

30 *DAYS of PRAYER*

FOR THE

ROMA



Great Commission Center International

God Loves Roma

Sharon Chan

I believe the term “Roma” is unfamiliar to most people. But if we say “Gypsies,” they might say: ‘Oh I see, those people!’ The name Gypsy is given them by the general public, with a discriminatory overtone. The word Roma means “human beings,” a name they prefer to be called by others.



The Roma came originally from northern India belonging to the lowest caste, the “untouchables.” They have been migrating steadily westward over one thousand years. Today, some 10-12 million have settled in Europe. In popular fictions and movies, they often are portrayed as artists gifted in singing and dancing, leading a carefree life, wandering around the world, and, furthermore, to prey upon people by stealing and swindling. Thus, most people have a bad impression of them, discriminate against them, and exclude them from educational and employment opportunities. They live a hard life with low education level, high unemployment rate, and find themselves in the lowest stratum of the society for generations.

In November 2013, I, together with Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Wang, Rev. Sek-Wai Lo, traveled to Serbia and Hungary to visit Roma communities and churches in over 10 cities. During this 2-week visit, we discovered that most of the Roma were outside the Gospel door. We also noticed a huge difference between the Christians and non-Christians. For the non-Christians, their eyes expressed doubts and fears, insecurity, and a sense of hopelessness for the present and the future. For the Christians, on the other hand, they were full of joy despite life’s hardships. Although despised by other people, they knew God loves them. It further reassured me that Roma need the Gospel! They need God’s salvation!

The Roma ministers also believe that nothing but the Gospel can change the Roma low self-esteem, self-abasement and their non-striving mentality.

Prayer items:

1. *Thank God that we can become His children and have stability in our lives.*
2. *Pray that the non-Christian Romanis have a chance to hear the Gospel and receive God’s salvation.*

Debtor to the Roma

Thomas Wang

"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." (Romans 1:14)

We know Paul meant here "The Debt of the Gospel." He blamed himself if no one hears about the gospel, and he felt personally responsible!

We are not trying to be compared with Paul, but after the Great Commission Center International's mission trip to Roma (the Gypsies) in Eastern Europe in November 2013, a number of us had that same feeling—we owe Roma the Debt of the gospel. Some of our members even felt a strong sense of "remorse" and asked, after 40 years of churches and evangelical organizations teaching their members to preach the gospel to the Unreached People Groups, today among the more than 10 million Roma in Europe, why there are only a few missionaries, and even fewer Roma Christians and churches!

Bound by their long lasting tradition, Roma practice early marriage at the age of 14 or 15. Their educational level is low (most of them only through the fourth or fifth grade), unemployment rate is high, and they are being ignored and marginalized. Today, some of the Roma have full or part-time low-income jobs with stable lives. There are still others wandering around with their families in horse-drawn caravans to beg and busk for a living.

Thank the Lord for the small group of Roma who believe in the Lord, as there have been gradual changes in their way of thinking, lives and families. Of course, the long history of evil practice cannot be changed in a short time. But we believe that Jesus is the only way to change completely Roma lives and their outlook on life. We have the responsibility to lead the Roma to know Jesus and to pay them back the debt of the Gospel!



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the salvation of the Roma whom we did not care in the past, and ask God for forgiveness.*
2. *Pray to God to stimulate the passion within ourselves to care about and preach the Gospel to the unreached people groups.*

Separated People

Melody Wachsmuth

Since the Middle Ages, migrating groups of people, one of the largest groupings of which are now most commonly called Roma (or Gypsies), have elicited various responses from their host communities in Europe, ranging from being honored musicians and craftsmen to facing forced assimilation, banishment, slavery, or death. For centuries, elements of each host culture, language, and religion became tightly interwoven into their own culture, with each Roma village or group of villages differing in terms of religious expression, dialect/ language, and cultural practices.

Differences from village to village prevent a homogenous conceptualization of Roma culture, yet commonalities of culture and language still remain. One of the primary markers of shared identity is an awareness of separation from non-Roma (the gadze)—an awareness cultivated by the Roma unique cultural and linguistic framework and fostered by centuries of prejudice.

Although scholars note the eleventh century as the earliest possible Roma reference in the western Byzantine Empire, the twelfth-century documents a more substantial presence, and by the fourteenth century, the Roma were widely established on the Balkan Peninsula. The religio-cultural landscape of the Middle Ages allowed care for wandering pilgrims to be viewed as a "privileged duty." Their craftsmanship and musical abilities were often a recognized asset and sometimes even a coveted ability in the royal courts throughout a number of centuries. Roma groups participated in the Serbian uprisings against the Turks in the early nineteenth century and in the Bosnian peasant revolt against the Turks in 1875, and they fought with the Serbians in World War I.

Many historical accounts describe the Roma physical appearance as "black like Tatars" and mention their adornment of silver earrings and clothes like blankets, features that immediately pointed to their separateness.

The alluring mystique of the traveling groups in the Middle Ages worked in their disfavor. Although they contributed unique aspects of craftsmanship to society, the Roma were kept at a distance "through the creation of an array of stereotypical myths... that became an integral part of the social fabric."



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for God's healing touch on them from generation of injustice.*
2. *Pray for them to be respected/accepted by their government and neighbors.*

Anti-gypsyism

Melody Wachsmuth

Roma history is complex, unevenly patterned with discrimination, fear, idealization, and a certain mystique—all of which makes it difficult to trace and understand the virulence of anti-Roma sentiment today. As Roma scholar Ian Hancock notes, "We are, after all, a people who have never started a war, who have never tried to take over a foreign government.... In fact, if anything typifies us as a people, it is our desire to keep to ourselves."



Hancock notes that "anti-gypsyism" has taken many forms throughout the centuries. Institutionalized measures aimed at controlling or eradicating Roma have ranged from forced assimilation, economic penalties, and kidnapping children to "civilize them," to torture and death. The most organized form of Roma persecution took place during the Holocaust, referred to in Romani as Baro Porrajmos, "the great devouring." Estimates of Roma deaths range from 200,000 to 1.5 million.

