

Stories of Miracles
in the Life of a Poor Boy



Rev. Nikos Stefanidis

I dedicate this book to my beloved wife Maria Platsidou,
the person who has filled my life with meaning, joy and love.
Apart from being a good wife, she is also a good partner in the
work that God has called me.

She is the whole world to me!

INTRODUCTION

This book contains stories of miracles I personally experienced during my life and ministry. Whereas my childhood was spent in poverty and my future was bleak, God intervened many times to help me fulfill my dreams and desires. Moreover, working for many years among refugees and immigrants, I witnessed many true instances of Muslims' conversion to Christ.

My attempt to gather all those miracle stories in this book aims to glorify Christ who is a God of miracles and thus reveals Himself to us! I also aim to encourage all of us to know that God is good, faithful, and always present in our lives, whether we feel it or not. He is our hope in this life and in the next, the eternal life!

PART 1

MY LIFE STORY

In the first part of this book, I want to describe some miracle stories I lived myself, from the beginning of my life until today. I spent my childhood and adolescence in poverty, and my future looked bleak, but God intervened many times in my life to help me fulfill my dreams and desires. Over and over throughout my life, I have experienced wonderful interventions of God. He knows how to lead, to open doors, to supply, to meet needs, to protect, and I want to share these stories with you for His glory.



Our home in the village. From left side: My brothers Stefanos and Dimitris, Dora Kalalidou (my mother's sister), my parents, Anastasios and Eftychia, and I at the age of 5.

The Family of Anastasios and Eftychia Stefanidis

On Monday, January 12, 1953, at 9:00 am, in the village Anthotopos within the city Kozani (formerly Koskinia), Eftychia Stefanidou, of the Paisios Kalalidis family, at the age of 36, gave birth to a boy named Nikolaos. My birth was somewhat extraordinary.

Eftychia was the practical nurse and midwife of the village. Almost all the children of the village came into the world with the help of Eftychia. However, when the time came for me to be born, she had no one to help her. At this critical time, she called George, her first son, who was then 9 years old. She gave him instructions on what to do and, with his help, the fourth boy in the family of Anastasios and Eftychia Stefanidis was finally born.

The four boys grew up in a poor but blessed family: George, Demetrios, Stefanos and Nikolaos were the pride of our parents. Each of us had different interests, abilities and dreams. George apprenticed under the care of our uncle Messias Kalalidis, a very gifted tailor. Thus, George became one of the most skilled tailors in Paris, and he received many awards. Dimitris studied to become an electrical engineer with the help of our uncles Platonas and Anastasia Kalalidis, but eventually he worked in the printing house of our uncles Platonas Kalalidis and Stefanos Semertzis. Stefanos was engaged in agriculture, but soon he also switched to the printing house. At the same time, he engaged in beekeeping and various other (mainly agricultural) activities. He is a very capable and hardworking man who generously shares all the fruits of his labors with others. The last boy was me. My dream was to study.

Our family life was beautiful but also very difficult. Ever since we were little, all of us helped with the housework. We grazed the animals, worked in the fields, cleaned the stables, and did various other chores. As a result, there was not much time for us to play. All day long, we all had responsibilities that filled our time. After school and after we did our homework, we continued our agricultural and household chores.



The wedding photo of my parents, Eftychia Kalalidou and Anastasios Stefanidis.

They were married on May 21, 1938

In the midst of our many chores, our mother focused our family life on what she called "family worship," which included Bible study and prayer twice daily. Every morning, before we left for school or work, she would read us some of the Word of God, sing Christian songs and hymns, and pray. Finally, she would give each of us a verse that we should learn by heart and then recite in our evening family worship.



The four brothers. From left side: Dimitris, George, Stefanos and Nikos.

As a result, all four of our lives were profoundly influenced by Biblical principles, an influence that continues to the present day. Everything I remember from the Word of God is the result of our family worship. The result of this consistent teaching of the Word of God was that all four boys followed Jesus and formed Christian families. We all lived our lives under the strong influence of God, and we experienced His intervention in our lives. My mother's influence in my own life, more specifically, was to instill in me the desire to become a priest (or a pastor, as that desire eventually led me to become).

As a token of gratitude to my mother, I wrote and recited the following poem to her. I did so on behalf of all of us on Mother's Day, at a family reunion at my brother Stefanos's estate on May 13, 2001.

There are many mothers,
But for their children,
each mother is unique.
Each one stands out,
for her overflowing love.

Every mother here on earth,
writes a story through her life,
not with words, commas and periods,
but with pain, crying, laughter and worries.

She writes a story that characterizes her,
an endless hidden heartbeat
for each of her children
whether they are far or near.

Every mother longs to see
All her children properly raised,
and her anxiety is great
if they make bad choices in life.

You are such a mother
who God brought to earth.
Eftychia (Happiness) you were named by your grandfather.
What an irony though because you experienced so much pain.

But in this hard life
you lived victoriously.

You gave birth to four children,
and you did the hard work of raising them.

Your days were tiring,
and you worked non-stop.
As you did the work of this world,
you did not deviate from your original purpose.

Your goal was unique,
that God would enter into the life of your children.
Having nothing else to leave to us,
you have endowed us with the treasure of Heaven.

In the midst of the commotion of every day,
there was always room for spiritual time.
You sat with the Bible in hand,
explaining to us what is God will.

It was not much fun for us back then
to read the Bible daily,
but time has shown
that you were absolutely right, MOM.

When I personally look back,
I proudly say, wherever I am,
that a faithful and wise mother
taught me to love the Word of God.

It would not be an exaggeration to say
that what I know from the Bible
I owe to you, MOTHER,
for you made me memorize the Word of God.

Surely sometimes we all made you sad, some a little and some a lot.
But your love was enough
so that, even when you were still disciplining us,
you too were in pain with us.

We cannot change the past,
but we can tell you now from the heart
that we did not want your feelings to be hurt,
and that we loved you then, and we love you now sincerely.

After so many years,
God has given you children and grandchildren.
George, Dimitris, Stefanos and I,
we want to tell you from the bottom of our hearts, THANK YOU
for your life that you spent for us, without sparing.

There are many mothers, but
even if we become a little selfish,
You are unique to us
and no one else is like you on earth!

All of us wish that
the peace of God fills you,

His joy floods you,
and may Heaven reward you.

From your children



The 4 brothers with our wives on our father's hundredth birthday

Childhood and Adolescence

I attended primary school in our village, where just one teacher, Mr. Korosidis, taught all six classes, six days a week. I loved studying. I wanted to go to high school and then study at a theological seminary, but my family had no financial means. We could not even afford the cost of going to the nearest town to attend high school. I was disappointed and cried very often about this.

