

## Pastor's Page

### *Lives well Spent*

On Wednesday morning 18 April I had to borrow a car (mine had broken) to get to the International Mission centre (IMC) Selly Oak where I was leading morning devotions. I spoke on Psalm 84 about "A Passion for God". At the same time in Malatya, a Turkish province 300 miles northeast of Antioch 3 Christian men with a "Passion for God" were leading a similar meeting. Tilmann Geske a 46 year old German Christian and father of three prepared to go to his office, kissing his wife goodbye and taking a moment to hug his son before saying "Goodbye, son. I love you." Tilmann rented an office space from Zirve Publishing. Zirve was also the location of the Malatya Evangelist Church office. A ministry of the church, Zirve prints and distributes Christian literature to Malatya and nearby cities in Eastern Turkey. In another area of town, 35 year old Pastor Necati Aydin, father of two, said goodbye to his wife, leaving for the office as well. They had a morning Bible Study and prayer meeting that some other believers in town would also be attending. Ugur Yuksel likewise made his way to the Bible study. None of these three men knew what awaited them at the Bible study.

Amongst those gathered at the Malatya Evangelist Church office that morning were 10 young men who were all part of a *tarik*, or a group of "faithful believers" in Islam. Five of these men were known by the Christian believers as "seekers" as they had attended an evangelistic service that Pastor Necati and his men had arranged at a hotel conference room in the city on Easter Sunday. On the morning of April 18 they arrived just as the Bible Study commenced. Reportedly, after Necati read a chapter from the Bible the young men began a violent and brutal attack on the three Christians. This torturous assault lasted for almost three hours and ended in death.

The Church in Turkey responded in a way that honored God as dozens of believers and pastors flew in as fast as they could to stand by the small church of Malatya and encourage the believers to take care of legal issues, and represent Christians to the media.

In an act that hit front pages in the largest newspapers in Turkey, Susanne Geske in a television interview expressed her forgiveness. She did not want revenge, she told reporters. And quoting the words of Jesus on the cross she said, "Oh God, forgive them for they know not what they do," (Luke 23:34).

The Christian press said; "In a country where blood-for-blood revenge is as normal as breathing, many reports have come to the attention of the church of how this comment of Susanne Geske has changed lives". One columnist wrote of her comment, "**She said in one sentence what 1000 missionaries in 1000 years could never do**".

In a letter to the Global Church from the Protestant Church of Smyrna the writers ask us to pray for the Church in Turkey. "Don't pray against persecution, pray for perseverance" urges Pastor Fikret Bocek. "The Church is better having lost our brothers; the fruit in our lives, the renewed faith, the burning desire to spread the gospel to quench more darkness in Malatya ...all these are not to be regretted."

What an amazing statement and what a witness to Christ! And much as I believe that the church in Turkey needs our prayers, I can't help feeling that we need theirs more!

13<sup>th</sup> May 2007