



# diaspora

GOD ON THE MOVE FOR PEOPLE ON THE MOVE.



# ABOUT DIASPORA

## Mission Statement

To tell the foreigner among us about salvation in Jesus Christ and build a diverse community of Christ-followers who are mentally, emotionally and spiritually healthy, so that their testimony reaches beyond human and geographical limits.

## People on the move.



The word "diaspora" means dispersion and stands for the ever-growing group of people who live outside the homeland of their ancestors.

The 21st century is a time of unprecedented dispersion of people globally- due to wars, famine, better employment or education opportunities. God is sovereign over these movements and uses them for His purposes.

Through this global mobilization of the nations, God has brought people from all corners of the world among us. Many of them have moved from countries that are highly resistant to the Gospel. But once here, they have a unique chance to hear the Good News, if only there is someone to tell them.

The nations belong to God who is their Creator and Redeemer. He has scattered them for a reason- so that you and I can seize this unique opportunity and reach out to unreached people groups, so that one day "every nation, tribe, and people stand before the throne, saying "Salvation belongs to our God!" (Rev.7:9).



# God on the move.

Diaspora first began in God's mind. Throughout the Bible, God moves people from one place to another to accomplish his purposes.

God called Abraham saying: "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you," so that He could make Abraham the father of a nation through which all nations will be blessed (Gen 12:1).

God sent Joseph as a migrant in Egypt to accomplish "the saving of many lives" (Gen 50:20).

God began the nation of Israel in Diaspora when Joseph's brothers moved to Egypt as economic migrants (47:27).

God moved Moses from an Israelite home to an Egyptian one, then as an exile in Midian, after which Moses migrated again with the Israelites to inherit the land of promise (Exodus 2:15).

Ruth was the foreign widow of an Israelite husband who became the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 1:4).

Daniel was placed in Diaspora so that the supremacy of the Jewish God be recognized by foreign kings (Dan. 3:28).

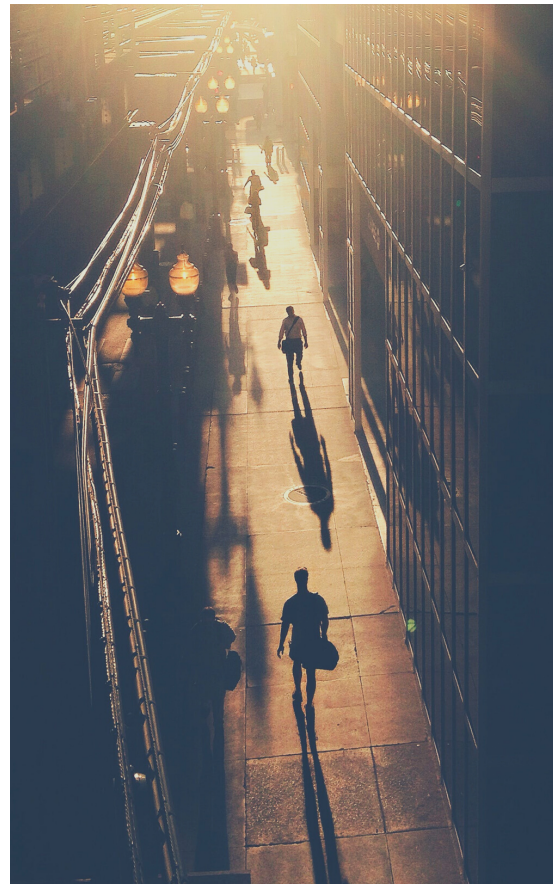
During Esther's time, the Jews were dispersed from India to Ethiopia (Esther 8:9) and through that dispersion, the faith in God was transmitted to both Jews and Gentiles.

God placed Esther in Diaspora through which He saved the Jews from genocide. His miraculous intervention through Esther became the reason many Persians to accept the Jewish faith (Esther 9:27).

Jesus migrated to Egypt as an "asylum seeker" to escape Herod who wanted to kill him (Matthew 1:13-15).

God scattered the early Christians from Jerusalem through persecution (Acts 8:1-4), causing them to cross cultural barriers and start the Gentile church (Acts 11:19).

The Bible is a story of migration, because this is God's chosen way to call people, fulfill promises and redeem the lost. Today, through the global dispersion of the nations, God brings spiritual travelers among us, so that His Church can gather the unreached nations to himself, one person at a time.





# WHO AM I?



## From Homeland to Diaspora

My name is Ellie Markova. I was born in communist Bulgaria in 1982. My parents were raised in communist atheism and worked as teachers. In 1989, the restrictive regime fell and a deep hunger for God pervaded our nation. A spiritual revival swept across the country and drove people through the doors of newly opened protestant churches. My family was among them.

