

# Keeping In Contact

News from Kontaktmission USA

June 2004

## A Big Need in Small Belgium

*Kontaktmission missionaries Matthias and Sabine Valenta, German nationals, have been working in Diksmuide, Belgium since 1997. Matthias was trained in retail business and Sabina as an elementary school teacher, but they also attended Bible college and began to look into needs in foreign lands, including in Belgium. Matthias writes, "We had the opportunity to do a 7-month internship in the German-speaking part of Belgium. During this time the spiritual need of this country first became really clear to us, and would not let go of us. We began to ask God if He would want us in Belgium, and He began opening the doors." The following is an article Matthias wrote specifically for our KMUSA newsletter, translated from German and edited for length.*

### **Belgium's spiritual situation**

The influence of Martin Luther in the 16th century caused many people in Belgium to begin to read the Bible, and about 600 Catholic churches adopted the protestant theology at that time. But the resistance to the Reformation was great, and tens of thousands paid for their protestant faith, many by being burned at the stake. Then, at the council of Trent (1563), Protestantism was officially denounced. Many Belgian protestants

left for neighboring countries, with the result that, even today, Belgium is officially up to 90% Catholic. Until 1962 the Bible was considered a forbidden book for regular citizens, reserved only for the consideration of the Catholic priesthood, and it was not legal to read it. For this reason alone it is not surprising that many Belgians are completely unfamiliar with the Bible. It is simply an alien book to them.



**The need is for many more small congregations like this one to be started.**

Islam is today the second largest religion in Belgium with 3.5% of the population. Even the Jehovah's Witnesses, with just 0.6% are as well-represented as born-again Christians. This makes Belgium, as stated in the missions handbook Operation World, "one of the least evangelized countries in the world." These statistics are frightening. The Catholic tradition of faith rules the lives of Belgians. Even though an increasing percentage of the population has

become disinterested in the Catholic Church, still the culture is deeply ingrained with Catholic thinking. The concept of salvation by doing good works is very prominent. And the worship of Mary is central; she is seen as an intermediary between man and God, someone to be prayed to, hoped in, and trusted upon.

*continued on page 2*

## Demographics

This small country called Belgium is very complex. There are 3 official national languages. The north is known as Flanders, and Flemish is spoken here. The Flemish account for about 57% of the population. In the south are the French-speaking Wallonen at about 35% of the population. There are also just a few German speakers in the east, as well as various groups of immigrants who live mostly in the larger cities of Brussels and Antwerp.

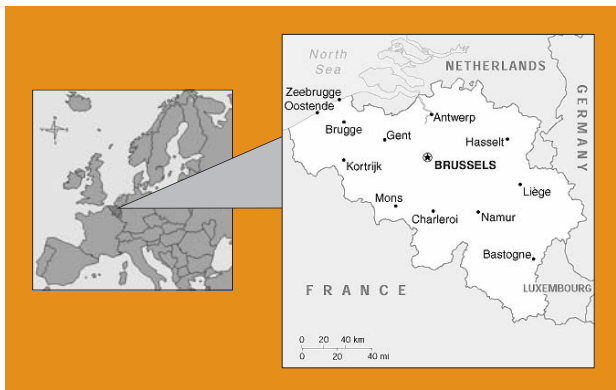
Brussels, the capital, is the most important city with about 1 million residents. But Brussels is also important for all of Europe and for the world, because it is the home of both NATO and the European Union (EU). Brussels is increasingly at the very heart of political and cultural development in Europe.



**Even in Belgium, kids have a great time at Vacation Bible School.**

fer working in teams, but there are unfortunately too few workers even considering working here for us to think of creating such teams. There are also very few Belgians who are serving Jesus fulltime in their homeland, simply because there are so few Christians in the first place from which to draw.

*We are specifically looking for workers to help by joining existing church planting teams, who are interested in and gifted for new church work and who are team players. We also offer the option of an internship with us, which would allow the opportunity to experience both Belgian culture and church work in a Belgian setting. We can also arrange an internship in any of the main language regions of Belgium.*



**Vacation Bible School included an evangelistic outreach to parents and grandparents.**

## Why Are We Looking for Missionaries for Belgium?

As I said, the spiritual need in Belgium is staggering, with evangelicals representing just 0.6% of the population. Biblical faith is simply unknown for Belgians, and in many cities there is not a single evangelical church. It is very important that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the message that sets people free, is preached in this land that is so strongly influenced by Catholicism.

