

Marching for Jesus in Secular France



In France, a country known for its secularization and growing Islamic population, tens of thousands of Christians will take to the streets for a March for Jesus on Saturday, which is being held at the same time as the nation's annual gay pride parade.

An estimated 30,000 Christians will parade through the streets of Bordeaux, Lille, Nantes and Paris, France, distributing 100,000 Bibles and 20,000 gospel tracts. Representing at least 70 different churches, marchers will carry signs proclaiming Jesus as Lord as they sing worship songs.

Parade participants also hope to be able to share their faith with the estimated 800,000 people who will gather for the nation's annual gay pride parade, whose route will intersect with the March for Jesus. Christian marchers have been prepped to pray and witness to the homosexuals without fear.

"It would be such a great privilege to be praying for all of the thousands of homosexuals that will be marching on the streets," said Christine Thabot, an event organizer and co-pastor of Temple de Paris with her husband, David. "We're not afraid. They need love, and we are there to bring them the love of Christ."

The march comes at a time when organizers say French opposition to Christianity has been worsening. They say it is nothing short of miraculous that they were granted permission to have a parade, much less distribute Bibles and preach the gospel publicly.

Thabot called the march “an anomaly,” noting that march organizers lobbied for the last year to get permission to hold the event.

“We are not allowed in France to just go about and talk about Jesus or evangelize openly unless you have permission,” she told *Charisma*. “We can’t sing or play our music or give away Bibles or tracts. You’ve got to have permission. This is the only day in which we are allowed to give out leaflets.”

Jim Daly, pastor of Jesus Christ Fellowship in Middleton, Calif., and a U.S. partner of the French March for Jesus, said Christians need to pray for the parade and for revival to break out as a result of it.

“[In France] it’s always going up hill,” Daly said. “It’s always going against the grain. Not like it’s much better anywhere else, but France just is an acutely hard country.

“When you land and get off the airport there in Charles de Gaulle in Paris, you can feel spiritually the oppression. And there are these beautiful cathedrals and museums and stuff, but there is something in the spiritual that is very strong, and it is like a stronghold.”

Many French Christians have struggled to practice their faith, especially in the last decade as secularism has risen. It is difficult for many to obtain mortgages or permits for church buildings, Daly said, and numerous congregations meet in barns and parking garages.

“It’s its own form of, really frankly, a humanistic, anti-Christian sentiment,” Daly said. “Some people have estimated

that there is really as many as 20 percent of French people that are atheist. And so many of the rest are nominal Christians.”

Daly has partnered with other Southern California churches to hold a prayer service in the U.S. at the same time the parade will be taking place in France.

“For those that can’t be there and can’t march, at least we can pray for a blessing and a breakthrough,” Daly said. “Frankly, just a breakthrough that revival would breakout in France.”

Both Daly and Thabot are asking Christians worldwide to join them in praying for a radical change in the country and that the parade would cause the European nation to realize the hope they have in Christ.

“Paris needs hope,” Thabot said. “And through this day we want to confess that there is hope in Christ.”