My father went to the teacher of our village and asked his opinion on what to do with me. The teacher advised him, "Send him one more year to the sixth grade. I will have him teach the students of the first, second and third grades every Saturday.

Eventually this will help him to get over it, and he will not want to go to high school anymore.” However, things did not turn out that way. The year ended with me teaching the younger children every Saturday, but I still wanted to go to high school. In response, the teacher encouraged my father to send me back to the sixth grade. I was terribly discouraged and even felt depressed from my grief.



The Primary School of Anthotopos and our Teacher, Mr. Korosidis.

That summer, however, God started a series of miracles that eventually led me to attend high school. The first miracle happened when the family’s plow broke, and my father had to go to the city of Kozani to repair it.

After finishing his work, he went to the bus station and waited for the bus to return to the village. There he heard a gentleman, who was the Director of the Telephone Company of Kozani asking the passengers, “Do you happen to know of any boy in your villages who loves studying and wants to go to high school? I want to take him

at home to help my two boys who are preparing themselves for high school." It was as though this man was sent from Heaven! My father did not miss the opportunity. Immediately, he told him about me and my desire to study. Thus, in a few weeks, my mother took me to this gentleman's house, and I stayed with them for a year, attending my first year of high school with the man's sons.



The broken plow that opened the way for me to go to high school.

This first school year passed quickly, and as it drew to a close, I increasingly became anxious regarding how I would be able to attend my second year. Once again, God miraculously opened a door. My father went to the Bishop of the Orthodox Church at Florina, Augustinos Kantiotis, and asked him to take me to the boarding school of the "Forty Martyrs" in Kozani. I was accepted and successfully completed my second year (high school had six grades at that time).

During that my second year, Bishop Augustine kindly became a mentor for me. He let me follow him to many churches where he was preaching. He was a good and decent man, and he greatly influenced my life, particularly regarding ethics. At the boarding school, I read many Christian books in addition to the Bible, and I was a subscriber to the youth magazine, *Children's Antilles* (which was a protestant

magazine, although I didn't know it at that time). The Bible I used (as most Evangelicals did and some still do) was a translation of Vambas, which is was not accepted by the Orthodox Church.

All these reading materials attracted interest, both from my forty classmates and also from my teacher who was the director of the boarding school, Mr. M. Efthimiou. Some students came to me inquiring what kind of Bible and books I was reading, and then they asked the director about them. To my surprise, the director not only knew of my Bible and the magazine, but he also had them in his office along with other evangelical publications. In fact, he even encouraged my classmates to read them. This led us to start a Bible study group, and almost all of the students subscribed to the *Children's Antilles* magazine.



2-8-1964. Our family's primitive agricultural tools. My father Anastasios.

My brother Stefanos is on the cart and Dimitris is on the bike.

When the time arrived for my third year of high school, things became more difficult. My parents were adamant that I could not continue my education because our finances were meager. I was very disappointed and asked God to help me. Once again, a miracle happened! That summer, my aunt Anastasia (the wife of Plato Kalalidis, my mother's brother) came to visit us in the village. When she heard my

story from my mother and saw my desire to study, she called my uncle. Without hesitation, they agreed to have me live with them in their home in Giannitsa (a city 80 miles away) so that I could attend high school there.



Aunt Anastasia and Uncle Plato at their printing house

To me, my aunt and uncle were angels of God! They had three children of their own: Virginia, Sophia and Paisios. A few years before I arrived, they had already taken my older brother, Dimitris, into their home, and he graduated from the Technical School of Electrical Engineering. Now, they wanted to take me too! Their life was not comfortable because their finances were limited. Even so, they were led by God to be sacrificially generous, taking me into their family for over six years. My uncle had a printing house and a frame-making workshop. I apprenticed with him and learned the frame-making trade, and I worked with him during all the years of my stay with this family.

Miracles had only just begun to happen and influence my life, and more followed. During my high school years, in Giannitsa, I experienced a great spiritual revival in my life. This took place after years of studying the Bible from a young age but failing to have my questions answered. For example, I had wondered how one can be sure

that one has been saved and is with Christ. I wanted to know if the so-called “Saints” could intercede to God for people. I also questioned whether the Church could pray to God to transfer a deceased person to paradise, and I was unsure whether



The Kalalides family: Sofia, Anastasia, Platon, Virginia, Sophia, and Paisios

salvation was obtained through works or through faith. I pondered these questions and many more. I used to ask the priest of our village about all these questions when I was little, but he apparently did not know what to answer and would tell me, “Ask your mother.” (My mother spoke to this priest about Christ, and later he was born again, as was his wife who was my mother's neighbor and best friend. They both respected her very much.) In high school, I asked the same questions to my Religious Studies teachers, but they did not give me satisfactory answers either. Increasingly, I saw that the proclamations of the Bible were contrary to many ecclesiastical practices and traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church.

For example, regarding the intercession of the “Saints,” the Word of God clearly states that “there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.” He is the one who offered Himself as a ransom for all of us, a fact that was witnessed when the proper time had come, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time” (1 Tim. 2:

5-6). To me, there became no doubt that a deceased believer could not mediate for the living.

Another big question for me was whether the Church could pray to God to transport the deceased to a place of Heaven and a place of rest. As I read and studied more, the Bible seemed to me to be absolute and clear, "Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..."(Hebrews 9:27).



In the summer of 1970, I worked for the Electrical Company, digging holes to install the of power transmission poles for our village. I had to work to contribute to my expenses.

My most important question had to do with why some said that salvation is obtained by our works, since this contradicts the proclamation of the Word of God which

emphasizes (Ephesians 2: 8-9), “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.”

One day, in my Religious Studies class, the teacher—who was also a priest of the Orthodox Church—gave us time to ask questions. I asked him the above question, asking his opinion about what the Apostle Paul meant in this verse, and he got very angry. He stood up and, in a stern and strict voice, said to my classmates, “Stefanidis has gone blind and has become a heretic. That's why you should not have any relationship with him from now on!” I could not have imagined that his words would have such an impact on my classmates, but from that moment and for quite some time, none of my classmates had any contact with me! However, this episode brought me closer to the truth. Not only was I not blinded, but the opposite was true. My spiritual eyes had been opened. The words of this verse made it clear to me that salvation is given by grace through faith and not by my own works and by my own efforts.

Thankfully, my relationships with my classmates were quickly restored, and the reason was simple: They needed me. I was very good at math and was tutoring them regarding the daily lessons so that they would be ready for the exams. Thus, they soon came back and asked me to continue the lessons, saying, “We apologize for listening to the Priest.” Thereafter, I tutored them in math lessons, but I also answered their questions about my beliefs. Eventually, many of them visited the Evangelical Church of Giannitsa, out of curiosity or interest, and listened to the gospel by the local pastor.

