



Pastor Greg Opean shares Scripture with Éva, right, and Móni at an outreach in south Budapest. Greg has begun several churches in the country. This was Greg's first return to Hungary since he felt the Lord calling him to leave two years ago. He was there to observe a new church plant.

Golgota

Story and photos by Tom Price
unless otherwise noted

A founding pastor returns to Hungary, witnessing the continuing work

(Golgota: the Hungarian spelling for *Golgotha* and connotation for Calvary Chapel)

Pastor Greg Opean, who helped begin the Calvary Chapel movement in Hungary, returned after a two-year absence to observe the growing work of the Lord.

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” Acts 10:38

Pastor Greg Opean had ministered in Eastern Europe for 17 years—planting and pastoring several churches soon after the fall of communism and the Iron Curtain. He eventually moved to Budapest, the capital city of Hungary, to begin another new church. There, new believers helped the

church to grow until over a thousand people attended each week.

Greg had grieved when he sensed the Lord's directive to return to America. In 2007, he left Hungary for California with his wife, Jen, and their two children. Two years later, with the CC Budapest leadership firmly established, Greg was able to come back for a brief visit during the time of a new church plant in the capital city. Approximately 300 volunteers from CC Budapest took time off from their jobs to do outreach in the area and hold concerts, culminating in the third Calvary Chapel in Budapest. Greg's old friend, Laci Németh, would pastor this new work.

“For 17 years the Lord allowed me the privilege of taking part in raising up a generation for Christ in Hungary,” said Greg.



Photo by Diane Schaefer

Laci Németh teaches the first Sunday service of the new church in south Budapest in a tent. He had pastored in Croatia before returning to Hungary.



Cerissa Gilligan prays for help in a drama. Behind her, Andrew Gartner plays the role of Jesus, Who took Cerissa's sins upon Himself.

“What happened and continues to happen in Hungary is like the Book of Acts. When I returned for a short visit this past August, I realized the depth of love and affection I felt for the people to whom I served and ministered.”

Lasting Fruit

On a humid and rainy summer evening, excited chatter echoed through the halls of CC Budapest, located in a historic theater in the center of town. Greg, their much-loved former pastor, who had led so many to the

Josh Sazdanoff, a breakdancer from CC East Anaheim, CA, draws a crowd close to the

Lord, was back to teach at two midweek services after a two-year absence.

That night, he showed a funny, purposely-bloated photo of himself on the screen since rumors of his weight gain had spread after his departure. Then he told the congregation of his family's recent visit to Sea World in San Diego. His eight-year-old daughter had been singled out from the crowd to come to the front to take part in the dolphin show. Asked where she was from, she proudly replied over the PA system, “Hungary!”

Greg launched into a message on the grace and mercy that our Savior has for believers, as he had shared so many times. Afterward, he reminisced with everyone in the Hungarian language. While greeting people, Greg saw a young lady named Lilla, whom he had known years before, when he had planted CC Esztergom in northern Hungary. At that time, she was only four years old. Now, 16 years later, Lilla was two days away from her marriage to the current pastor of CC Esztergom, Laci Gyügyi.

Tamás Gémes also came to greet him. He had been an early participant in the Budapest church plant a decade ago. After graduating from the school of architecture, he had been preparing to leave the country. Recognizing his leadership potential, Greg had asked Tamás to consider using his skills in the remodeling of the future Bible College in Vajta, Hungary. After the remodel, he took classes and interned there, enabling him to grow in God's Word. He currently pastors CC Vác, 30 miles north of Budapest on the Danube.

Seeing old friends and babies who were born after his departure, Greg recollected his years in Hungary with a great sense of gratitude to the Lord. “By the way the churches and outreaches have grown since I left, you understand that it was always about Jesus Christ and never about me,” added Greg.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything,

new church, then shares the Gospel and invites onlookers to the free concert.



The team from CC East Anaheim shares the love of Christ through mime in a busy shopping area.



Photo by Diane Schaefer

The church began with believers who lived in south Budapest.

nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

Vision to Make Disciples

Phil Metzger has been the pastor of CC Budapest ever since Greg was called back to Redlands, California, in 2007. Phil is also the director of Calvary Chapel Bible College Europe in Vajta and oversees Calvary Chapels across Eastern Europe. CC Budapest had been praying for vision for the city and they felt the Lord directed them to start a much-needed fellowship in a new part of town. This vision of discipleship was passed on to the church and those living in the area of the new church plant who were encouraged to consider attending.

