

10

Countries

38

US
Missionaries

51

National
Missionaries

1

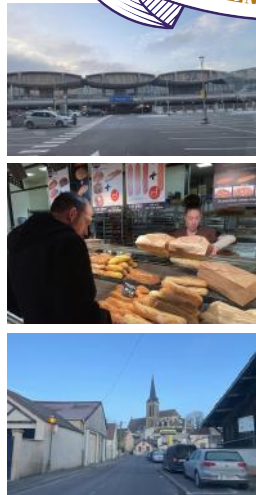
Great
Commission

Jeff and Joanna Davis

- Works of Evangelism
- Establishing Churches
- Equipping Nationals

ACROSS
THE
LANDS

DECEMBER 2023

EMU
INTERNATIONALEXHORT  EQUIPENLIST  ENGAGE

are always spectacular, but we saw whole neighborhoods lit up with Christmas decorations. I felt my anticipation grow, of arriving on the ground and finally seeing my wife Joanna in person, not through Facetime.

As I sit in front of my computer to document the events of my recent trip to France and Croatia, the darkest day of the year is fast approaching, Dec. 21, the shortest day of the year for the more than 6 billion people living north of the equator. What a wonderful time to celebrate the birth of our Savior. We often overlook *John chapter 1*, when we consider the Christmas story. Our "go-to" texts are normally in *Matthew* and *Luke*. While the world is at its darkest, we have Christmas, a reminder that God has given us the Light of the World. Read *John 1:1-14* and be reminded that "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." (v.4) Why? Because Jesus is "the true light." (v.9) Isaiah prophesied in *Isaiah 9:2* "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." *Isaiah 42:6-7* "I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." Jesus affirmed His purpose in *John 12:46* I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

Continued

As Flight AA5058 made its final approach from Philadelphia to Greenville Spartanburg International Airport, my seat companion and I observed out the window the bright lights near the airport runway. Suddenly, the engines revved as we gained speed, and the nose of the airplane began to climb skyward. For some reason, the pilot aborted the landing. While it is always disconcerting when this happens, I have been in this situation a few times. Aviation officials say that aborted landings, called "go-arounds" are not uncommon, and are considered routine and safe. I was ready to get on the ground. I had been traveling for over twenty-one hours. I looked at my seat neighbor and said, "Better safe than sorry." This allowed us a few more minutes to talk. We spent the entire flight talking about the Lord and His work in our churches and what He is doing around the world. I had enjoyed similar conversations with passengers on my other flights and in the waiting areas. As we circled and made our final approach. I said, "Look, there are the same bright lights we saw earlier." The lights at night from the air

EMU International
209 Roberts Road
Taylors, SC 29687
(864) 268-9267
office@emuinternaional.org

Jeff & Joanna Davis
119 Oak Wind Circle
Greer, SC 29651
(864) 617-7156
jeff@emuinternational.org
mrspastorjd@gmail.com



pastorjeffdavis.com

It was the dark of Winter, but what a wonderful time to travel, and experience first-hand how Jesus, “the true light,” is piercing through the darkness, particularly in the ministries of two special families who serve with our mission.

Other than passing through the airport, this would be my first visit to Paris. I was excited to spend time with Tim and Ruth Bixby, who have served in France since June 2009. The night before my trip, I went to bed around 9:30 pm and woke around 4:30 am. I hoped that this would give me a little bit of a jump on confronting the jet lag. I left home early on December 1, bags packed light, but tight. I did not want to have to check any luggage. This made my stops through security and passport control a lot faster and I was guaranteed that my luggage wouldn't be lost. I had to fly through Charlotte and Philadelphia, then through the night to Paris. I arrived on time at 8:20 a.m. on Saturday, December 2, six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. Passport control was a breeze and Tim was in the parking garage quickly to pick me up. I enjoyed the short drive through their former town of Goussainville, as Tim described for me their early days in France. After a couple of quick stops, including an amazing French bakery, we arrived at their house in Fontenay-en-Parisis, a small community of around 2,000 people in the northern outskirts of Paris, named after the tribe of Parise who appeared in the region in the 3rd century BC. The name Fontenay, as in fountain, refers to the three sources and the many municipal and private wells that supplied the villagers with drinking water.