At the same time, my desire to talk about the gospel and serve God through ministry was also strong. I did this with joy and without feeling any pressure. For example, during the years I went to the high school in Kozani, I taught at the Sunday school of the Orthodox church of Saint Nikolaos. I was also a member of the Christian (Orthodox) organization, LIFE, which was very popular at that time. Working with theological issues was very natural for me, and I loved doing so. This led me to think seriously that maybe I should study theology and prepare for ministry.

I struggled with my strong competing desires to become a mathematician or to become a priest/pastor. I reasoned that, since I had multiple disagreements with the Orthodox Church, and my priest-professor had called me a heretic, I should go to the pastor of the Evangelical Church of Giannitsa, M. Kantartzis, for counsel. I discussed my vocational concerns with him, and he helped me a lot. Still, it took me more than a year to accept that my calling was to God's work, and then I found my peace.



Michalis Kantartzis and the Youth group of the Evangelical Church of Giannitsa

My path to becoming a pastor had many steps, many of which hid difficulties that led to many miraculous interventions by God. One of my biggest difficulties was the fact that I had great problems with spelling (probably, I had some kind of learning disability). I made tremendous efforts via tutoring, personal study, and other methods that were suggested to me to improve my writing. I also fasted for many days, asking God to help me become a good speller. I thought that with a difficulty such as this, I probably would not be able to serve in ministry, where writing ability is

important. I decided to visit a pastor whom I valued very much to discuss my problem with him. I even presented him with a small sample of my writing so he could read it and see the extent of my problem.

After reading it and thinking for a while, he said to me, "If you do not improve yourself, you cannot become a pastor." I left that meeting devastated, and in anguish, I cried out to God, "Why did You make me this way so that I cannot become Your minister?"

I spent many weeks thinking about what to do next and finally I decided that, if I could not become a pastor, I would not go to study theology but something else instead. Then God intervened! On the day of my decision, the phone rang. It was my friend Giannis Chionidis who was the Pastor of the Greek Evangelical Church in Toronto, Canada; he was on holiday in Greece and wanted to catch up with me. I believe he was sent by God to speak to me because his first question was, "When do you start your theological studies?" I opened my heart to him and said, "I will not be pursuing theology because I have terrible difficulty with spelling, which would keep me from being a pastor. That's what an older pastor friend told me." Giannis became furious regarding this other pastor's advice, and he told me, "Do not make any decision until you get a letter from me." Giannis (who is now with the Lord) was a very blessed and respected Pastor. In the letter he sent me, he wrote the following (which I have corrected only regarding his spelling errors): "My friend Nikos, I want you to do me a favor. Please read this short letter and try to correct my spelling mistakes. I believe you are much better than I am at writing. If God has used me as His minister, then surely, He can use you too." Indeed, his letter had many, many spelling mistakes! The devil used a pastor who spelled well to frustrate me so I might abandon my pursuit of God's ministry, but God used a pastor who spelled poorly to call me to His work!

When I finished high school, I was wondering if I should go to the army first (in Greece, army service is mandatory for men) and then, after I finished, to go abroad for my theological studies, or vice versa. At that time, I met another pastor who blessed my life, Rev. Argos Zodiatis, who was visiting my church. After the service,

Rev. Zodiatis stood by the door to greet the people and talk to them. My uncle Platon Kalalidis, as he left church that day, grasped the opportunity to ask Rev. Zodiatis my behalf, "Mr. Argos, my nephew wants to become a pastor. He wonders if he should do his military service first and then start his studies or begin his studies first. What do you think is better for him to do?" Mr. Argos, very wisely advised me to finish first with the military service and then, free of my army obligations, to proceed with my studies. This is what I did.

Military Service (January 1974 - May 1976): A Great Education!

When I was about to enlist in the army, I was faced with another dilemma. Should I try to pull a few strings so that, after my basic training, I could be transferred to a camp near my home? Alternately, should I leave everything in the hands of God and go wherever I would be sent? Eventually, after prayer, I decided just to trust God. I said to myself, "I want to serve God wherever He sends me," and I did not regret doing it!

My military service was a period of training but also a confirmation that God was calling me to His work. Throughout my time in the military, I was given many opportunities to witness to and evangelize my fellow soldiers. Even on the very first day in the army, I was faced with a dilemma where I needed to choose either to be silent or to witness regarding my faith. This is what happened.

After going through all the procedures and getting the uniform, the armor, and everything else that each soldier was given, I went to my squad room and chose my bed. It was time to meet the soldiers of my ward and the officers. After we all got together, a sergeant started giving instructions. Before letting us to make our beds to sleep, he gave us the first order. A frame was nailed to the wall with the well-known Greek Orthodox prayer beginning with the words "Heavenly King" and ending with "By the wishes of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ God have mercy and save us. Amen." The Sergeant told us that, every day, one of us would recite this prayer for the group. When I heard him giving such an order, I said to myself, "Either I speak up now or I will remain silent forever."



January 1974, at the camp in Tripoli.

Almost spontaneously, a voice came out of me. I said, "Sergeant, I have known this prayer since I was a child and I can say it by heart, but I cannot say the last sentence because..." The Sergeant interrupted me, saying, "All right, all right, the group will stay here for 50 days until each of you goes to your units. There are enough people in the group so that one soldier can say the prayer every day without you needing to do it. Dismissed, go to your bed."

That night at 3:00 a.m., a hand touched my shoulder and woke me up. I jumped up and saw the sergeant. In a calm voice, he told me quietly, "Do not be afraid. Sorry I woke you up. I want to talk with you. Can you come to my bed?" I went with him, and he asked me, "I have not been able to sleep, and I want you to tell me why you cannot pray that prayer."

Thus began a conversation that lasted until the dawn. I explained to him that the Word of God says that there is only one mediator through whom we can pray and bring God our requests, and that is Jesus Christ. There is no other intercessor. "Through the wishes of our Holy Fathers" implies that the Holy Fathers, who have lived and died, have the power to intercede. However, Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed that He is the only mediator and that whatever we ask in His name the Heavenly Father will do. "That's why I cannot say this prayer that exalts people and not Jesus Christ."

Then he asked me, "How do you know of all this? Where did you learn these things, and how can I find out for myself?" I explained to him that everything is so simple and comprehensible, as long as one reads the New Testament. He responded, "Where can I find a New Testament?" I replied, "You have it already but you did not notice that it was given to you. Just empty your backpack and you will find it. The first item they gave us when we joined the army was a New Testament."

To his great surprise, the New Testament was there, at the bottom of his backpack, waiting for him. He took it and started kissing it. I told him, "Kisses will not help you at all if you do not read it and do not do what God says in its pages." Then, with tears in his eyes and in a low voice, he asked me, "Can you please help me? Can we read it together?"