I loved learning about Jesus and being involved in our church. I accepted Christ during a summer camp in 1993 and got baptized a few years later. My parents left their teaching professions and became full-time missionaries with Cru. I remember my father often being gone from home as he traveled across Bulgaria to show the Jesus Film to people who had never heard the Gospel.

I joined him whenever I had a chance, going from town to town to show the Jesus Film or help at the newly formed churches he preached at. Doing the work of a missionary became a lifestyle I loved.



# Training & Calling

In 2004, God called me out of my homeland and moved me to America where I received a Master's degree in Christian Counseling and a Master's degree in Biblical Studies that were not available in a post-communist country like Bulgaria.

God led me through difficult circumstances and through seasons of scarcity, homesickness and isolation, burnout, restoration, and waiting, all to grow in me faith, courage, strength, trust and obedience to Him, and to bring me to a place where he has equipped me well for the mission ahead.

In 2015, during my very last class at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Charlotte, NC, God spoke to me in a particular way. He repeatedly placed before me a specific text from Is. 2:2-5. It is a grand vision of the nations coming to God in pursuit of His salvation, wisdom and guidance.

My Swiss-born professor on the book of Isaiah had a unique skill of presenting the text with passion that stressed the urgency and importance of missionaries to participate in the ingathering of the nations before God in our present day. The Holy Spirit was moving in my heart and mind,

God spoke in unmistakable ways through the Bible, people and circumstances to place a personal call for ministry among the nations to which I committed.

Over the years, it has been a joy and privilege to tell men and women of all backgrounds about Christ, to lead them to spiritual and emotional maturity through Christian counseling and Biblical discipleship, and to see them do the same with others in their turn.



## Isaiah 2:2

"In the last days,  
the mountain of the Lord's  
house will be established  
as the highest of the  
mountains; it will be exalted  
above the hills, **and all  
nations will stream to it.**"

*Ellie Markova*



# Mission among J-1 students

## Harvest Hands

"When Jesus looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. "What a huge harvest!" he said to his disciples. "How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!"



## Unique window of opportunity

Around 3,000 international students come to Myrtle Beach, SC every summer. They come on a U.S. government program called "work and travel" which invites them to help local businesses for the summer, then travel and explore the States before they return home to continue their studies. We call them the J-1 students, after the name of their visa.

A large percentage of the students come from Eastern European countries like Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, or Czechia, where born-again Christians are a minority and stigmatized by society. In Bulgaria, for instance, Christ-followers are at 1.1%, while Muslims are the second largest religious group.

A significant group of J-1s also come from Turkey and China where Christians are hated and persecuted. While in the States, however, the barriers of family and culture pressures are removed. These students are open to hear about Christ and visit an American church. What a unique window of opportunity to reach out to them, if we only seize it!

# "Glocal" Mission Field

At the end of their four-month stay in America, the J-1 students return back to their countries. They are welcomed by family and friends who are eager to hear about their summer experience. Imagine what an influence a student who has found salvation in Jesus can have! Now they have the opportunity to share their faith with their own people, extending our work and influence across the border. In this way, the ministry among international students is "glocal"- it takes place locally, but its impact is global.

Cod uses Diaspora Christians to reach out to the international community in different contexts. Belonging to two cultures themselves, Diaspora believers understand issues of migration. They offer practical help to the newcomer and, in the natural context of a friendship, they win his trust over and share the Gospel. In this way, Diaspora Christians can also grow and revitalize the local church, turning it into a blooming multicultural community of Christ-followers.



*Among these international students are the future teachers, doctors, writers, actors, political leaders, athletes, and culture influencers in their country of origin. Impacting one could impact a nation.*



# LIN'S STORY

## *China*



I spotted Lin sitting alone on the curb, watching J-1 students play basketball. In the six years of ministry among international students, the sight of a Chinese one was new. How could a communist country that persecutes its Christians allow her to visit the Bible belt of America? I often wondered that I and asked Lin many questions about her way of life at home. She was an only child, her family was Buddhist, it was her first visit to America, and she was excited to have found a new friend in me.

Like most J-1 students, Lin appreciated help finding a second job, giving her a ride to the grocery store so that she will not have to ride a bicycle on a busy highway, having her at home for dinner, taking her around town to walk, eat ice cream and talk. She once shared that women in her city sometimes go to the temple to pray for a baby boy, but she could not say whom they pray to. Lin had no knowledge of God, nor had ever heard about salvation in Jesus before.

## LIN'S STORY

With the help of a friend from Taiwan who spoke Mandarin Chinese, I was able to share my testimony with Lin, making sure she understands everything well. I also gave her the Jesus Film in her native language to watch. We met often over the summer and always enjoyed our conversations.