The Bixbys have a nice, comfortable house, which accommodates their family of seven. Tim took me downstairs to his office which has a day bed. Tim sacrificed this space for me over the next six days. Their oldest son Micaiah was helping a church member move, so the rest of us gathered around the dining room table for breakfast. I enjoyed the fruit and yogurt, but especially the croissants and the baguettes. I enjoyed hearing about their children and what life is like for them in France. Micaiah (20) and Miriam (18) are both in college. They have to travel into Paris every day. He is studying Maintenance Engineering and she is studying History. Their youngest, Siméon (4), attends school nearby but was home for my stay because he had undergone surgery the week before to remove his tonsils and adenoids. The other boys Zacharie (14), and Gabriel (11), attend schools near their home. They are a musical family. Ruth earned a Master of Music degree in 2000. Each of them plays an instrument and they use their talents for the Lord in their local church.

Before we left the table, Tim read from a devotional book called, “Daily Light for the Daily Path.” It is available to read online at <https://dailylightdevotional.org/>. Tim had a nicely worn, leatherbound copy of the book which was given to him by his parents, Bob, and Bonnie Bixby, in 2003. Each morning and evening devotion is a short Bible study with scriptures compiled according to a biblical theme, with no anecdotes, commentary, or stories to distract the reader, thus permitting the scriptures to speak for themselves. It was their family's practice to read from this book on mornings and evenings of each day. His dad would say, “I wonder what gem God has for us tonight.” Tim and Ruth have maintained this practice.

It was cold outside, so Tim started a fire in the fireplace, I sat on their couch and was greeted by their dog Rabelais, a gorgeous Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, named after the famous French author. We talked for the next couple of hours about their ministry and the history of their church, Eglise Biblique Baptiste du Grand Roissy (Bible Baptist Church). You can find them on Facebook where they post regular updates including videos of their services: <https://www.facebook.com/EBBGR>. Their website is in French. Google Chrome will translate into English: <https://www.espoir95.net/> The church has an attractive, clean logo designed by our ministry friend Mark Ward. The name of the church was chosen to communicate the core foundation of the church. They are very serious about their ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). They are committed to community, as seen in their unity, their diversity, and their interdependence with one another. They are a multinational assembly. They chose the name Bible to emphasize the importance of the Scriptures as the only source of doctrine and practice. They also don't shy away from using the word "Baptist" signifying that they adhere to the historical doctrines which mark Baptist churches.



Ruth prepared lunch, a delicious charcuterie spread. I don't claim to be a turophile, a connoisseur of cheeses, and I can't pronounce most of them, but they were amazing. Later that afternoon, I unpacked, grabbed a forty-five-minute nap, and prepared for my messages the next day. After supper, we attended a service at their sister church in Saint-Denis about thirty minutes away. Missionary Tim Knickerbocker preached on Job. Tim Bixby translated for me by transcribing the message on his laptop.



Sunday was the first Lord's Day of December. We awoke to light snow falling. We were unsure how that would affect the church attendance and were pleasantly surprised to see a large crowd gathered for both services. In the first service, I showed slides and shared the ministry of EMU International. For the worship service that followed, Zachary sat on the front row next to me and translated while Tim led us in worship. It was easier for me to read the French words while singing than when I tried to pronounce them in conversation. The order for the service was very intentional with time dedicated to Scripture memory, prayer, and even an open time for folks to share testimonies, read Scripture, pray, or request a hymn favorite. I then preached on Luke 2, a message called, "Good News for All People." I met people from several different countries as many people stayed around for a long time fellowshiping afterward.

We left home that evening around 4:30 pm to head into Paris. Sunset was at 4:50 pm and the streets were already crowded. The GPS routed us through the back roads. Paris is known as Europe's City of Lights, which becomes even more grand during the celebration of the French Noel. From a distance, we could see the spotlight spinning around the Eiffel Tower. We experienced one of the most lavish displays of Christmas lights and decorations as we drove down Champs Élysées, where a million (yes, literally!) sparkling lights cover the 200 or so trees lining both sides of the famous avenue between Place de la Concorde and the Arc de Triomphe. We parked at the Louvre and walked around the palatial grounds which were lined with fair rides, with crowds of people enjoying family, festivities, and food. We had to get in on the action with a couple of sacks of churros. We walked around for a couple of hours. One of my favorite views was Place Vendôme's huge central plaza. In the shadow of the 140 feet tall Vendôme Column which is topped with a statue of Napoleon, dozens of perfectly coned-shaped Christmas trees sparkled with white and blue lights.