For the next 52 days, we read the New Testament and prayed together. I brought him in contact with a Christian fellowship in Sparta (the sergeant's home town). Only God knows what happened in his life after that. What I learned, however, is that God had a plan for me and my future, both during my military service and in my life after that.

The testimony I gave about my faith in Christ during my military service began with the Spartan sergeant in the Tripoli camp and was repeated on other occasions. After my training in the camp of Tripoli, I was transferred to another camp in Athens and then to the Karatasou camp in Thessaloniki. In all these military training centers, I was given opportunities to share the truths of the gospel. Even more incredible than this, however, is what happened during the months I spent in the mountains of the village of Chamilos in Komotini!

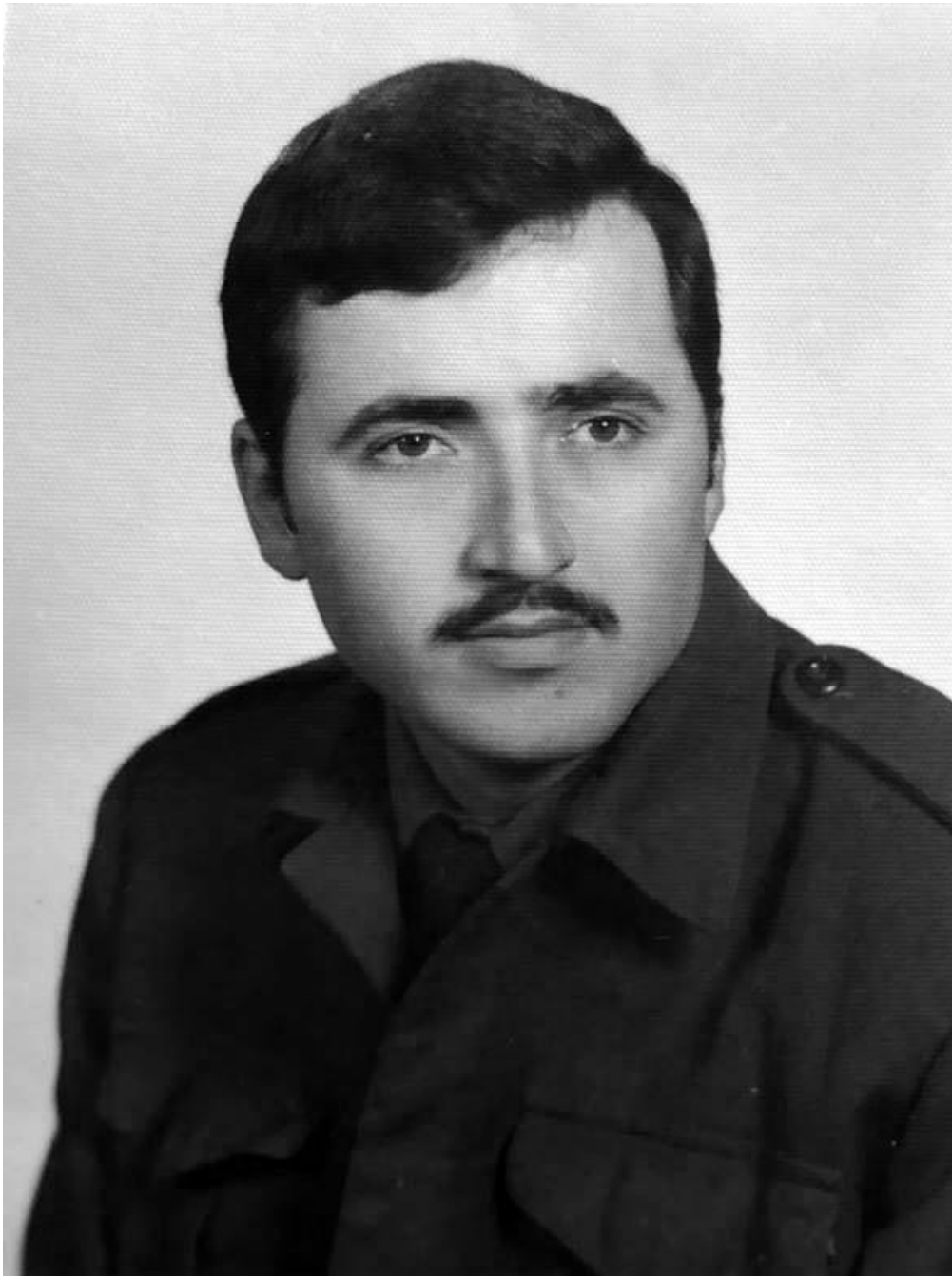
Some fellow soldiers were watching me studying the Bible daily. At first, they mocked me, trying to upset me, to make me angry. They sent me for chores, and in every way, they tried to make me lose my temper. By the grace of the Lord, however, I did not do them the favor! I continued to study the Bible at night in my tent, using my flashlight.

One night, one of them, named Savvidis, came to my tent and apologized for his behavior. In fact, he asked me to start reading the New Testament with him. I thought it was a trap, but I proceeded anyway. The man was thirsty to learn the truth, and so we started studying the Bible together. Soon a second soldier from the team of formal "mockers" was added to our Bible study group. Then a third, and a fourth, and a fifth one joined! We continued to study the gospel of John all together, and I was explaining to them what I knew.

There was another soldier in the team named I.K., who was the worst of the "mockers." He had the most obscene language I have ever heard and seemed to be a very tough individual. One day he asked me to fetch his gun from his tent while he was preparing himself for his nightshift. When I entered his tent to find the gun, I saw something incredible! He had his New Testament open on the same page that we were currently reading in our Bible study, a passage from the gospel of John. It was obvious that he was also reading the gospel, but he did not dare to let us know. God was working in his heart! We all had noticed that he had reduced the swearing, and he finally stopped cursing completely. Finally, one day he said to me, "I want to come to your team. May I?" We were very happy, because—after all—underneath his tough exterior, he was a good guy. The first day he came to our Bible study, he

apologized for the way he had previously treated me (e.g., his frequent insults and harassment). He said, "I had set a goal to make you swear too, but in the end, you changed me. I apologize for the way I acted."

This group stayed together for six months with Bible study, prayer, and a lot of discussion, until the day we were sent to other units and separated. When we left, all of us were different persons than when we first met!



Military Portrait

Another Big Dilemma That Assured Me of My Calling

Because my superiors greatly appreciated my behavior as a soldier, I was offered a job in the army as a civilian. My commander, Dimitrios Pierakos, insisted that I accept this offer of a well-paid and secure job, which was very attractive to a guy like me who had grown up in poverty. This started a war inside me. On the one hand, I heard the voice of human logic saying, "This is your opportunity! Do not miss it. You will even be able to do ministry better in the army because you will be able to talk to many soldiers." On the other hand, another Voice was whispering to me, "I want you for something bigger. I will prepare you for a different work, and for that, you have to study."

