

## COVID-19 | EUROPE

### **Adrienne Satterberg | France**

**3.29. 20**

When the number of positive cases in France started doubling in a matter of days, President Macron announced the nationwide closure of all schools and universities to begin on March 16th. I wondered how the closure of universities would prevent the spread of the virus when I saw the bars full of students on Friday evening. Two days later all the restaurants and bars in the country were ordered to close. Finally, on March 16th President Macron declared 'war on the virus' and ordered all residents to remain at home except to go to the grocery store, pharmacy, or to get some exercise. The police are enforcing this order and will fine those who don't oblige. We wonder how we can continue our ministry when being physically present with people is such an important aspect of caring for them.

We are thankful that there are many ways to connect with people. We have the time to try to connect with the people that we have lost contact with. Bible study small groups have started WhatsApp groups. We often have two Zoom conferencing sessions a day. In this way, we strengthen our ties with colleagues locally and across Europe.

Our French church in Lyon now provides a virtual worship service every Sunday, resources for children who are home all day, and a virtual prayer forum. The imposed restrictions cause us to focus on what is most important and to discover new ways of communicating with and caring for people.

### **Greg Fauss | Germany**

**3. 29. 20**

The first infection was reported on February 25th and the first deaths on March 9th. The government considered the risk to be "low" until March 2nd when it was elevated to "medium." Containment was first attempted through partial, regional lockdowns, followed by increasingly strict pronouncements to "shelter in home." Most schools were closed by March 17th, followed by bars and restaurants. Chancellor Angela Merkel addressed the nation on TV on March 18th. Her clear, sober and urgent appeal to the nation helped catalyze a more unified and serious response among the population.

It started in southern Germany, but the central western state of North Rhein Westphalia is also a hotspot. As of March 27th, approximately 50,000 have tested positive and 351 people have died. We are restricted until at least April 17th. No public gatherings are allowed, only essential stores are open, leaving the home is allowed for necessary travel or exercise, at least 9 feet of distance is to be observed between persons, all playgrounds are closed and a maximum of 2 non-household members may gather outside.

Our local church in Berlin had their first virtual worship service on March 15th as the school we meet in was the first closed due to an employee testing positive. All are experiencing some level of anxiety, but generally people are patient and calm. Christians are responding with hope that maybe this will cause people to check out the Christian faith. Aside from increasing levels of prayer, people are generally finding creative ways to reach out and help one another, both inside and outside of the church.

The first week was particularly stressful as we had to decide if we would stay for an "indefinite period of time" or return. At the same time, ordinances were changing daily and we were trying to adapt our

ministries accordingly. Now we are as busy as ever with many Zoom and Skype meetings for prayer, small groups, planning and worship, along with one-on-one walks for discipleship and evangelistic meetings. Our ministry among refugees has become more difficult, however. Still, we see opportunities for both evangelism, pastoral care and growth in faith.

*Kiel | Stephanie & Phillip Volland*

As is probably true with all churches, the pandemic has put new stress on our church staff to know how to care for the immediate needs of our community and each other. Any gaps in leadership and communication are becoming increasingly apparent. We could use prayers for creative and effective new ministry strategies and cohesiveness between our church leaders. I think this is where Phillip and I can really offer a resource both as missionaries and as Americans. Our home culture is generally more comfortable than our host culture with the notion of abandoning previous models of ministry and "pivoting" to collaborate to discover what model of ministry will work in these exceptional times.

Please pray that we could assist, come alongside, and help lead our church through change. Pray also for our adjustment, healthy new rhythms, and most importantly, that this crisis would lead to many people coming to faith and growing in Christ.

**Barbara and Steve Swanson, Bethan & Erick Abramson | Sweden**

**3. 27. 20**

Unlike our neighboring countries and most of Europe, the government of Sweden has not yet required us to "shelter in place" and some shops and restaurants and schools remain open.

Gatherings are being cancelled like elsewhere in the world. Sweden is well connected with internet worship services and meetings, and creative ways to keep in touch with your community. At the moment, our conference superintendent suggested small groups going out and Easter caroling with guitars and accordions! Pray for wisdom for authorities and local church councils in making decisions that affect activities and social life.

Social distancing may intensify an already existing problem of isolation among the people of Sweden. Pray for God's power to break that cycle of isolation amid social distancing. People are asking, "what are we supposed to learn from this crisis?" We are also challenging one another in the church to consider what God is saying to us in the midst of this.