

## Regional Leadership Conference - Thessaloniki, Greece December 1-3, 2006

This fall the Free Methodist Mission in Europe sponsored four regional leadership conferences throughout the continent. The first three were held in Ukraine, Belgium, and Portugal. The final conference was held on December 1-3 in Thessaloniki, Greece. Coupled with the conference was the planned opening of the Thessaloniki Free Methodist Church's new worship center.



The conference started on Friday evening with a time of praise and worship led by a united worship team, comprised of members from the Thessaloniki Free Methodist Church and from the Evangelical Church where the conference was being held. This was a highly talented group of musicians that helped to set the tone for the entire conference.

Michael Long, Balkans Regional Director, welcomed the conference participants and introduced the people who would be taking part in the conference, including Dave Hall from [Worship From the Nations](#) and Pastor Andrew Belshaw from the [Cornerstone Free Methodist Church](#) in Kirkham, England.



Pastor Stephen Scholes, also from the Cornerstone Free Methodist Church, gave the opening message. He spoke on the topic of "The Rabbi's Dust", which was basically an encouragement to everyone to follow closely to Jesus. A large number of people responded to his invitation to step forward to the front to signify their desire to draw closer to the Lord.

About 150 people attended the conference over the weekend, coming from churches in Bulgaria and in Thessaloniki. Some were able to participate for the full weekend, others were only able to come for the events on Saturday or Sunday. The speakers spoke in one of three languages -- Greek, Bulgarian, or English -- and because of this translation services were available. Song lyrics were projected in both Greek and English.



During the daytime on Saturday three tracks of workshops were offered -- worship, youth, and church leadership. Dave Hall led the worship track, Stephen Scholes and Andrew Belshaw led the youth track, and Evgeniy Naydenov and Thanasis Kopatzidis led the church leadership track. Evgeniy is the pastor of an independent church in Sofia, Bulgaria and Thanasis is the pastor of the Thessaloniki Free Methodist Church. All

of the workshops were well-attended. Dave Hall's emphasis was on worship as a way of life, and his workshops touched the heart of many in attendance.

Saturday evening there was another time of praise and worship, followed by a message from Pastor Evgeniy Naydenov on the Body of Christ as a family. The evening concluded with a deeply meaningful worship concert, led by Dave and Sarah Hall.



The Regional Leadership Conference successfully ended on Saturday evening, but the weekend hadn't yet ended.



The church meets 50 meters down this street.

The ancient forum and marketplace.

Sunday, December 3 was a day of celebration at the Thessaloniki Free Methodist Church. The church meets in rented space in the heart of downtown Thessaloniki -- on a street just 50 meters away from the ancient forum and marketplace, which the Apostle Paul probably visited. When the opportunity came for the church to rent a larger space directly across the street, they jumped at the chance. Work on the necessary renovations came to a standstill following Michael

Long's bicycle accident in October, and the hope of having the building dedication during the conference weekend was lost. However, people didn't count on Michael's amazing determination! In spite of his nine cracked ribs and two broken collar bones he pushed on throughout the week, motivating volunteers and paid laborers to complete their work in less than the usual amount of time. Whenever necessary he did the work himself -- installing sinks, toilets, curtain rods, and more! Able-bodied people found it difficult to keep up with him!



Because of these Herculean efforts, the facility was ready to be dedicated. Pews that had been donated from a church in the U.S. had been set up, and extra chairs were brought in. The stage was filled with the musical equipment of the united worship team, and translation systems and video projectors were put into place. The space filled up quickly, and soon there was standing room only. A busload of 22 more Bulgarians

from Pastor Evgeniy's church arrived. Other guests from Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, and England were present, as well as other missionary friends and colleagues. At least 120 people were in attendance. The atmosphere was joyous.

Following a time of praise and worship, Michael Long greeted the gathered guests and introduced the leaders of the various churches that were represented,

including the Europe Area Director of Free Methodist World Mission, Jerry Coleman. The keynote speaker at the dedication was Pastor Andrew Belshaw from the [Cornerstone Free Methodist Church](#) in Kirkham, England. He spoke on "Going Deeper into the Water" and challenged the congregation to go forward boldly in faith. Because of the large number of Bulgarians present, there weren't enough translation receivers to go around, so Andrew preached with two interpreters at his side-- one translating into Greek and the other into Bulgarian.



Pastor Thanasis (Sakis) then addressed the congregation and invited them to partake of Holy Communion. This was received joyously, accompanied by stirring music from the united worship team. As the benediction was pronounced, the worship team played "These are the Days of Elijah". Thus the new worship center was dedicated, blessed, and inaugurated.

While the big celebration took place on Sunday morning, the day wasn't yet over. The members of the congregation returned on Sunday night for their first Sunday evening service in the new facility. Maria Long led the church's own worship team during the time of praise and worship. She was delighted to have



her daughter Gina home for the weekend. In addition to participating in the worship team, Gina introduced six of her friends from her Bible school in Athens that had come up for the weekend. It was thrilling to hear the testimonies of these young people, and to hear of their desire to serve the Lord!



Area Director Jerry Coleman presented the evening message, speaking on faith. Jerry sprinkled his presentation with a lot of humor -- both intentionally and unintentionally. In trying to make a point about the necessity of establishing a relationship of trust, he used several examples from his courtship of his wife, Jan and dramatically acted out the moment when he proposed to her. The congregation enjoyed Jerry's message and his mode of presentation.



The nice thing about the evening service was that it was almost entirely made up of people from the local congregation. It was good to see so many people there!

The Thessaloniki Free Methodist Church is off to a great start in its new ministry center!