I tried to explain to my commander that my vision and calling was to become a pastor, and for this reason I planned to study at a theological school in England. This was why I could not accept his kind offer. Puzzled but with respect, he said to me, "I do not understand what you are saying, but I will make an agreement with you. Go study and let's keep in touch. I will hold this position for you for three years. In case you change your mind, you have three years to come back and get it."

Thus, at the end of my military service term, we parted ways with this agreement. Indeed, he kept his promise and kept the position open for me for three years. In the third year, however, I informed him that nothing had changed in my plans. I thanked him warmly, and we continued our course.

The years passed. I finished my theological studies, and God let me to serve as a pastor in the largest Greek Evangelical church, in Katerini. There, among my other duties, I performed many wedding ceremonies. One day I was officiating a wedding and, as I was looking into the audience, my eyes met the eyes of my former commander, Dimitris Pierakos! At the end of the ceremony, we chatted about the old days, and we also remembered his job offer in the army. Then he turned and said to me, "This is what you wanted to do, and we ignorant folks were trying to keep you in the army." This man, my former military commander, became a good friend and conversation partner. For a long time, he came regularly to my office to talk about God.

My Theological Studies (September 1976 - January 1985):

A Series of Miracles!

London Theological Seminary, England

After my military service, I was admitted to the London Theological Seminary, a two-year theological program. I arrived in England having only taken English lessons for one academic year and, of course, my English was poor. My finances—as always—were tight, but God had again gone ahead and opened the way in wonderful ways! The European Missionary Fellowship offered to pay my tuition and, in return, I would be working in their premises, taking care of the orchard and garden. I also worked in Greek restaurants to cover my other expenses. In one of them, I learned to make tasty salads, something I still enjoy doing for family and friends. In addition to providing for my finances, God provided me the opportunity to preach the Word of God in a small Greek-Cypriot church which had been started by Rev. Argos Zodiatis.

Reform Theological College, Michigan, USA

When I graduated from London Theological Seminary and returned to Greece, I wanted to continue my studies in America, and I began to plan for this. During that time, I also met a Christian woman through family friends, and we were married. Sadly, our marriage was difficult from the start, but I did my best to be a good husband. Soon thereafter, I was accepted to the Reform Theological College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and my wife and I left for America. There, too, God had prepared everything! The College offered me a scholarship for tuition and I worked in the garden and in the College Library. I also took care of some gardens outside the College. I did this hard work while studying full time. I also ministered at the Greek Evangelical Church of Chicago, where I attended every weekend. By God's grace, I covered all my expenses throughout my time at Reform Theological College, and also throughout my entire eight years of theological education. Of course, it was God who gave me health, concentration and all the opportunities to work. My studies at the Reform Theological College lasted two years, and I graduated with a Bachelor Degree. During that time, I experienced many small and big interventions of God, but here I will only describe one special example.

As part of the College curriculum, all students were required to participate in a Christian ministry. As I was praying for God to show me what to do, the idea came to work with the homeless children of the city. I discussed my idea with the professor of Practical Christian Ministry. He was surprised and asked me, “Where will you find



In June 1981 I graduated from the Reform Theological College.

the homeless children?” I told him, “I want you to help me find them.” He replied, “Since you insist, I will show you where the homeless children spend their nights, on the outskirts of the city.” When we arrived at that area and saw the desperate conditions, I was speechless, and my heart ached. Soon I started organizing a ministry for these homeless children. I visited the pastors of the area and shared my idea. Everyone responded positively. I also mobilized my classmates to participate in this ministry. Even the city council got involved, providing a bus for the transportation of the children to the facilities we would use.

With God's help, everything was set up in two weeks. On the first day we had already found 90 children aged 7-16 and we had several volunteers from college and the churches. The program included food, Bible lessons and crafts. We divided the children into four classes according to their age. I got the older kids, 20 in number. Disciplining these kids proved to be a big challenge. I tried different ways to get their attention, but it was impossible. Then I got the idea to make a deal with them. I proposed to them that we would finish the lesson in 15 instead of 45 minutes (and I would focus on a single message I wanted to pass on to them). For their part of the deal, they would not tease each other, and they would pay attention to the lesson. In the end, I would ask them a few questions to see if they got the message. If they violated the agreement, we would go back to the 45 minutes class. It was an idea that eventually worked. At the end of the day, we evaluated the program. The other teachers had the same problem of discipline, with little success, so they asked me about my method.

After much discussion, they asked me to do a class where I would teach the kids, and they would observe. Finally, the entire program began functioning in an orderly fashion. It was the wisdom of God that led us to find the right teaching method for these “difficult” students! This ministry was well received by the local community, and it continued after my graduation from the Reform Theological College.

Trinity Evangelical Divinity Seminary, Chicago, USA

After graduating from college, my wife and I moved to Chicago, Illinois, where I pursued my postgraduate studies at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity Seminary. I graduated in January 1985 with a Master of Theology and double major in homiletics and counseling, but my education also involved extensive training in trusting God for everything! For example, my postgraduate studies—which would better prepare me to work in God's ministry—began (again) with a serious financial problem that led to another miracle. Just before the academic year started, and while I was already in Chicago, I realized that I could not raise the tuition money of the first semester. The Christian organization that had promised to support me changed plans, and I was left with no plan B. The only income I had was coming from the small Greek fellowship I

was ministering to in Chicago. I needed \$ 3,500 to enroll in the first semester, otherwise I would lose my residence visa in the States, and I would have to go back to Greece. Given the huge amount I owed, my only hope was God. I started praying and waiting for God to act. Either I would find the money or I would hand myself over to the authorities who would put me on a plane and send me back to Greece as an illegal immigrant.

Time passed and nothing happened. The last night arrived before the registration deadline was to expire. Before going to bed, I prayed, “Lord, it seems my journey ends here. Tomorrow, I will declare myself illegal in the country, and we will go home. Your will be done! Amen.” Paradoxically, I fell into a quiet and deep sleep. After midnight, I was awakened by the phone ringing. Puzzled, I picked it up and heard a male voice—from 4,000 miles away—saying to me, “Sorry we woke you up, but I have news for you. Give us your bank account number, because we decided to send you \$ 3,500 for your tuition.” I couldn't figure out whether it was a dream or a reality, or whether it was the voice of a human or an angel! It seemed unbelievable, but it was true! The Missionary Committee of the Greek Evangelical Church of Boston had made this decision and felt they should let me know immediately. I had not written them any letters. They did not know of my need. But it was known to God who acted, as always, in His time! So, with another miracle, I started my postgraduate studies in Chicago. This period of my life was very significant, not only for my theological education, but also because God gave me opportunities to serve Him in new ways and to gain experiences that would be valuable in the years that followed.