The church has often been complicit in perpetuating hostility and suspicion toward the Roma. Throughout history the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches have demonstrated scant interest in inviting Roma into their midst, seeing "little contradiction in both keeping them at a distance and condemning them as irreligious." In Christian folklore, Roma were accused of "forging the nails with which Christ was crucified"; their fundamental sin was seen as their refusal to offer shelter to the Holy Family when it fled to Egypt. The spirituality of the Roma, often involving spirits, magic, palmistry, and fortune-telling, was abhorred by the church. Not until the nineteenth century was there any evident interest in Roma souls.

Prayer items:

1. Ask God to forgive the past hurt on the Roma by the churches.
2. Ask God to help us really know the Roma and avoid misunderstanding, pray for God's wisdom and love to accept the Roma.

Roma for Christ

Melody Wachsmuth

In the nineteenth century churches in Europe started to care for Roma souls. In 1952 a religious revival beginning in France spread Pentecostalism among Roma, first to Western Europe and then to Eastern Europe by the 1970s.



The Gypsy Evangelical Church (started in France in the 1950s) baptized over 70,000 individuals in its first three decades of existence. Angus Fraser characterizes its success as a result of the special identity and social solidarity it created for people. In addition, he notes that it put radical claims on an individual's lifestyle, such as abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, gambling, cheating, and theft, while promoting literacy and education. (*The Gypsies*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, p.46, 57)

Roma most often talked about coming to Jesus as a result of a vision, dream, healing, or healing testimony that happened to them or someone they knew. Many had an immediate conversion upon hearing the gospel in relation to such events. There are three reasons.

First, the fear of death and ill health were significant for most of the interviewees. Health is one of the first topics of conversation with Roma families, because they don't know what will happen to them when they die.

Second, constant marginalization has, for some, caused a deeply marred and shame-filled identity, which helps explain an immediate, positive reaction when presented with the message of God's love for them. Goran Saitovic, a church leader in Leskovac, states that after conversion, "We are now aware that God created us exactly how he wanted us to be ... now we love and appreciate ourselves."

Third, Roma come to Jesus out of acute need. Sometimes they come to church for the primary purpose of collecting humanitarian aid, but once there, in many cases they have an encounter with God. Before "they hear the gospel, they are usually without hope, and when they hear it, they feel hope."

Prayer items:

1. *Pray that the many Roma who are still in superstition to be freed from the bondages of darkness and see the light of the gospel.*
2. *Thank God that many Roma know God. Ask God to strengthen their faith and become real disciples of Christ.*

The Roma Church

Melody Wachsmuth

The spiritual openness of Roma does not immediately translate into a steady pace of discipleship and transformation.

The reasons for this slow growth are complex. First adult illiteracy is extremely high, and tools such as audio Scripture and videos have had no visible results. Consulting "magic men" continues to be an ongoing problem when the people become sick. Zvezdan Bakić claimed that the people of his village have a "spirit of witchcraft" and are visited by the occasional "false prophet," so church leaders must carefully control and monitor people's visions, since not all of them are from God.

There are also vast cultural barriers inhibiting non-Roma who minister in the villages. Local people know very little about Roma culture and language, not realizing the extent of its variance from their own. There is little recognition of the need for cultural study, which could lead to a more contextualized mission approach from non-Roma to Roma.

Socioeconomic factors also contribute, for normally the Roma focus the majority of their time and energy on daily survival, health concerns, and family needs. Finally, the areas of deep brokenness in villages – fractured relationships between neighbors, violence, alcoholism, sexual and physical abuse, theft, and witchcraft – require patience and perseverance to overcome.

Most Roma themselves are unaware of their rights or how to access those rights and the opportunities that are open to them. The Roma pastors understand that their role extends into many spheres of life, ranging from urging young people to wait until eighteen for marriage and children, to helping their people obtain proper documents. Miodra-Misa Bakić one of Leskovac's rising generation of young leaders believes that the church has been given divine authority for such purpose. Other pastors noted that they are not just pastors but also "lawyer, advocate, nurse.... not only to preach the Gospel, but to ... help them have normal lives."



Prayer items:

1. *Pray that Roma Christians can be freed from old habits and willing to change their lifestyle.*
2. *Pray for the mutual acceptance between Roma and their neighbors' cultures.*
3. *Pray that Roma churches will ask God for strength and wisdom to care for their people's need.*

The World's Orphan

Andy Ching

In the "2014 Roma Mission Consultation" in Budapest, Hungary, a Roma pastor told me about a rarely told painful story, a bitter experience they once suffered. During World War II in 1939, Nazi Germany put both the Roma and the Jews on the ethnic cleansing list, and killed more than 500,000 Roma. Their fate was similar to that of the Jews. Until now, Roma are still being discriminated against.

The location of the conference was in Hungary, where a newly emerging political party (Jobbik), gained support by using anti-Roma slogans to incite Hungarians' feeling of hatred toward the Roma, and became the third largest party in the Hungarian Congress. Another Roma pastor said, "As we come to the consultation and stay in this hotel, we are more or less concerned about whether the local employees would give us a hard time. In the past few years, there have been more than 60 attacks on Roma, including murder and arson by the locals.

"We are the world's orphans and are not welcomed anywhere," the Roma pastor added. "Wherever we settled down, the locals do not like us. Over the past hundreds of years we have suffered oppression and despise to the extreme. They call us Gypsies in contempt and believe we only wander around, read palms, deceive people, and steal. They look down on us. However, we hope others would see us as 'Roma,' the 'human beings.'"

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the Roma in Hungary to have the courage to stand up and appeal their grievances.*
2. *Pray that the Roma are not discouraged by being despised for they understand that they are loved by God and are the most precious in the eyes of God.*



Roma are also created in God's image as human beings with blood, flesh and emotion. Jesus loves them too. He was crucified on the cross to cleanse their sins. Roma also need the gospel, we pray to the Lord that we serve Roma with love and help transform their lives.