The day before she left, I took Lin for a walk one last time. Without any prompting, she started sharing a powerful witness to how our time together had changed her, saying: "I believe in Jesus now. I understand he is my Savior. I want to always remember that so I want to have a cross tattooed on my wrist. Yesterday I went to church and I took communion. I took six more communion cups with me to give to my friends in China and tell them about Jesus. Thank you, my sister."

I gave her a silver necklace with a cross to replace the tattoo and her first Bible. I advised her to hide them well in her suitcase to not get in trouble in China. I also encouraged her to find other Christians and join a church if possible.

We exchanged our emails and Facebook information, but our communication never got through. Facebook is forbidden in China and online communication is heavily censored by the government. I never heard of her again despite my effort. I often wonder what happened to her in China and pray that God protects her faith. What a unique window of opportunity we had to reach out to Lin and thank God for a soul won for eternity.



# MINISTRY TO WOMEN



## Suffering in silence

Over the years, God has been leading to me women struggling with different challenges. What these women had in common was the inability to solve the issue by themselves, the lack of trained Christian counselors where they lived or cultural and language barriers preventing them from seeking help.

Issues like fear, childhood trauma, broken relationships, grief of a loved one, stress and burnout, anger, shame and guilt, anxiety, abusive environment or depression held them captive and isolated. They were suffering in silence.

I had the honor of partaking in God's plan of deliverance and blessing for these women. Their journey of healing was often accompanied by spiritual growth as I walked them through weekly Bible studies and prayer together. Thus, their transformation was on all levels: mental, emotional and spiritual.



We serve a God who is profoundly concerned for the suffering, isolated and marginalized. He loves all people and desires to give them healing and abundant life.

God placed me in Diaspora many years ago, so that through my seminary training and the life experiences He has led me through, I can respond to a need that at large remains unmet. I stand in the gap for women in Bulgaria where Christian counseling does not exist. I also minister among international women in America who suffer in silence because of barriers that discourage them from seeking professional help. They are often referred to me by their pastors or they hear about me through other women.

It is a joy to be an instrument in God's hand for the healing of these women on a holistic level. Living between two worlds-America and Europe- their testimony of the power of God is spread beyond geographical bounds, proclaiming God's ability to meet every person where they are.

*"He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor..."*

*Isaiah 61:1, 2*



MINISTRY AMONG WOMEN

# TANIA'S STORY

*Bulgaria*



I contacted Ellie with the request to help me in the process of healing from a very deep trauma from my childhood.

I was very depressed and had what I now understand to be post-traumatic stress disorder. I was blaming myself for letting the pain of my past affect my work and my relationship with my husband. I was suffering from very low self-esteem and felt locked in a prison nobody seemed to understand.

Ellie educated me on the nature of my trauma and prepared me of what to expect as I started sharing the memories. She made sure I became intentional about self-care and gave me homework regularly. We prayed after each meeting.

Ellie's counseling helped me greatly and God used it powerfully to help me make important steps toward healing and have some difficult conversations I was avoiding.

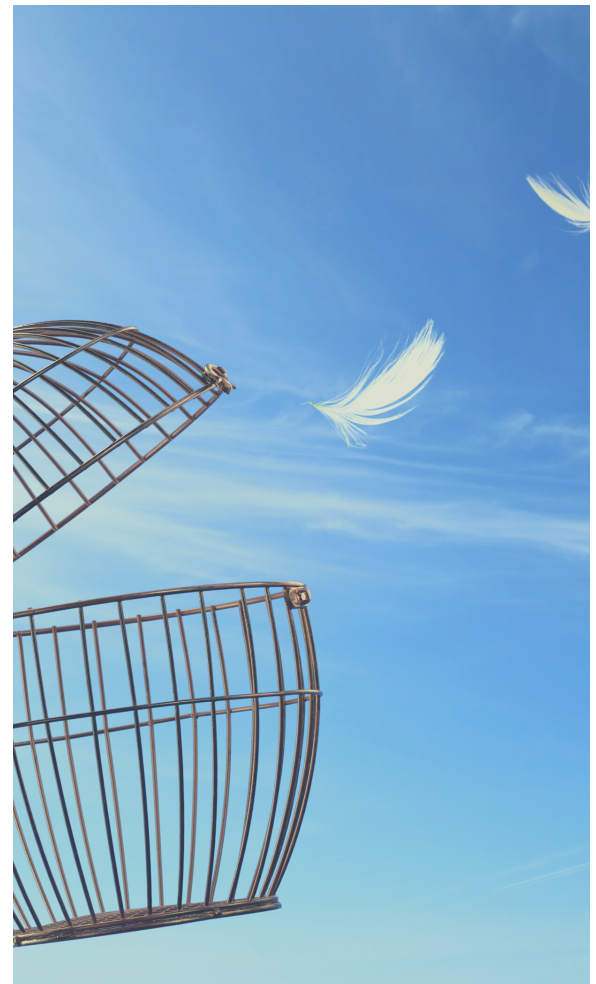
## TANIA'S STORY

Through our conversations, God was transforming slowly many areas in my life that the trauma had affected. I was becoming a much more emotionally healthy adult. The shame and guilt were gone. Ellie helped me in this process with her calm, confident and friendly attitude which made me comfortable to share painful memories and built in me trust that I was in good hands. The format of our counseling was informal, in the form of friendly conversations, a lot of sharing, with very good questions on Ellie's part and practical goals for me

It was a personal breakthrough when Ellie started preparing me to face the person who caused my trauma. She taught me that forgiveness was a process and that I have to forgive eventually so I could move on.