The Ministry in the Church, Television, and Radio

While I was studying in the USA, I preached in the small Greek Evangelical Church in Chicago, which at first had only 10 people in all. I visited that church while I was studying in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Rev. Giannis Chionidis, the Pastor of the Greek Evangelical Church of Toronto, Canada, introduced me to an elder of the church in Chicago, the dentist Harry Michailidis, to whom I owe a great deal. For the next two years, every weekend I used to take the seven-hour bus ride from Grand Rapids to

Chicago to preach in the Sunday church service. Later, after I had moved to Chicago, God opened the way, and the church called me as a pastor.



On the day of my ordination at the Greek Church in Chicago. In the background is the choir of the Evangelical Church of Toronto with their pastor, Rev. Giannis Chionidis.

Every Friday morning, I used to listen to a 15-minute Greek program on the radio, which included some news from home, music, and commercials. One morning, this show stopped. A few weeks later, I felt God prompting me to go to the radio station owner and ask him to give me 15 minutes on Friday to do my own show! I still wonder where I got my courage to do it. I had no knowledge regarding radio productions, and I only had money for five 15-minute programs. Nevertheless, God gave me the courage, and I called the radio station. I found the owner and arranged a meeting with him. I explained my idea of doing a program called “Radio Quest” and I told him that I only had money for five programs. “Will you give me the slots for these programs?”

He immediately agreed, saying "Five programs is better than nothing!" He then introduced me to his technicians who would help me because I was completely ignorant of how to set up a radio program. With God's help and the assistance of the technicians, I set up a program that included a short message from the Bible and some hymns. I always closed the show with offering a New Testament to anyone who would ask for it, and I would go and give these in person.

The five Fridays passed quickly and, since I had no more money, the show stopped, as I had agreed with the owner of the station. In the meantime, over 70 people had called and asked for a New Testament, each of which I personally delivered. Many of the listeners of my program kept calling the station, continuing to ask for a New Testament and asking why the show had stopped. After a month, to my big surprise, one Sunday the owner of the station visited my church. After the worship, we had a short conversation.

"It is a great and pleasant surprise to see you," I told him. "What can I do for you?" He replied, "I want you to know that I have been looking for you for a month, and so have your listeners." This was my second big surprise! In response, I said, "What can I do, since you know I have no more money to finance the program?" He answered, "I didn't ask for money. I want you to start the show again because people want to hear you. It will be completely free of charge, for as long as you can do it!"

What a great miracle this was! For three years I had the opportunity to preach the gospel to more than 500,000 Greeks living in Chicago and to visit many of them with a New Testament in hand!

Moreover, the miracles continued, and God opened another door! I was called by a second Greek radio station, WSBC RADIO, which was also based in Chicago. When I met the owner, I was very surprised to hear him say, "I will give you—free of charge—30 minutes every Saturday evening at 8:00, which is the most popular time slot." Thus, on January 1, 1983, my second radio program began. I was able to preach the Word of God clearly to the thousands of Greeks living in Chicago. Only God knows the results of those sermons, but I look forward to meeting those who were touched by the gospel in Heaven one day!



At the radio program for the Greeks of Chicago

Still, the Lord was unstoppable with His miracles! God led the owner of the only local Greek TV station to give me 15 minutes, every Saturday evening before the Greek news, to read biblical texts of my choice in modern Greek. That show also had a huge response! Together, the TV and radio shows attracted many Greeks of the Chicago area who started coming to church, and many accepted Jesus as their Savior. I had trained some of our church members to help me with the programs, answering the phone and talking to listeners who were interested in learning more about God's Word. Our small church started to grow and when I left, it numbered almost 70 people.

As a result of the radio and TV broadcasts, God provided another wonderful opportunity for evangelism. In Chicago, as in many cities outside Greece, there were schools for the Greek children. One of them was the largest school in Chicago, with many students attending all grades from Kindergarten to high school. Like all schools, this Greek school ended the year with a graduation ceremony where children received their graduation certificates. More than 1,000 people, relatives and

friends of the students gathered at that ceremony. Each year, the ceremony included a keynote speech.

One day, when my phone rang, the Principal and owner of that large Greek school in Chicago wanted to talk to me. He and I had met through the radio programs. He knew that I was studying Theology and that I was serving in the local Greek Evangelical Church, but I still did not expect to hear what he had in mind. He invited me to give the keynote address at the graduation ceremony! I was shocked. He continued, "I listen to you on the radio, and I thought having you speak would be an opportunity for the Greeks to hear something different. You are free to say whatever you want, although I would prefer that you speak from the Bible." When I realized that he was serious, I enthusiastically replied, "Thank you for the great honor and the opportunity you are giving me to speak to such a large audience—in my own language! Please, give me 24 hours to pray and think about what God puts in my heart, and I will give you an answer to your gracious invitation."

Thus far in my life, this was the longest 24 hours of thought and prayer I had ever experienced. Eventually, God brought peace in my heart and gave me a title for my address: "The Renaissance of Letters! The Renaissance of our Nation! The Renaissance of the Soul!"

The next day I let the Director know of my decision. His joy was great, and we both began waiting anxiously to see how people would respond to my speech. I do not know exactly how God moved in the hearts of those who attended. What I can say, however, is that the entire audience listened with great attention, and afterwards, many asked for a New Testament. Once again, I realized that God was there before me, and He had prepared everything!

My Studies Continued Only with Miracles.

I had always wrestled with tight finances, but this struggle was also an ongoing challenging opportunity to learn to trust God more. The church was slowly growing and, when it reached 50 members, it covered most of my tuition and book

costs. For my daily and the emergency expenses, God repeatedly revealed His own sources of funding—always in His own time! One such incident I will mention below.

I was nearing the end of my graduate studies, needing only to take three more classes. The total cost was \$2,000, but I did not have these funds. I asked some of my Korean classmates who were dedicated believers to pray with me regarding this need. This took place during the time when I started preaching God’s Word through my radio broadcasts. While I still wondered how I would pay for my final classes, I went to check my mailbox one day. A miracle was waiting for me there! In the mailbox was an envelope containing a handwritten note and a check. The note read, “Mr. Stefanidis, thank you very much for your radio program. It has changed my life! Please pray for me, my husband and my children. I enclose a check of \$2,500 for your study expenses.”

How generous God's care is! I was praying for the \$2,000 I needed for the tuition and God gave me \$500 more! With this extra money, I was able to make my only trip within the USA during all my years of theological study. I went to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and enjoyed a visit with my uncle Symeon Ioannidis, my mother's first cousin who was an AMG Executive. Later, I learned that the donor who made this all possible was a woman named Dorothy Stoica. I was blessed to meet her three years later, and since 1983 we have kept a prayer relationship until today. Because of God’s work through her, and by means of so many other miracles, I finally reached the successful completion of my theological studies.