The Plight of Roma

Matthew Tam

At the end of September 2014, I went to Hungary to attend the “Roma Mission Consultation.” At the Budapest International Airport in the capital city of Hungary, I saw a small, shifty-eyed man pacing back

and forth in the lobby. He poked into trash bins, looking like a rag picker, and at the long rows of chairs as if expecting to see any odds and ends that might have left behind by travelers. His actions drew the travelers’ attention. After not finding anything he wanted, he slipped outside. While watching his back, I said to myself, “Is he Roma?”

After arriving in the city and before the conference started, I ventured out to the streets to gain a personal and intimate experience of the local culture. I went into a small supermarket and was greeted with warm smile of the staff. However, this warm hospitality did not last long. When I asked if there was any book about Roma in the store, the staff’s face suddenly fell and yelled at me: “There is a long queue behind you. Please pay quickly!” How baffling!

Later on I went to several bookstores nearby to ask for books about the Roma. The store clerk brought me a copy of pornography dealing with the selling of Roma children from the rack where all unwholesome magazines were kept. How insulting!

Fortunately, I found in another bookstore a biography of a prominent contemporary Roma figure. A round logo “Caring for the Roma Movement,” which looked like a round radiating rainbow, was found in the book. It seemed that the plight of the Roma had been seen from the Heaven. How exciting!



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the acceptance and respect the Roma deserve.*
2. *Pray for prominent Roma to become Christians and through their life testimony to encourage their compatriots to believe in Christ.*

A Roma Girl

Sek-Wai Lo

The feature of the Roma girl was really beautiful!

I saw that girl in the Gypsy slum in Serbia. She was playing with other children in her neighborhood. When I saw her innocent eyes seemingly I could see her future.



This little girl very likely would become a primary school drop-out, marry a boy who is also a drop-out, raise hordes of children, and would never be able to get out of the slum all her life. Her life would be more miserable if she were to be sold to the Middle East as a child bride, forever separated from her family!

Who can help her and change her fate? Over the past thousand years since these "Roma," commonly known as "Gypsy," migrated from India to Europe, they have been regarded as "untouchables" and outsiders, and have been kept at the bottom strata of society. They lived as serfs in Romania. Like Jews, they were mass murdered by Nazi Germany. Those of them called Sinti still wander around in caravans and suffer all sorts of discrimination, exclusion, and oppression across Europe. Their education level is low and unemployment rate high. Those who are gifted in music become street performers, but most of them do piece-meal work, hard labor or become hawkers. Some even become pickpockets or thieves. Although living in countries whose state religion is Christianity, yet no one preaches the gospel to them.

They are like the Israelites in Egypt in the days of old performing hard labor. They cried out to God, begging for help. These 12 million ethnic Roma scattering all over Europe are the "unreached people" who are being ignored by the churches today.

But God has heard their cry and the Holy Spirit is working among them. A major evangelistic challenge is now facing the churches.

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the acceptance of Roma people around the world and that they may no longer be subject to exclusion and discrimination.*
2. *Pray for Roma girls that they can have the opportunity to be educated and to live a respected life.*

The Secret of Life Transformation

May Kwan

God has given me an opportunity to experience His great power in the lives of Roma. During the two years I served in Albania, I never had to worry about how to start a conversation with the Roma, as my black hair, brown eyes, and yellow skin had already got me on their friend list.

One Roma father over the age 40, was considered a "big challenge" to us. Interestingly, he often attended children's and women's activities. He would stand outside the door to observe and listen to us, and sometimes use foul language to taunt or even insult all of our female co-workers. To minister unto him was entirely out of the love of God which encouraged us not to be afraid to proclaim the truth and to treat each other with the same kind of love He showed us.

While he "persecuted" God at first, that Roma father progressed to having fun like a child at the church's cultural activities and to be the first to arrive at the church's Christmas service and the last one to leave. When we asked how he felt, he replied with a very satisfying smile and said: "very good!"

Once he sprained his back while carrying heavy loads of aluminum cans, I shared with him and his family the pain-relief oil I had brought with me from Hong Kong. I encouraged him to read the Bible to know the God I believe in. Thank God, he took the Bible and said he would read it. Later on he wished me well when I was sick and again when I was returning to Hong Kong. This poltergeist is changing: With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible!

Thank God! Only God's true love is the secret of life transformation!



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the acceptance of missionaries in Albania by the Roma and good relationship between them.*
2. *Pray for God to grant patience and wisdom to missionaries in Albania so that they may be able to witness Christ with their lives.*
3. *Pray for the Roma fathers to provide stable lives for their families.*

Cherished by God

May Kwan

According to studies in European linguistics, the Roma originally came from the Punjab region in India, an area between northwestern India and eastern Pakistan. Since the fifth century, they gradually began migrating and scattered in different countries. Some scholars wonder

whether the 7,600 people living in the Xuejiawan village in the hills of Yongdeng County in Gangsu Province, China are Roma.

The Roma seem to be content for generations with begging, busking, fortune-telling, and scavenging as a way of making a living. From my past association with the Roma in Albania the words we often heard from them were: "What could we do?" What is even sadder is the fact that human traffickers always have their eyes on the Roma children, youth, and women. Whether the relationship between these targeted groups and the human trafficker is voluntary or involuntary, these groups are being used as tools for money-making. Would they have any choice when the truth is found out?

The Roma are endowed with beauty, intelligence and flexibility, and also gifted in music and dancing. How wonderful it would be if instead of wasting such endowments in the kingdom of darkness, they can use them to praise, worship and serve God in the kingdom of light! If that were the case, then wherever the Roma chose to migrate, they will carry with them the scent and the good news of Jesus Christ's life transforming teachings, and they will also become angels who will bless many other people. How beautiful that would be!

The body, mind and spirit of the Roma are cherished by God, just like God treasures you and me. All Christians who receive grace from God, how should we respond to the need of the Roma?