On Monday, we enjoyed a visit from Pastor Albert from the Saint-Denis church. It was encouraging to hear his testimony and his call to ministry, particularly to this area of France. The country covers a geographical area a little smaller than the state of Texas. The population is nearly 65 million with approximately 55% claiming to be Catholic, but less than 5% attending church at least once a month. Catholicism with its "saints" and traditions is ever-present, but the country's population is becoming increasingly secular. Some surveys show that over 30% of French people are non-religious. Evangelical Christians are few (1.0% across all confessions). The Prince of Darkness has blinded the minds of many in this atheistic, humanistic, postmodern society, and yet the light of Jesus Christ is piercing through the darkness in these sister churches.

That evening, Kristi Colas their ministry partner who was moving to Nice the following day, joined us for supper. It was a fun time of fellowship with a raclette grill set in the middle of the table. It was fun to play with our food as we cooked our own meats and veggies and melted our own cheese. It was also delicious.

On Tuesday, Tim and I spent the day visiting the market in Sarcelles and then taking the train into Paris. It was a cold, rainy day, but the fellowship and the conversation were delightful. It was fun to explore some of the back streets. As we crossed the Seine River and returned to the station near the Louvre, the Lord showed out for us a little as the sun's rays peaked underneath the clouds refracting its light in a glorious completely arced rainbow over the palace. I preached for their Tuesday night service on the theme, "Fear Not," from Psalm 46.



Wednesday was a nice day as the younger three kids, joined their parents and me, as we traveled to the small nearby medieval town of Senlis. It was a beautiful drive across the French countryside. The monarchs of the early French dynasties lived in Senlis, attracted by the proximity of the Chantilly Forest. It is known for its Gothic cathedral and other historical monuments. The cobblestone streets were narrow and lined with quaint little shops. After a short visit to the cathedral, we enjoyed a delicious meal of crepes, both savory and sweet. We then visited a nearby nursing home/rehabilitation facility to visit an Indian lady who is one of their church members and her sweet daughter and son-in-law. For supper, my new Pakistani friends from their church brought us our meal. They shared their story of how the Lord placed them in Sarcelles. It was quite moving. We then enjoyed a delicious meal of salad, biryani, chicken Marsala, and chicken Tandoori. They knew I liked spicy food, so they brought me my own special dish. It did not disappoint.

Tim and I were greeted on Thursday morning with a beautiful sunrise on our way to Charles de Gaulle Airport. Since I was already in Europe, I found an inexpensive roundtrip flight to Zagreb, Croatia. In 2013, Croatia officially was admitted into the European Union. The country has recently adopted the euro and joined the European Union's borderless Schengen zone, an area comprising 27 European countries that have officially abolished passports and many other types of border control at their mutual borders. It was a nice, short flight from Paris to Zagreb. Upon landing, I walked out of the airport as easily as if I had flown from Greenville to Greensboro, without having to even show my passport. Our missionary, Kornel Crnković drove through a lot of snow and fog to pick me up. Most of it had melted before I arrived. This was my second time visiting his family in Croatia and I was looking forward to seeing their new church building and the growth of their congregation. The hour-long drive north to his house in Koprivnica afforded us a wonderful opportunity to catch up with each other. His wife, Tanja had lunch ready for us when we arrived. We had a great afternoon of fellowship which included decorating their Christmas tree. We went to the church in the evening for music practice, packaging gift materials, and decorating. The church planned a three-day celebration of Christmas with services in the evenings on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Following the rehearsal, Kornel's brother-in-law and co-Pastor Nathaniel Špičak brought in some delicious pizza. The spicy pizza was amazing, and the seafood pizza was a first for me, but surprisingly good.



Friday, with snow still on the ground, Kornel had to drive me into town so I could register my visit with the local police. We also had to swing by the church, so I took a couple of pictures during daylight. I was blown away by the transformation from an old broken down, dirty brick building, to a gorgeous, beautifully renovated house of worship. When we returned home, we were greeted by an aromatic symphony of cookies baking. Their oldest daughter Andrea was preparing desserts for the fellowship which would follow the programs over the next three nights. We returned home for another delicious lunch and sweet conversation.



The sun set around 4 pm and I was already feeling tired, but we had a busy night ahead of us. We left for the church to arrive around 6 pm. By the time the program began, the church was packed. We had over 20 visitors attend, some from other churches, but mostly friends and folks who lived near the church. The choir and musicians had prepared a program of special music called, "Take Me Back to Bethlehem." I was captivated by the talent of this small choir, especially the teenage instrumentalists. Like the Bixby family, all of the members of the Crnković and Špičak families are incredibly musical and play various instruments. The program included songs by the complete choir, by the young people, by the children, and by the two pastors and their families. I preached on Luke 2 and gave a clear gospel message. Afterward, the people hung around for a long time enjoying the food and fellowship. It was guys' night back at the house as the Crnkovic boys had their cousins over to spend the night.