The Big Step of Returning to Greece (January 1985)

As my studies were nearing completion, I prayed to God to take me to the next chapter of my life and ministry. In the summer of 1984, I visited Greece and let the Synod of the Greek Evangelical Church know of my desire to serve in one of our churches. In this context, I made some contacts and preached in some regional churches. The summer passed, with no church expressing any particular interest. Thus, my wife and I made plans to go back to America and get involved in a small Greek church in Montreal, Canada, which had made me an exploratory proposal.

God's plans, however, were different, and once again, they exceeded my expectations!

Just one week before I returned to America to complete my studies, Rev. Thanasis Elias, the Pastor of the Greek Evangelical Church of Katerini, invited me to preach one Sunday morning in his church. I accepted readily, without having any idea about what would follow. After the service, Rev. Thanasis invited me to discuss a proposal he had for me. In view of his retirement, he suggested that I replace him in the church of Katerini. We had a lengthy discussion in which he explained to me the reasons why he believed that God was calling me to the church of Katerini, and I told him my hesitations and reservations. First and foremost, I only had in mind to serve in a small church, and the size of the Greek Evangelical Church of Katerini seemed huge in my eyes. The responsibilities would be many, and I was very hesitant. Rev. Thanasis, however, insisted and finally he told me, "I do not want you to give me an answer right now. Pray, think, and wait for a formal invitation from our church. Until then, you can work on deciding what you should do."

I returned to the United States and finished my studies. In the meantime, the General Assembly of the members of the church of Katerini sent me an invitation to replace Rev. Thanasis Elias. They gave me enough time to pray and think about it. This took me a long time, but finally, with some fear and a lot of anxiety, I replied that I would accept being tested in this position for two years. On January 25, 1985, I settled in Katerini as the new pastor. It was a difficult adjustment.

The Ministry in the Greek Evangelical Church of Katerini (1985-1995)

For the first five years of my time in Katerini, I actually wanted to go back to America. My mind was in Chicago, with the church there, the fellowship, and the radio and TV programs. Slowly, God gave me peace and grace, and so we stayed 10 years in Katerini where I served the church, coping with many difficulties but also experiencing many blessings! Eventually, I came to believe that God had actually prepared me for this ministry. One of the most encouraging interventions of God in the beginning of my ministry, which confirmed for me that I was where He wanted me to be, was the return of some souls to Christ. I had settled in Katerini in January

1985, and in March of the same year we organized a week of evangelical events that addressed the people of the evangelical community and the wider city. We invited a British Evangelist as the keynote speaker. At this event, we invited many friends from the city but also many Evangelicals who no longer were attending church.



In the pulpit of the Greek Evangelical Church of Katerini with Rev. Thanasis Ilia, on the first Sunday of my service there.

A number of people responded to the invitation and came to one of our gatherings that week. One of them was Kalliopi Demitriadou, an Orthodox woman who was married to an Evangelical, but none of her family attended church. I had visited Kalliopi a few times as part of my acquaintance with the locals. She came to church that week, she heard the gospel, and God touched her. One evening, she gave her heart to Jesus along with some others. From that moment on, Kalliope began to pray for her husband and her children to get to know Jesus. In the following weeks, I visited her several times, and we had many talks with her family members. Since those days, she calls me “the shepherd who gathers his sheep.” Her genuine turn to Christ affected her entire family. Her husband, her two daughters, and her son Paul (who later became a pastor) all believed in Jesus. I praise and thank God for drawing

to Himself the souls of many of His children, and these early conversions in Katerini encouraged me greatly!

During my ministry in the church of Katerini, my priorities were preaching the gospel and visiting the church members. However, I also had put special emphasis on the youth team of the church. Along with all this, I was performing the required ceremonies (weddings, baptisms, funerals), I was participating in the local and general synods of the Greek Evangelical Church, and I was also going to conferences and traveling abroad for support-raising.

I had the great joy, privilege and blessing to see a significant increase in the number of churchgoers. The Sunday morning service numbered more than 500 people and the Wednesday and Sunday evening services numbered more than 200 people. Also, the number of our Youth Team increased significantly, from 20 people to over 80 before I left Katerini. I praise God for all these young people who blessed my life and the life of the church with their presence!



At the office of the pastor of the Greek Evangelical Church of Katerini.

Another important goal that I zealously pursued was to encourage and train not only men and women who would serve God and the church in various ministries, but also

young men who would preach in the local church and wherever else there was a need. Thus, with the affluent grace of God, young lay preachers and missionaries coming from the church of Katerini were trained and encouraged to minister in various ways. Without overlooking in my heart any of my “spiritual children,” it is my privilege and honor to mention a sample of those who are now ministering in the work of God. These are:

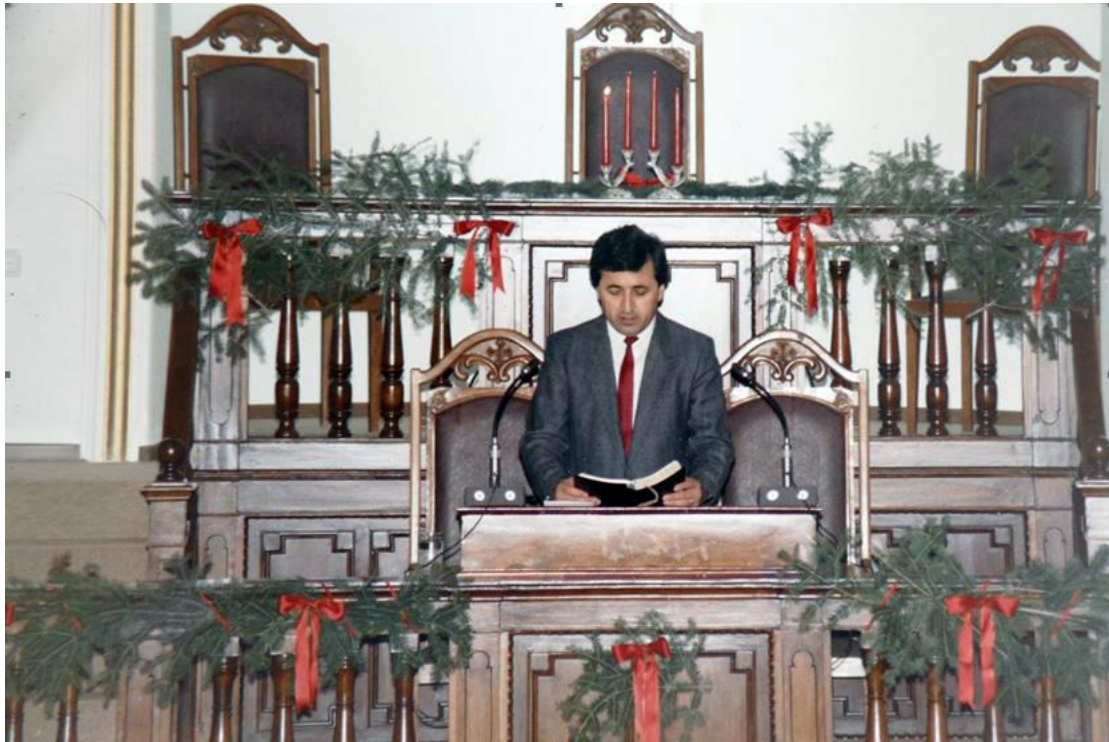
- Rev. Panagiotis Kantartzis, who first served as Pastor of the Greek Evangelical Church of Volos, then the Greek Evangelical Church of Boston in the USA, and now he is pastoring the First Greek Evangelical Church of Athens.
- Rev. Pavlos Dimitriadis, who served the Greek Evangelical Church of New York and now is the Pastor of the Greek Evangelical Church of Piraeus in Athens.
- Solon Dimitriadis, who became the first missionary to Albania, when the borders opened, where by the grace of God he planted some churches. Currently, he serves at the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) and teaches at YNDAEL University in the Netherlands.