Prayer items:

1. *Thank God for the gifts endowed to the Roma.*
2. *Pray that the Roma are aware of their gifts are granted by God and thus should be used for the kingdom of light.*
3. *Pray that God calls more people to serve the Roma and let the Roma know that God also loves them.*

The Plight of the Roma

Kristel Ortiz

Though the dark days of oppressive governments are past in Slovakia, nearly all Roma continue to face staggering problems and obstacles every day. The European Union identifies the Roma as "the Gypsy problem." One Slovak city became overrun with stray dogs and decided to solve two problems by allowing its starving Roma residents to eat the dogs. Thousands of Roma are forced to live to themselves in crumbling cement block housing left from the communist era. An estimated 55 percent of Roma live without electricity, heat, water or sewage systems.



During Slovakia's biting cold winters, Roma must burn wood for heat. However, many vendors refuse to sell wood to the Roma, forcing them to burn pressed board and other scraps. The pollutants from these materials are released into the air, causing tooth loss and other sickness for the beleaguered Roma.

Despite the deplorable poverty of most Roma communities, something much disturbing is evident. In the crowded, muddy streets and makeshift homes, there is an unnerving absence of teenagers. Considered a threat and a nuisance, healthy Roma young people — up to 70 percent of them — are locked away in mental asylums.

But suddenly in the midst of this misery, the Spirit of God has swept into the Roma community of eastern Slovakia. An awakening — unprecedented and unabated — is sweeping from village to village, gaining momentum as it goes.

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for God to turn Europe's "Gypsy Problems" into "Gypsy Praise."*
2. *Pray that the youth of the eastern Slovakia will grow up in a normal social community.*

Marriage Breakthrough

Kristel Ortiz

In 1999, after his wife's death a Roma man living in Sabinov, Slovakia, was brokenhearted and left with five young children to raise alone. Unable to cope with his grief, Marian began to drink heavily, but as time went on he realized he was only slipping further into darkness.

One night, Marian fell to his knees to plead with a God whom he did not know to deliver him of alcohol and help him raise his children. A few days later, his nephew invited him to Switzerland to work as a street musician. Marian went and soon began attending a Swiss church. "I felt joy there ... and hope," Marian remembers. "I heard about Jesus and invited him into my heart."

For the next year and a half Marian faithfully attended church and became part of a cell group. There he met Elisabeth, a widow. Soon Marian and Elisabeth fell in love. But their relationship faced great opposition. Elisabeth's family and some people in the church recoiled at the idea of a marriage between a Roma man and a Swiss woman. If she married Marian, she would have to sacrifice everything.

Faced with such a huge decision, Elisabeth fled into the mountains to seek God. As she stared across the peaks, her eyes settled on a cluster of clouds capping one specific mountain. "Please God," she whispered. "If this marriage is Your will, move those clouds to the next mountain." The clouds moved and God spoke: "Take Marian and go live among the Roma of Slovakia." Elisabeth did not hesitate. In 2000 she left her family, sold her 11-room mountain home, married Marian, and moved to Slovakia. Later, Marian became a minister.



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the marriage of Roma, especially those married in a young age. Ask God to teach them how to respect and treat each other properly. .*
2. *Pray for the family and ministry of Marian and Elisabeth. Ask God to lead them and strengthen their ministry.*

Awakening and Reformation

Kristel Ortiz

Sabinov, as with all Roma communities across Slovakia and Europe, has traditionally been haunted by many problems. About 95 percent of Roma are unemployed. Alcoholism, incest, theft and violence are all too common. Roma often resist education, integration or cooperation. Distrust and resentment between Roma and majority of European create a vicious cycle of unrest.

But among Roma awakened by God's Spirit, startling changes are taking place.

Particularly in Sabinov, crime rates have dropped drastically. Police and local authorities express not only amazement and gratitude but also a desire to partner with the church to build a community center so that children could have a clean and safe place to play, rest and study, than to wander on the streets.

"First we bring people to God." Marian says. "But we also pray and do what we can to bring change in families and education so people can have better opportunities in the future. Many Roma go to England because here they have nothing. But people of this church don't go. They say they prefer the presence of God here to the money there. We are thankful that they are living in the Word of God. Seeing the first fruits motivates us."

A desire for education, partnership and quality of living is evident among Roma believers. Though they have few belongings, their homes are immaculate. Clothes are kept clean, grooming improves, and begging stops. Jobs are sought, and alcoholism ceases. The changes are so pronounced that many government officials have noticed. They comment that faith is producing more positive long-term results within Roma villages than any other solution or program previously introduced.



Prayer items:

1. *Thank God for renewing the Roma communities.*
2. *Pray that God moves local people to accept and support the Roma to build harmonious, peaceful communities.*

Ever-Widening Vision

Kristel Ortiz

"God always uses those whom the world considers unworthy as vessels of His power and glory," says missionary John Bean. "It would not be surprising if God use the Roma to usher in the next wave of revival across Europe."

John and his wife, Daralena have served as missionaries to Slovakia since 2008. They are now assigned to work specifically with the Roma. Their ministry will involve assisting in training more Roma leaders and initiating a variety of ministries to strengthen local churches.

Already the Sabinov church has planted four others. Marian, Renaldo and their team have reached into more than 13 additional communities with the gospel, and their message has been eagerly received. As new churches continuously being planted, leaders are in great demand.

In the Roma village of Ostravany, a church is perched atop the city trash heap, the only land the congregation could use. Though surrounded by squalor, the building is immaculate. In another community, Milpos, every resident has prayed to accept Christ.

"God has told us He has a big mission for us here," Marian says." But the mission is not just for Slovakia. It will go outside our borders. I believe we will have missionaries to Ukraine and beyond. With God we do so much more than we could alone."

Cast aside and rejected by mainstream society the Roma are finding acceptance in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has brought spiritual awakening to hundreds of Roma, forever changing their lives, homes and communities. Wherever the Spirit moves, the Roma are eager to follow.