Ellie helped me be brave and address family secrets that perpetuated the trauma. God arranged for a perfect meeting and conversation with the person I needed to forgive, on His perfect timing. I felt such release and healing as a result of it, but most of all, I felt liberated and empowered.

I am so thankful to Ellie for all that and I praise God that he can heal and restore broken lives for his glory!





# MORE TESTIMONIES

*from all around the world*



"One of the reasons I came to America this summer was to find out who God is." **Nuria** is a J-1 student from Barcelona, Spain. Meeting her was a divine appointment. Throughout the summer God worked in her heart through our conversations and time together. Nuria accepted Christ and was put in touch with a church in Barcelona with focus on disciple-making.



**Cheng Ye** is a J-1 student from Malaysia. She comes from a Buddhist family. Through our ministry, she had the chance to hear about Jesus for the first time in her life. Cheng Ye started reading a beginner's Bible to learn more about God.



*"I believe in God now and I never thought I would before. Hearing more about God from you made me open up to ideas I was very closed to in the past. I want to learn more and I know that this is the place to be if I want to go to church and hang out with Christians. So I am definitely planning to return next summer!"*

- **Victoria, Bulgaria**



# MORE TESTIMONIES

*from all around the world*



**I contacted Ellie four years ago due to battling chronic anxiety. As a Christian woman, it was important for me to consult someone who truly knows God and could counsel me from the perspective of God's Word. I was driven by spiritual thirst and I was full of existential questions.**

**We started talking on the phone weekly. Working with Ellie and learning from her has been such a blessing. Her knowledge base and ability to convey information in a way that is so practical, accessible in everyday life, has been so invaluable and profoundly changing to me.**

**BORISLAVA**

Chicago, IL



**In 2016 I was going through an unexpected separation from my husband, which was really hard for me to deal with. I needed someone with excellent counseling experience to guide me during this season of my life. One of my Bulgarian friends from church who knew Ellie well recommended that I give her a call. Ellie was the perfect person not just because she is an experienced counselor, but she also has a lot of biblical knowledge. Her counseling is based on the Scriptures and what is God's will in my life according to those Scriptures.**

**GERRI**

Chicago, IL

# MORE TESTIMONIES

*from all around the world*

I have known Ellie for many years, but we weren't close until about four years ago when I lost my husband and Ellie offered to help me go through this difficult period in my life. She was very kind, caring, careful and patient and was a great help to me. I think she was one of God's instruments at that time to help me have a good perspective on the situation.

Although we live in opposite ends of the world, Ellie was always ready and eager to set an appointment on Skype and spend an hour or longer talking to me, asking me deep and important questions, offering advice, books, prayer and wise council.

At first I think I wasn't much convinced I needed any help but once we started our Skype meetings, I didn't want it to end. Since various emotions, thoughts,

confusion and fear were going through my mind and heart, I would eagerly wait for the time to meet her online to share it all and unload it all to her. She was always very, very patient, understanding, and tender. I could see her heart was truly committed to me, listening to my sorrows. She would encourage me to trust the Lord for my life, for the future ahead, for bringing up my kids and anything I would have concerns about.

Turning back now I can very clearly see her impact in my life and I can't be thankful enough for her support, wisdom and love. I thank God that He provided healing and renewed heart for me through Ellie. I know she has studied hard to obtain the needed knowledge but more than that it's her heart for people and for God that touched me the most.



Gergana, Bulgaria

I am forever indebted to Ellie for never leaving my side all those days when I was feeling so dejected. I thank her for her incredible generosity and humility as a person and therapist. Ellie was the only professional who was able to uncover that my condition was the result of something physical and that something was happening in my system which was causing my symptoms, both in my body and brain. She never once gave up on me and always pushed me to go to the doctor until they uncovered what was wrong with me physically. Without her tenacity and care, I would not be alive today. You could say that I owe my life to her.

I don't know how I could ever repay Ellie, but I know that she is an exceptional therapist and human being and with her knowledge, practice, and heart, she is able to help so many in need. Thank you Ellie for your incredible gifts!

Filipa,  
Chicago  
IL