Saturday was a relaxing day. Breakfast was amazing, as always, and Marko made us crepes. He is currently a student in college a few hours away but took cuts for the week to be home and assist in the program. Kornel and I went to the store that is just across the highway close to his house to buy some groceries in anticipation of the family gathering on Sunday. Kornel's sister Kornelija and her daughter Mayja joined us for the afternoon and attended the Saturday evening Christmas program. I felt a warmth in my heart, watching the girls finish decorating the tree with the tiny sparkling lights. Kornel and his boys Marco and Nathaniel (15) were outside hanging lights on the side of the house in the cold. It was a full table as we enjoyed Tanja's homemade lasagna. Kornel preached for the program Saturday evening to another full house with many visitors. Their daughter Kristina Pintarić surprised us after the service. Everyone was thrilled to see their new grandson Joshua. We returned home and the boys headed to the soccer field to play outside in below-freezing temperatures. The adults stayed up until 2 am enjoying our conversation. The teens were up until 6 am.

Sunday, we had a great day as twenty-one people, family members, gathered together for lunch and fellowship. Sunday evening was the final Christmas program at the church with another full house and Pastor Nathaniel spoke. For the three days, there were a total of 170 who attended. We were mostly encouraged by the 70 guests. Please pray for the follow-up efforts.



Monday, Kornel and I drove to Ludbreg, the town where Tanja teaches. She only had to work a couple of hours, so we explored the town. The town claims to be “the center of the world.” Mladen, my Croatian friend, who brought me tomatoes during my last visit is from Ludbreg. He was working on a house outside of town. We called to ask about a place to grab lunch. He told us to stay where we were and that he would be there in five minutes. He met us in the town square and showed us around town. We grabbed a quick lunch, where I enjoyed burek, a delicious cheese pastry. He then took us to the top of a mountain nearby and showed us a current house where he was working. He then took us out for cappuccinos. After picking up Tanja, we drove about an hour West, across country, and visited the Trakošćan Castle, which dates back to the 13th century.

My last full day in Croatia began ironically with a hearty breakfast of French toast. The Bixbys didn't serve me that. Kornel and I then drove out to visit the farm of one of their church members. One week before I arrived, they had “the killing of the pig,” which provides meat for the winter. It was fascinating to see how they smoke the meat. We returned home so I could pack for my return flights the next day. After Tanja returned from teaching school, we had a good visit with her sister's family. In the evening, the guys gathered back at Pastor Nathaniel's house to watch soccer.

We left home around 5 AM on Wednesday, for a one-hour drive to Zagreb. The temperature was a little bit warmer, so we had to deal with some fog. The conversation was edifying for both of us. I'm going to miss these dear friends, but we are already making plans for their family to visit the States in the summer of 2024. Let me know if you would be interested in learning more about their ministry.



Attention Pastors

I am currently planning my calendar for 2024. In addition to traveling and visiting the EMU International missionaries on their various fields of service, I have had the privilege of preaching in Christian School chapels, Pastors' Fellowships, at Christian Camps, Missions Conferences, Revival Meetings, and Family Conferences. I am also available for single meetings to promote the work of EMU International. Contact me if you are interested in me visiting your church.



It would be 21 hours before I landed in Greenville. As my Croatia Air flight left the runway, I had no desire to read or watch a movie. I wanted to reflect a little, to rehearse in my mind everything that I had experienced over the past two weeks. My mind went back to the Saturday evening program. Pastor Nathaniel had those in attendance sing along with the choir the beloved Christmas carol, “Silent Night,” a song about light. “Son of God, Love's pure light / Radiant beams from Thy holy face, / with the dawn of redeeming grace.” That is what this trip was all about, witnessing God's grace at work among these choice servants. Celebrating the light of God's undeserved love beaming brilliantly in the birth of His eternal Son. I reflected back to singing with the congregation in France, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” also a song about light. “Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! / Hail the Son of Righteousness! / Light and life to all he brings, / risen with healing in his wings.”

During World War II, Winston Churchill proclaimed, “The light has gone out in Europe.” To some, it may appear that way, but at least in these two congregations, the glorious light of God's love continues to shine brightly as the light of Jesus Christ, the true light pierces the darkness.

Visit <https://pastorjeffdavis.com/france-croatia/> to view photos from Jeff's trip to France and Croatia.

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