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the Roma church leadership training.*
2. *Pray for God to harvest more fruits and strengthen ministries among the Roma.*
3. *Thank God for the missionary vision of the Roma church. May God raise more Roma missionaries outreaching their neighboring countries in Europe.*

Relieving the Plight of the Roma

The Editor

The governments of 12 Eastern European countries proclaimed the period from 2005 to 2015 as the “Decade of Roma Integration.” But so far no noticeable results have come out of it. The Roma are still being marginalized in financial, educational or political sectors.



Today there are more organizations set up by the Roma to serve their compatriots. In 2011, the European Union published the Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, which showed the attention and commitment of the international community toward the “social integration” of the Roma. Over the past centuries, all efforts made “to solve the Roma problem” had never taken into account what Roma themselves think. But this time the Roma are actively involved.

In February 2012, The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights published a report in which Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg called for a “Truth Commission in Europe” to deal with the reality of persecution of the Roma. He correctly pointed out that the root of the problem is the attitude of the mainstream society.

Misha Bakić, a Roma youth leader from Southern Serbia said that he felt like “a second-class citizen, a total animal rather than a real human being.” These diverse, complex and entangled life issues have deepened the gap between the Roma and the mainstream cultures. He believes that only churches and “spiritual organizations” can provide assistance at the global level.

To improve the lives of the Roma, education is the key. Misha hopes that churches can equip the Roma, so that they can represent their people “at all levels of society.”

Prayer items:

1. *Thank God for the awareness of the European Union and the Council of Europe’s Commission for Human Rights that has created different programs of Roma Integration into society. Pray that the programs can be implemented effectively.*
2. *Ask God to open the hearts of the mainstream society so that they will truly accept the Roma.*
3. *Pray that the local churches may help the Roma integrate into the community.*

The Roma in Germany

Part I

Jane Lin

Over a thousand years ago, the Roma began to scatter all over Europe. But having been charged for spreading the bubonic plague, stealing and the practice of witchcraft, they were gradually expelled by various European countries and forced to wander from place to place.

During World War II Hitler's genocide scheme also included the Roma. It is estimated that up to 500,000 Roma died at that time.

Germany expressed deep remorse for the killing of Jews. They built memorial halls and monuments, and held gatherings in memory of them. But the genocide of Roma seemed to have been forgotten until November 2012 when Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, unveiled the outdoor memorial plaza beside the German Parliament Building in Berlin in memory of the slaughtered Roma.

The total size of the Roma population is not easy to estimate. According to the German magazine *Der Spiegel* there were about 100,000 Roma in Germany in 2013. But for a long time, they have consciously attempted to protect their traditional culture, and have not tried actively to integrate into local life. As a result, their rights as well as their needs have been ignored. In the 1970s a group of Roma people realized that they could no longer box themselves in their own circle and alienate themselves from the rest of the society, if they wanted to have their voice heard about their basic rights to life. They also disliked to be called by the contemptuous name "Gypsy." In the 1980s, the "Central Committee of German Sinti and Roma" was established and started actively campaigning for the civil rights of the Sinti and the Roma ethnic groups. Only after 30 years' effort a memorial plaza was established. To Roma, it is belated justice!



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the healing of the pain of Roma descendants whose forefathers were murdered in World War II in Germany.*
2. *Pray that the human rights movements for Sinti and Roma will receive due attention and that they will be treated fairly.*
3. *Thank God for the establishment of the outdoor Roma memorial plaza. Please ask God to grant the Germans a true willingness to compensate the Roma.*

The Roma in Germany

Part II

Jane Lin

According to a German study, one-quarter of the Germans wish the Roma leave their country, and one-half of the respondents believe that the Roma are prone to committing crime. In German media, indeed all over Europe, the Roma are perceived as not only thieves, but also children and organ traffickers and prostitutes, etc, entirely negative.

Although a large number of Roma were slaughtered in the Second World War in Germany, members of the current generation began moving back to that country gradually after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Those living in Romania and Bulgaria also began to migrate to Western Europe for a better life.

In the Kosovo War in 1999, both Roma and Serbs were perceived to be on the same side and were therefore forced to leave their homeland by the Albanians. Out of humanitarian concerns the German government agreed to accept these new refugees (estimated to be 50-70 thousands), and provided shelter, social welfare and allowed them to participate in an "integration program" (Intergrationskurs) designed for all immigrants.

Unfortunately, as a research scholar in Heidelberg pointed out that, the Roma still speak in their mother tongue in Germany and do not proactively learn the German language nor acquaint themselves with German systems, culture, politics, and local customs. Because of the language barrier, the Roma cannot find employment, nor can they participate in the integration program provided by the government. During the summer in Berlin, they can often be seen in tents on the lawns in the parks or living in station wagons. They can also be found washing car windows while the cars are waiting at red lights, or playing accordion in the streets to scrape a meager living. They are still living in hardship and poverty.



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the Germans to have a positive attitude toward the Roma.*
2. *Pray for the Roma in Germany to have the ability and a willingness to learn German and to integrate into German society so as to upgrade the quality of their lives.*

Let Me Know

Young Eagle

Roma people value “family” but not “education.” They normally get married and have children at the age of 13 or 14, and are under much pressure if they do not get married by 18 or 19. Lack of educational qualification for many decent jobs, the young Roma couples have hard time for an adequate living. So for a considerably long time, they depend heavily on their parents.



In Serbia, a gorgeous 20-year-old Romani man is brought up in such devaluing education custom. He has been deprived of further studies upon secondary school graduation. But He taught himself English from English animated movies. He also taught himself composing, singing, playing piano and drums. He uploaded his compositions onto Youtube with a dream to fly high in the music industry. Unfortunately, his ambition went in vain due to inadequate financial support. All along he is fighting against the tradition of early marriage and has been stressed out.

The Romani children are adorable, simple and lively. I happened to meet a 15-year-old girl in a children event. She was apparently pregnant with her noticeable abdomen. The girl wanted to join the games but her pregnancy restricted her from participation. She was so young and so full of hope but soon she would be a mother. What will her life be? What will be the future of her next generation?

