

Zagreb Baptist Church - July 2018

Pastor Mihal has developed a heart to shepherd several refugees seeking asylum from the Middle East in the past 6 years. More than 36 Farsi speaking refugees are currently coming to their fellowship, and 15 have been baptized as a result of their relationships. From this, an Iranian/Farsi Congregation has emerged with committed Christian converts leading as laymen from within their cultural base and languages. Several had left their homes due to persecution of their Christian faith. Beyond mentoring their fellowship, Pastor Mihal has recognized their urgent need for safe housing, language/cultural skills and job training during their asylum application process and has entered a ministry of mercy to them. His mission is "to evangelize, disciple, and model Christian life among Farsi speaking refugees." All governmental grants have been approved with his Christian basis as the center of the applications.



He has identified an old building in the neighborhood of his church. He now has government approval to renovate and use this as a center for the process of integrating refugees into Croatian life and society. His vision is to serve the spiritual, physical and social needs of his neighborhood community through the services of this local center. Once renovated, this House of Hope can house 7 refugees, plus provide language/culture training and job retraining sponsored by EU refugee funds. The government will sponsor two full-time language/culture teachers and a full-time House Manager. Level B Croatian



language skills can be achieved within 12 months using the materials Pastor Mihal's team has developed. The guests will be applicants from Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Syria, and Kurdistan, agreeing by contract to receive these services and provide labor to fulfill the House of Hope outreach to the local community, such as providing/delivering 150 meals per day and laundry services to the elderly and infirmed. Their contract for residency will be extended to a maximum of two years, depending upon compliance and contribution to the House of Hope vision. Pastor Mihal has built a praiseworthy cooperation among 4 local Baptist congregations of Zagreb, who will each contribute Board members to govern the operations of House of Hope and facilitate strong ongoing relationships/communication with the city.

A bit of background on the building for the House of Hope. This neighborhood building is a large, two story, 100 year-old ex-police station. It is three times larger than any other facility serving day programs for the Middle Eastern refugees awaiting decisions on their asylum application. There are currently around 600 refugees in Croatia who are generally housed in crowded, rundown motels. Other programs are a Red Cross Medical Clinic and a Tea Room for socializing by the Catholic Missions. This opportunity to provide language/cultural daily training rapidly accelerates the process to become job functional, vastly improving their odds at becoming approved for asylum and assimilation as a productive resident. These classes could serve significant numbers with the full-time teachers and facility space of House of Hope. With an industrial kitchen facility, the residents could produce 150 meals/day to support the needs of the local neighborhood. The long-term vision of House of Hope, by Pastor Mihal, is as a center to continue to serve multiple severe social needs of the community through relationships of his congregation, even beyond the current refugee crisis opportunity to extend mercy and hope in the Name of Jesus.

This on-going ministry has several needs for prayer and action:

1. Prayer for Pastor Mihal and team to persevere in teaching of the new life of grace and truth in Christ and fellowship with one another, despite previous cultural habits of thinking
2. Renovation of House of Hope: \$140k in donations (potential of \$50k in reimbursed invoices from International Baptist Mission Board)
3. House of Hope Board applicants with hearts submitted to the Lord, capable of working with the implementation of grants with the city
4. Partners to join in prayer, planning and finance

I have to tell you, I got chills just picturing the impact of 7 adults experiencing a spiritually led community in the Name of Jesus, with a clean bed, good food, effective language/cultural and job training, in the mentoring of committed mature Christians to develop positive self-esteem and an understanding of the Gospel of Jesus, and then move out into their family/ethnic communities with a concrete history of productive cooperation among different nationalities. – church team member

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Blessings,

Zagreb Baptist Church