Phil's vision is for all the churches to be heavily involved in reaching their areas with the Gospel. “Most importantly, we are taking seriously our call to make disciples,” said Phil. “The church is the entity that accomplishes that. Therefore we knew we needed a



Laci shares at the concert. The maturity of believers who came from CC Budapest has allowed the new church to minister to orphans, prostitutes, and the homeless.

seasoned pastor to lead the new church with a strong vision to reach the lost.”

Laci Németh had been an assistant pastor at CC Szeged, Hungary, during Greg’s time there. Laci was the senior pastor for many years in Vukovar, Croatia, a city devastated during the Croatian War of Independence in the early ’90s. He had grown up in Subotica, in former Yugoslavia, with a father of Hungarian descent and a Croatian mother, so he spoke several languages fluently. In early 2009, Laci had sensed that his ministry time in Croatia might be ending. During prayer with his wife, Keri, this was confirmed. Laci spoke with Phil about this change and then informed his church board.

Phil later contacted Laci to let him know that many were praying about starting a church in southern Budapest. Laci thought to himself, *Please, not Budapest, Lord. Any place else!* Both Laci and Keri had an aversion to the biggest city in Hungary. They wrote down the pros and cons. The only two entries in the “con” side were: dislike and fear of such a big city.

Laci commented, “Fear and dislike are never an argument with God. If you don’t trust the Lord enough and think He can’t protect you and change your heart, then you shouldn’t be in ministry.” They turned the church in

Croatia over to a young man gifted in teaching and moved to Budapest in the beginning of July 2009.

Both Laci and Keri, who was eight months pregnant, were suspicious of the ease of the move, unaware of the impending spiritual storm. Keri was soon to deliver when their oldest daughter, Lea, came down with a severe skin infirmity that caused her to be hospitalized. The risks for Keri to be compromised at this stage of her pregnancy were too great, so Lea’s care was left to Laci. A week later, after the initial church plant outreach and first Sunday service, their youngest daughter, Lotti, came down with a swollen gland that was dangerously close to her main artery. Surgery was needed immediately. Again, Keri was too close to delivery to assist. Laci stayed at his daughter’s side in the hospital for ten days. The price of ministry soon seemed too high as the spiritual attack heightened.

“I called and asked everyone to pray,” said Laci. “I was broken and in tears with my children under siege.” A text message from a friend helped get his focus back on the Lord. “The message simply said, ‘Remember Job.’ Finally, I knew that I just needed to endure.” Keri had a safe delivery,

the attacks diminished, and the new church began to flourish.

But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:62

Continuing Fruit

Many believers from the original Budapest church grasped on to Phil and Laci’s vision to begin outreach and share the Gospel in their communities. Laci said, “Ministry in south Budapest began immediately to orphans, prostitutes, and the homeless, as well as a men’s ministry. We quickly needed to rent a larger meeting place.” He started teaching in 1 John. “Love seems to be a missing ingredient in this geographical area,” added Laci.

Greg’s visit coincided with the timing of the new church plant. The Lord had completed



During the concert outreach for the new church plant, students from A Vision for Life program at the Bible college in Vajta dance in a line. Above right: A member of CC Budapest, Tamás Rottenhoffer, left, ministers to a young man who was struggling.



Tamás Gémes welcomes back Greg, who had encouraged Tamás to use his skills for God. Tamás now pastors CC Vác.



Greg says “Hi” to a newborn and dear friends, Diana, left, and Nati.



Budapest



Greg greets Magdi Radácsi, one of the first to attend CC Esztergom in northern Hungary. Magdi’s daughter, Lilla, center, was 4 years old when the church began. Lilla, now 20, and Laci Gyügyi, right, who is the current pastor of the church, were to be married in two days.



There are now three Calvary Chapels in Hungary’s capital city of Budapest.

the circle begun so many years before. Laci explained, “Greg was the pastor at the Calvary in my hometown of Subotica, Yugoslavia, when I gave my life to the Lord. Long before I met my wife, Keri, she was the first Hungarian to get saved when Greg began the church in Esztergom, Hungary.” Before going back home to Redlands, Greg proudly witnessed the completion of this circle; his friend Laci was now leading this new church, Calvary Chapel Dél-Pest.

Greg Opean is currently an associate pastor at Pickinghouse Calvary Chapel in Redlands, CA. ☞

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