

Intimidation Hasn't Stopped Egyptian Christians

Despite threats, the Kasr El Dobra Church in Cairo continues to send missionaries throughout the Arab world

In Egypt, 8 million Egyptian Christians, mostly multigenerational Copts, co-exist peaceably with Muslim Egyptians. But they must register with Egypt's Muslim-dominated government as Christians. Muslims must register as Muslims.

Although some progress in the religious liberties area has been achieved in the last two years, converts from Christianity to Islam have their legal papers instantly changed. They are hailed in the media, but rejected and ostracized by their families.

Converts from Islam to Christianity are not allowed to change their identity papers, may face charges of "stirring religious strife" and receive threats from state security intelligence police and Islamic fundamentalists.

Yet threats do not bother Egyptian Christians. The Kasr El Dobra Church evangelism-training center has trained and sent 15 missionaries and 20 teams to reach the 1 billion Arabs in the 10/40 Window.

This Cairo church has also become the headquarters for the Global Network for crusades, events which often attract as many as 100,000 Arab Egyptians at once. The church's youth ministry features Olympic-style games in Arab villages drawing more than 25,000 youth for soccer, track and field, swimming,

and other sports events.

In spite of the many e-mail threats he receives daily, the Rev. Sameh Maurice, co-pastor with the Rev. Menes Abdul Noor, calmly says that he is not afraid. "We are used to seeing these things. The language of our city is to threaten," Maurice said. "If you cannot be intimidated, you cannot be threatened. We are fighting a spiritual battle—the spirit of hate and fear vs. the spirit of love."

Founded in 1945 as a Presbyterian mission, the Kasr El Dobra Evangelical Church is located in the center of Cairo. Beginning with 400 members, it now has a membership of more than 7,000—many of whom are Coptics. The church has five full-time pastors and eight senior lay leaders. The church's many ministries include drug rehabilitation, free medical care, youth ministry and an emergency needs fund.

Ehab El Kharrat is one of the eight lay leaders. He leads Freedom Recovery Center—a long-term Christian drug rehabilitation center located halfway between Cairo and Alexandria. El Kharrat also leads an outpatient program in Cairo where many upper class Muslims come for expert medical recovery help for their heroin-addicted children.

El Kharrat said he speaks for 99 percent of both Muslim and Christian Egyptians when he states that Western Christians' support for "Zionist" Israel was a "basic stumbling block to show [the] true love of God to Muslims."

He said his rationale "comes from a deep commitment to Jesus Christ and study of both the Old and New Testament." Even though Egyptian Arabs side with the United States in their

current battle against terrorism, they live with hatred for the Jewish Mossad Israeli security force. He also said he finds no biblical basis for the possession of the Holy Land in Israel by the current Israeli government or by modern-day Jews.

El Kharrat, along with the membership of his church, said he prays for both Muslims and Jews for their spiritual salvation, as well as peace and justice for all.

-Mary Theresa Webb in Cairo