa Boles. Each day, members took turns leading in a devotional time that often developed naturally into a “team meeting” discussion about what we were learning, observing, experiencing, and discerning. We held a final “discernment meeting” on the last night of our trip at the home of Kenn and Lisa.

In short, this team reaffirms the decision made by the first team in 2022. We recommend that the Global Outreach board of NWYM and the board of Evangelical Friends Mission approve church planting among Islamic refugees in Greece as a new official mission field for Friends.

Without repeating every detail of each of the five categories of the CANGO criteria, below are a few fresh observations made by our 2023 team.

C – Champions

No changes here in that we continue to see interest from Barclay College/MAYM and NWYM, but perhaps even stronger interest/support from FSW (they considered this as one of their top two areas of interest at their own Think Tank). As for individuals who might serve as missionaries, Josiah, and Leisa (engaged couple) are not a “no,” but need more time/experience. Same with Thomas. Kenn and Lisa figure prominently in our thinking, but we specifically sensed that the need is so great that even if Kenn and Lisa were not involved (and given the connections and open doors), we need to move forward. Kenn and Lisa remain open to this partnership, but cannot join EFM until leaving another missions organization.

A – Affirmation

Even other mission organizations and leaders we met with seem supportive of the idea. We received encouragement from several missionaries in the area to consider some of the unreached or underserved parts of the country. Partner ministries and strategic alliances are likely to happen, as the bridges and relationships are already established.

N – Need

This was our biggest concern going into this trip, and perhaps the most important answer we obtained.

We have known of the great need but didn't know for sure if the need also presented itself in a way that we could do anything about it (we wondered if the door for effective ministry had shut). In short, we believe strongly that the door remains open, even though it presents itself somewhat differently.

Here's the context: The political climate of the country shifted dramatically since our visit in 2022, with most refugees rounded up and sent away to one of 23 different internment camps around the country. The city of Athens appears devoid of refugees in places where they were prominent and visible just one year ago. We wondered if the opportunity for ministry was closed. Bottom line – we determined that the door for the gospel has not closed. We heard stories of God working every week in refugees' lives, and we saw first-hand the relationship connections between Christians and refugees that remain possible at the camps. Trauma ministries will be part of future strategies, as will humanitarian aid. But there is an ongoing hunger for the gospel and open doors of spiritual opportunity for disciple-making. We participated in one small Bible Study adjacent to a camp, and relief work next to another. In addition to the open doors that continue in less obvious ways, we anticipate that the internment camp policies of the government will change again (especially with more refugees coming every month).

G – Gifting

No changes here. We continue to see strong gifting for the Dirrimis in an oversight/leadership/connectional way. Their 17 years on the field, immersed in the complex milieu of both Greek and refugee cultures and ministries, is extremely valuable. We continue to believe that former refugees will be among the best church planters and multiplying disciple-makers, but there are clearly roles for Westerners to serve in helpful ways. Missions through business opportunities, and creative ministries like the ones we experienced, will persist in large measure because the needs are so great.

O – Opportunity

One person summed it up this way in our final meeting: "The Lord is opening an opportunity to do it. We don't have all the answers. We just need to show up here [and we will see God work through us]." The door remains open. The opportunity is now, and appears as though a way forward will remain as long as refugees continue to use Greece as the doorway to Europe (a pathway which shows no signs of ending soon, despite the political climate in the region).

Conclusion: As stated above, after visiting two internment camps, many conversations with other missionaries and church planters with years of experience serving refugees, some direct conversations and one meal with some refugees themselves, serving briefly with Helping Hands (the refugee relief ministry where Kenn and Lisa have served), and time spent listening to the Lord and each other, it is again the recommendation of our 2023 Luke 10 Greece that EFM should embrace church planting and disciple-making among Islamic refugees in Greece.