Early marriage has been a Roma custom for generations. While the pain of moral and ethical confusion prevails, illiteracy dominates among them. Because of poverty, the Roma has been the targets of discrimination in the community. We believe that only through the saving grace of God can this vicious cycle be penetrated and broken.

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the Roma to get rid of the early marriage custom, to value the importance of education and to shake off poverty in the social strata.*
2. *Pray for the moral and ethical malady of the Roma to align with truth and righteousness.*

Roma in Romania

Vivian Chew

It was a dark, cloudy night in October 2014, we visited a Roma Christian community in Romania. When we got off the van, there were some teenage boys welcoming us in the dark. We could not communicate with them because they do not speak English. We walked on gravels in the dark for about 10 minutes up a small hill.



Then we saw more people and a light at the top of the hill. The light came out from a building – the church. It is actually a small shipping container with one fluorescent light but no other facilities. Some villagers came in and sat with us, many had to stand near the entrance or stay outside.

There is no school in this community. Public school is about 2 km away. As most of the parents could not read or write, you can imagine what happens when the children start school. They need extra help from their teachers. But often teachers are not able to work with them individually. So they fall behind from the very beginning!

When it rains, the footpath to school becomes muddy and the children get to classes looking very dirty. This makes them even more unlikeable by their classmates and teachers. Thus, Roma children have very low self-esteem and find it difficult to mix with other children. Most Roma children drop out of school after 4th or 5th grade.

Can we turn this situation around?

Yes, we may establish kindergarten in the village and after-school program to help students do homework.

When Roma become Christians they tend to be happier and are more willing to send their children to school. There was a community known as the place of many heaviest drinkers in that region. They closed all the bars after most people accepted Jesus. Roma Christians in that community become trusted businessmen and vendors in the market. Praise the Lord!

Prayer items:

1. Pray for the growth of Roma churches and more appropriate worship environment.
2. Pray for the acceptance of Roma children in school and being able to finish their education.

God Helps Me to Love the Roma

Viktor Sabo

In the early 90's in former Yugoslavia, there was a civil war. We lived very close to the church and we had many people coming to our home daily asking for medicine, food and clothing. Many Roma people also started coming to our house asking for food. What we had we shared with them.

After the war was over the humanitarian aids and humanitarian missions were also gone. But then there was one Roma woman who showed up every Sunday asking for something. My wife always gave her some kinds of help. Meanwhile one pastor friend and one brother went to the Roma community and served them.

One day my wife said to me, "Let's go to this Roma community to testify for Jesus." Until then, the notion of Roma missions never hit me.

A few days later, my wife came again with the same question, "Let's go?" Then I went to my office, knelt down and prayed, "Lord, if you want me to minister to the Roma people please pour your great love for them in my heart."

Next year, we moved to a different city and God started bringing Roma people to our church. By then I was ready. I have a great big heart for these people. I love them, go to their homes, sleep over, eat with them, do ministry with them, cry together, and sing together.

God has done such a great miracle in my life. I remembered one day I even prayed, "Lord, why didn't you create me as a Roma? If I were a Roma, I could get even closer to these people."

I believe this is the only way that we can serve one another: when we receive the love of the Lord and when we are obedient to His Word and to Him.



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for pastor Viktor, ask God to strengthen his church ministry and the love for the Roma.*
2. *Pray that we all have the love for our neighbor, especially the love for the Roma.*

Blessed Are Those Who Serve Him

Aaron Chui

Tibor Varga, an Argentinian pastor, went to Serbia to preach the gospel among the Roma. When we, a group of five, came to visit his church, we met a group of lovely kids. Thanks to a brother of the church who provided the space. It was a large canvas tent between two detached houses. Upon arrival, Pastor Tibor fetched a big box of bread from his car, which he bought the day before on sale from a bakery's day-old stock. Meanwhile the sisters from the church prepared some hot soup. This simple meal of bread and soup regularly feeds Roma families and many children.



The Roma, whom Pastor Tibor serves, are very poor, uneducated, and with low employment rate and low-paying jobs. They dearly need the support from the church. The church is facing shortage in finance and resources. Now, the church only receives a donation of Euro \$250 every month from a church in Western Europe, according to Pastor Tibor. They rely on God's grace and occasional donations for the rest.

Pastor Tibor himself has a family of seven children. His wife is the only bread earner with a regular income as a teacher. His eldest son is studying in a seminary while the other children are still in school. His eldest daughter is also planning to enter a seminary upon graduation. In spite of meager resources and financial burden of his family, Pastor Tibor still serves the Roma passionately, visiting the poor Romani families constantly, trying every effort to help the daily needs of the families of his church. He even helps repairing their shabby houses. His slogan, 'Live by Faith,' deeply moves me. With such strong faith in Christ he shepherds his church relying on God's providence. Indeed he is a shining testimony of "Blessed are those who serve Him."

Prayer items:

- 1. Pray for God's abundant supply for the church ministry of Pastor Tibor and his family.*
- 2. Pray for all missionaries and pastors serving the Roma.*

Hot Soup Lunch Serbian Style

Rebecca Chan

We followed Pastor Tibor to visit his church.

As soon as we opened an iron gate, we saw a house for their worship services on the right and another two-storey house inhabited by some families on the left. In between is a large canvas tent with long tables and benches. This was one of the alternate days for serving bread and hot soup lunch. Among those coming were the Roma and the Hungarians, some of



them with mental disorder or emotional problem. There were also a group of children from poor families. All of them enjoyed the hot soup and bread in the tent. To them, this was a gracious moment when they could stay away from wandering on the streets and being starved.

Pastor Tibor chatted with every one of them. He also shared with us their personal stories. We were told that some of them have lost hope and given up after suffering from discrimination, suppression, and futility of working hard. Some women were abandoned by their husbands, remarried for a few times, and had difficulty to make a living with several children. Pastor Tibor brings here, provides them with hot soup or a long loaf of bread every other day, allows them to experience the love of God, helps them to find self-worth in Christ, and rebuild their lives.

