

American Missionaries Reach Africans and Sri Lankans in Paris

After ministering in France for 13 years, Robert and Kathryn Baxter are empowering others to reach the multicultural city

American missionaries to Paris Robert and Kathryn Baxter had spent years building their French church Assemblée Chrétienne du Bon Berger (The Christian Assembly of the Good Shepherd) when 12 of their Algerian members said they wanted to start a North African church in Paris.

“Should we dare to send out some of our best people?” the couple had asked God.

Robert Baxter remembers God’s response. “He said, ‘Build as many baskets as you can, make them elastic, and I will fill them.’”

The Baxters gave their blessing to the new Algerian church, and God began filling the “basket.” In a country where the average congregation numbers 50, in just four years, the new church has grown to more than 75 and has even sent out a missionary who is working with the underground church in Algeria.

Since then, the Baxters have added more church-plants, including one in Paris. They also have begun an international

English-speaking church on Saturday evenings and are leading a Sunday afternoon satellite church in Chantilly, north of Paris.

In addition, Robert serves as spiritual adviser for a Sri Lankan congregation and has been asked to serve in the same role for a new Ghanaian church-plant in Lyons, France.

“Our vision has developed into a strategy of, ‘One spiritual family, many churches,’ with a goal to have 10 churches as part of our family,” Robert Baxter said.

Their second church-plant, which came about through their Filipino members, was led by associate pastor Apolinario Bugarin, who trained under Baxter for seven years.

“Robert gave us a year to transition,” Bugarin said. “The Baxters’ faith carried us and encouraged us.”

This church, which began in 1998 with 30 Filipinos, has nearly tripled in membership and today meets in a hotel off the Champs-Élysées in downtown Paris. The Baxters believe that God has allowed the descendants of those colonized by Europeans to bring the gospel back to Europe.

“We are praying that God leads [these ethnic groups] to cross the cultural divide as did the Jews of the early church, to reach out to the Europeans,” Kathryn Baxter said.

To strengthen their churches, the Baxters organize a biannual conference called “Build the Church, Bless the Nations.” The conference focuses on uniting the church-plants and equipping

their members and teaches on such themes as leadership development and church-planting. The Baxters believe the conferences will become a catalyst for a regional cell-system as well as for future church-plants.

The Baxters' mission, however, has not been without costs. They have persevered through personal and ministerial trials, including the near loss of their newborn daughter to a congenital heart defect and almost losing their building due to significant financial challenges. But God's deliverance in both trials increased their faith.

"Our daughter doesn't even have scar tissue on her heart today," Robert Baxter said. "And before our landlord died, he asked his children to do whatever it took to keep us in the building. So they paid 1.2 million French francs [\$200,000] to renovate our church to meet the building codes."

While Paris may be world-famous for its haute couture, fine cuisine and ability to draw more tourists than any other city in the world, Robert Baxter says that spiritually speaking the "City of Lights" falls short.

"The 'New Wine' [Toronto Blessing], the repentance revival, the glory miracles, apostolic movements and other 'moves of the Spirit' have all been embraced quicker and with greater success outside of Paris than inside," he said.

Because Paris holds significant influence throughout France, Europe and even the world, the spiritual strongholds of this city of 11 million are powerful. "We have seen ministry after ministry, church after church, rise up to do a great work for God, only to be knocked down a couple of years later," Robert

Baxter said. "Paris will not be won overnight. It will be a long, hard road to win this city for Christ, but we will."