Some of the missionaries in Belgium work completely independently. We pre-

**Church leadership in Diksmuide, Belgium**



# Speaking of Interns

We are working with a number of new workers and future interns at this time, but we wanted to take a moment to introduce you to two who have just arrived for their internships within the past week as of this writing. We are sharing this information because many students who receive this newsletter may also be interested in internships like these. Internships represent one of the best ways for students and older adults to become intimately acquainted with a foreign culture and missions work within that culture.

**Leah Waddell** is a student at Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary, set to graduate in May of 2005. Leah is the daughter of American missionaries in Argentina, where she was raised. She is already fluent in Spanish, making her a perfect candidate for an internship in Spain. She is also recently engaged, but wanted to pursue her internship anyway. Leah is working with KM missionaries Matthias and Marion Keppler in Burriana, Spain, near the Mediterranean coast.

In her first e-mail after arriving in Spain she writes, "My first impressions of Spain???? Gorgeous!!!!!! There are mountains around me and on some of the tops sit the remains of buildings and towers, and we even drove past towns that had a whole wall all around. They (the Kepplers) also stopped to show me the Mediterranean, which, let me stress, is only three blocks away from the place that I am staying. Three blocks...Got it? :)"

"The Kepplers are an amazing family and I know that I am going to learn a lot about family life from watching them interact with each other and with their children. I see a vibrant healthy fun family and I love to see that."

"I know the Spanish here is going to take me a while to adjust

to because I am going to have to concentrate to catch a lot. They use a lot of phrases that we do not use in Argentina, and then they use this one word a lot which happens to be a cuss word in Argentina. It will be interesting." We're sure it will be.

**Jerrod Sharp** is a student at Lincoln Christian College and Seminary whose heart is set on missionary service, potentially in Italy. Even though Kontaktmission does not have a missionary team in Italian-speaking Italy (only in German-speaking Tirol) we were able to arrange for him to work with long-time American missionaries Harold and Enid Fowler in Matelica. Jerrod is already (after only a few days in Italy) enrolled in an intensive language school course.

He writes, "Last night I got to go to the church (or meeting place rather) for the first time. It is

located above a bakery and across the hall from some sort of factory. Nonetheless, it is still a very nice meeting place. I got to meet 5 of the Italians who attend the church. It was a very interesting experience."

"School begins on Monday morning. Be praying for safe travel (people drive like crazy over here) and also that I will be able to retain some of the Italian I will be making a noble attempt to learn. I feel a bit overwhelmed with all of it

right now, but that is because I know very little. I can speak in unconjugated verbs... kind of."

"Italy is beautiful. It is very different from anything in the U.S. There are two huge gorgeous mountains out the windows on either side of the apartment I am staying at. God is so awesome to have created something like this world. Glory be to Him!"

**See page 4 for the cost of an internship.**



## Did You Know?

...that French Fries come from Belgium, not France? Here they're usually home made, and they are the number one choice to accompany any meal. And did you know that Belgium chocolate is renowned as among the best in the world?



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*The Harris Family  
Rob & Carla with Alissa & Ryan*

## The Cost of an Internship With Kontaktmission

Kontaktmission arranges internships for the purpose of acquainting seriously missions-minded people with peoples, cultures, and church works in Europe. On the basis of this purpose, the primary cost of an internship with us is a fairly earth-shaking decision: to honestly consider full-time missions service in Europe. After that, the costs in terms of finances are relatively low.

We usually say that an internship can be organized for roughly \$100/week of the internship plus plane fare, and passport/visa if necessary. Often this \$100 is more than enough, since interns are frequently housed and fed by missionaries or local church members. In some cases, for instance if there is language school or considerable travel in the plan, the cost may be a bit higher. At

this time, it is possible to fly to most places in western Europe for less than \$1000, but these prices do change quite regularly. If funds are sufficient, Kontaktmission also withholds a small percentage for our expenses.

We work hard to keep internship costs low, but we understand that an extended trip to Europe is not usually factored into the financial plan for a student's education, so we are more than happy to provide help in raising the necessary funds. It generally proves quite easy for interns to meet their fundraising goals, although they may all get nervous about it in the process. After a successfully completed internship, if the intern does choose to serve full-time on the mission field, he or she has then already received some training and experience in fundraising.

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