At night, we joined their Saturday evening youth fellowship. Over ten youngsters worshipped God with praise and songs. The praise leader was a Romani teen who dressed decently, spoke fluent English, played guitar skillfully, and exhibited a vibrant life in Christ. It is only in Christ that they could find the way out of their current dismay with a renewed life.

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the poor Roma people, especially those who face physical or mental problems, to be delivered in Christ.*
2. *Pray for the teenage Christians to have lives rooted in Christ and passion to serve God.*

Roma and Chinese

Annisa Tong

After hearing stories of the Roma, we can't help but ask, "What can the Chinese churches and Christians do for the Roma?"

Chinese and Roma are both sojourners in Europe with comparable experiences. Though we have our own traditions and cultures, we shared many similarities, such as strong family bonds, trying to make a living in a foreign land. Perhaps the Chinese churches can play an important role in Roma missions. We hope we can:



Put Aside Prejudices and Extend the Hand of Friendship: Although there are cases of Roma shoplifting in stores run by Chinese, but do not let them poison our mind and prevent us from sharing the gospel with the Roma. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have mercy; for they will be given mercy."

Put on New Perspective: Misunderstanding and misconceptions arise from prejudice, discrimination, or generalization. Are we willing to put aside the stereotype about Roma and view them with God's perspective and Christ's love? Only when we consider Roma as equally God's precious children and willing to accept them as brethren in Christ, can we truly relate the love of God to them.

Prayers and Blessings: If Chinese churches can start putting Roma people on their "unreached" people list and pray earnestly for them, the intercession will be more effective. Just as a Serbian pastor now serving Roma declared, "Love is the most important language that we should learn!"

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for Chinese churches and Christians to love the Roma whole-heartedly.*
2. *Pray for a strong willingness of Chinese churches and Christians to support the Roma ministry.*

The Singing Roma

Andy Ching

One evening at “The 2014 Roma Mission Consultation” in Hungary, when the praise team started the singspiration, they set off the enthusiasm of the Roma congregation. They all stood up singing and clapping. Their joyful noise filled the whole venue. A few Roma started to hold hands together



and danced along the aisle, and soon a long line formed around the hall, singing and dancing joyfully. This mirrored a biblical picture from Revelation 7:9-10, “There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”

Yes, we definitely shall sing and rejoice loudly before the High Seat and the Lamb.

The challenge is that 80% of the Roma is illiterate. How should we share the gospel with them? How can we teach them to become Christ's disciples and messengers of the gospel? Utilize their natural ability in music and songs. Through singing and story-telling of the gospel and biblical teaching we can help them become disciples of Christ. In turn they can share how God transforms their lives with other people in songs and music. We are currently in an era that people immerse in entertainment with visual and audio effects. When molded into outstanding troupes of Christian singers and dancers, the Roma, dispersed all over Europe, could become a strong force for the gospel in post-Christian Europe.

Prayer items:

1. *Thank God for blessing the Roma with musical gifts.*
2. *Pray for improving the literacy rate among the Roma.*
3. *Pray for Christian musicians and missionaries to reach the Roma through singing and story-telling.*

How to Win Roma Disciples

Sek-Wai Lo

I met Rev. and Mrs. Paul Raphael in Hungary. Rev. Raphael is a plain-looking, a hunchback Roma gentleman without front teeth. His wife is a Hungarian college graduate, a beauty with flawless fair skin. They reminded me of the story, 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' written by Victor Hugo.



Rev. and Mrs. Raphael knew each other through a Christian website. They became pen-pals and eventually grew into a close relationship. Mrs. Raphael was attracted to her husband because of their shared faith in Christ and passion for mission not minding any outward appearances. Ironically, christian parents of Mrs. Raphael never objected to marrying their only daughter to the poor Roma pastor, while Paul's Roma family was not very fond of this beautiful Hungarian daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Raphael said although they speak the same language (most Roma in Hungary speak Hungarian), to make disciples of Christ of Roma is a cross-cultural mission. While the Hungarians discriminate against the Roma, the Roma also look down upon the Hungarians. Mrs. Raphael explained that her mother-in-law thinks that Hungarian women do not know how to cook, do housework nor raise kids.

The Roma also discriminate against people not belonging to their clan, and look down upon those who have lower social status in their midst. Therefore to win a disciple among them, one needs to overcome their traditional views on social strata. We also need to breakthrough the cultural barrier between them by the Gospel and incorporate them fully into the church community.

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the total acceptance and complete harmony between the Roma and Hungarians.*
2. *Pray for the family and ministry of Rev. and Mrs. Raphael to become an effective channel bridging the Roma and Hungarians.*
3. *Pray for the Hungarian Christians willing to engage in the cross-cultural Roma mission.*

The Story of the Woman at the Well

Sek-wai Lo

Upon graduation from bible seminary, the Raphaels went to a Roma town at the boundary of Hungary. They rented a government venue and started a church. Every day they try to reach their “unreached” compatriots with the gospel by handing out Gospel tracks and visiting homes. But for one whole year, the worshipping congregation every Sunday in that small chapel consists of the Raphael couple plus their two sons.



One day, a Roma woman came to the chapel, sat down, said nothing but cried. She came and cried every day throughout the week and finally she told Mrs. Raphael her sad story. As soon as her husband died, the paternal family seized the house and sent her and her children into the street. She was alone without any home or help. The Raphaels showed mercy on her and invited her to stay with them. The woman did not cry anymore after she became a Christian. She went back to her village, shared the gospel with every neighbor and led her neighboring family by family to the church. A year later, the chapel was full. With a simple faith in God they purchased a vacated shop as their new venue for worship. Although they do not have money for renovation, they trust God would provide what they need.

In that remote Roma Christian community, I witnessed how their new lives are making disciples of Christ. I also witnessed that the Roma gospel field is white for harvest and ready for God to send workers to share with them the message of salvation.

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for God that more Christians live like the woman at the well in the Bible, bringing people to His church.*
2. *Pray for the growth of the ministry of Rev. and Mrs. Raphael and other Roma churches and for them to be beacons of light shining in the darkness of the Roma communities.*

Chinese Churches and Roma Missions

Yiu-keung Au

If Chinese Churches and believers want to serve the Roma, we need to have a mindset willing to reach a marginalized people group. We also need to be equipped with cross-cultural skills, understanding Roma culture to seize every opportunity to accept, trust and foster friendship with them.



There are many strategies for Chinese Christian mission to Roma, and I recommend that we start with those outside our door step. There are a lot of Roma in Europe, e.g. 500,000 in France, 140,000 in Paris alone.

To serve the Roma, we start meeting their daily needs, supplying food, improving living conditions, providing job and education opportunities, etc. These things will enrich their life skills and knowledge and help them escape from the miserable lowest social strata. They are very direct and attractive. With truth and compassion, we should also help them rebuild their self-esteem; renew their mindset of fearfulness, marriage, time and the outlook on life. In fact, there is much to do. It hinges on available resources of churches for the kind of services to meet the daily and spiritual needs of the Roma.

When a Roma becomes a Christian, his or her testimony is influential among their peers. It will surely be more effective than sending a Chinese missionary to them. It can be effective also to partner with Roma churches, and other mission organizations.

Most Roma have very low self-esteem and are introverts. They need our love and patience. We serve them not out of our own preferences, but through God's perspective and the compassion of Jesus.

Prayer items:

1. *Pray for Chinese churches' willingness to take part in cross-cultural missions.*
2. *Pray for the Chinese churches in Europe to see the needs of their Roma neighbors and meet their needs.*
3. *Pray for the partnership of Chinese churches with other churches and mission organizations for Roma missions.*

God Among the Roma

Melody Wachsmuth

Chronic poverty, survivalist mentality, low education levels, isolated cultural, and persistent discrimination are among the factors keeping Roma from escaping the lowest stratum of European society. But effective discipleship has a proven track record of transforming Roma lives and renewing Roma culture. That is the conclusion of a completed groundbreaking research on Pentecostal Gypsies in Bulgaria by scholar Miroslav Atanasov. The key factor is grassroots Roma pastors with a comprehensive vision for ministry.

In 2008, Alexandar Subotin, a pastor from northwest Serbia began seriously to follow the command of Christ to care for "the least among you" (Matt. 25:35–40) — whatever the cost. He said, "When many Roma hear the gospel, they usually had already been without hope. They accept the gospel and have a fire in their heart, but they don't know how to add fuel on the fire."

His ministry requires him at various time to be a pastor, lawyer, advocate, nurse, and counselor. "He gave me these people, so I must serve them, walk with them, encourage them," Subotin says, "not only to preach the gospel, but more importantly to encourage them to seek work and live normal lives."

He also says instances of violence and witchcraft have ebbed, and school attendance and legal marriages have increased. More Roma now have personal documents that give them legal status in society, and there is higher expectation to find work and more willingness to keep living environment clean.



Prayer items:

1. *Pray for the pastors, churches and agencies serving Roma: God will grant them a holistic vision.*
2. *Pray that Roma people will receive acceptance by the local government and people as well as proper social status.*
3. *Pray for the Roma to have self-respect so that they want to live a positive and dignified life.*

Project Ruth – A Holistic Mission

The Editor

Project Ruth is a non-profit organization in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, run by the Baptist Convention of Romania aiming to provide a holistic service to the Roma people.

It started with Ruth School kindergarten class in 1993 along with daily lunch for the poor Roma students. Each subsequent year it added one grade level class. Today it has kindergarten to 8th grade. Other services include a medical center, the Naomi Centre for teaching women handicrafts, child care services, etc.

But their most important ministry is to plant churches. In 1999, they started the Gypsy Smith School, one of the very few institutions to train Roma ministry workers. Of their 50 graduates many are serving as pastors, elders, deacons, youth and music ministers, church planters or missionaries.

They also train the next generation workers through a voluntary program. This is a successful example of a holistic ministry which includes the five aspects: physical, mental, social, spiritual, and administrative.

However, Project Ruth reaches only one community. There are a whole lot of Roma communities needing for

this type service. Would the Chinese churches have such foresight to provide same services for Roma people? It is feasible if some Chinese churches combine their resources to provide a “Project Ruth” for a Roma community.



Prayer items:

1. *Thank God for Project Ruth and pray that they will equip more Roma Christians to become suitable vessels of God.*
2. *Pray for more holistic ministries to be launched in Roma communities and more dedicated workers.*
3. *Pray for God to inspire more Chinese churches and Christians willing to serve the Roma.*
4. *Pray for God to reveal His will and lead the Chinese churches in search of a proper model to serve the Roma communities.*

2016

Short-Term Mission Trip to Eastern Europe Serving Roma Communities

Date: May 6-8, 2016

Location: Roma communities in eastern Hungary

Team Members: european Chinese pastors

Purpose: Visit and serve Roma communities



Date: first week of July, 2016

Location: eastern Hungary

Team Members: members of Hungary Chinese Christian Church, Berkeley Chinese for Christ Church, and students of International Chinese Biblical Seminary in Europe

Ministries: Conduct youth and children camp, organize family seminars for Roma communities



Date: August 5-16, 2016

Location: northern Serbia

Purpose: to explore the possibilities of setting up the following services for Roma communities:

Pre-school and after-school programs, Community Health, Medical Service, Family Counseling, Farming, Produce marketing, House Remodeling

Qualification: Christian professionals who are willing to serve the Lord with their expertise

Quota: 8



Date: Sept 25-Oct 5, 2016

Location: Albania, Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo etc.

Purpose: Explore the needs and possible ministries
Qualification: Pastors and lay leaders who have the burden to get involved in holistic mission among Roma communities in these countries



For detailed information please contact GCCI.

Phone: 1-408-636-0030, **Email:** info@gcciusa.org