With great gratitude, I must say that there were many special events and experiences I had had, due to my diverse ministry as pastor of the church of Katerini. Such an event, very important to me, happened when—as President of the General Synod of the Greek Evangelical Church—I represented our churches at the conference of the “Reformed Ecumenical Conference.” It was organized in Athens with delegates from all countries. Due to the fact that the conference took place in Greece, I was also the Chair of the conference.

After the opening ceremony, the first session began where all delegates participated. As Chair, I invited the members to take their seats and start the conference. The first and major agenda topic that day concerned the ordination of gay Ministers. The issue was raised by the delegates of the Dutch churches, and the discussion was expected to be long and difficult.

This issue, supported by the Dutch churches, had already divided the body of delegates, even before the conference started, into those who were in favor and

those who were against the ordination of homosexuals. Small churches from faraway lands, which were financially supported by the Netherlands, were in a difficult position because they did not want to vote in favor of the ordination of homosexuals. Doing otherwise, however, would result in their losing the support of the Dutch churches. Thus, many delegates were hesitant or were hindered to express their views freely.



In the pulpit of the Church on Christmas day.

In order to be able to state my opinion on the subject, I gave my Chair to the General Secretary of the conference and went up to the podium saying, "I will not give a long talk. I just want to remind us all that, in the creation of the world, God created "Adam and Eve," not "Adam and Steve." Please tell me, on what grounds will you support the ordination of gay workers?" And I sat back. The response of the audience to my speech was a loud applause from almost everyone. Following this reaction, the proponents of the gay ordination asked for a 15-minutes break to think of how they would proceed with their proposal. When we came back, they announced that they withdraw the subject! Then a second, louder applause was given from the majority of the delegates and the issue was closed, at least for a few years. I think it was the hand of God that had put me there, for this decision alone!

In the ninth year of my ministry in the church of Katerini, I was feeling that God was telling me that this cycle was coming to a close. All seemed OK and the ministry was going very well, but deep inside, I was constantly hearing a Voice saying to me, "It's time for you to move on." When I announced my plans to the church, many were upset, but in my heart, I had peace. This was true even though I did not know where I would go and what the next step in my life and ministry would be.

Thus, in January 1994, following the standard procedures, I wrote a letter to the Executive Committee of the General Synod of our churches informing them officially of my departure, so that they might inform any interested churches of my availability. Months passed, but no church showed any interest. I could not explain this silence. Nevertheless, I prayed and waited for God's guidance. The answer came in December 1994, when the Hellenic Bible College invited me to join the College's body of teachers. An important chapter in my life and ministry was closing, and another one was just beginning.



Hellenic Biblical College: Teachers' Meeting

My relationship with the Hellenic Bible College was long. I had already started in 1985 and continued during my pastorate in the Evangelical Church of Katerini. For 10 years I had been a visiting professor at the college, where I taught various courses

from the Old and New Testament, specializing in Homiletics. I was initially hired as a professor, but things soon changed. The Bible College's Director of Administration had just submitted his resignation, and the Board of Directors, acknowledging my gifts in administration, asked me to take his place. This change was crucial to the operation of the College and took place in a transitional period for the school. At that time, the old facilities of the college in Kastri were sold, and new, more modern facilities were built in Pikermi. There were a lot of issues that needed to be settled, but everything went well by God's grace and with a lot of work from all the executives of the college. The school was running smoothly. Student enrollment was increasing, the college's financial support was strong, and the prospective ministers of the gospel were continuing their studies, promising to serve in the work of God.



Hellenic Bible College: Commemorative photo of students and teachers

Then, however, black clouds came that turned my personal life upside down and dramatically affected both my professional life and my ministry. The "storm" had to do with our marriage, which from the beginning had continued to be very difficult. Finally, our marriage could not survive any longer, and we divorced.

As a result, the body of the college professors, with the consent of the Board of Directors, asked me to resign from my post. So, after four years of intensive administrative work and teaching, I found myself unemployed! If that were not enough, due to my divorce, the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the

Greek Evangelical Church excluded me from church ministry and also, they banned churches from inviting me to preach. The doors were closing one after the other. In the midst of the biggest crisis of my personal life, I found myself without a job, facing serious financial problems, and—perhaps for the first time in my adult life—without a ministry. I felt empty, as if my world was crashing down. My only hope was, again, God and prayer.

Building a New Life from Scratch and Experiencing More Miracles!

At that time, my life course seemed vague and frustrating, but the sun of hope began to rise again. Brothers and sisters from various churches began calling, with genuine and caring interest, asking me how I was doing and saying that they were praying for me. Some helped me financially to meet some of my needs. For years, the family of Dimos and Polyxeni Boukis hosted me in their house as if I were their own son, until I found a home and settled in Athens. When I felt abandoned by my colleagues, God sent his angels to encourage me, to support me, and to open doors for me. It was my brothers and sisters in Christ and my friends who stood by me during those difficult days. They prayed with me and asked God to help me find a job and ministry, and His answer did not take long to come.

God used my brother in Christ and friend, Dimos Boukis. He talked about me to a Christian who owned a tourist agency, Dino Rousso, the owner of Aristotle Travel. At the time, he was looking for a managing director. Dino and I had known each other since the time I was working in the Bible College, and we had worked together in various ministries. However, I had not thought of talking to him. Yet, I was wondering, what job could I do in a travel agency since I had no knowledge about the field of tourism? God, however, opened a door for me to work at Aristotle Travel. Not only that, but Dino opened his arms and heart for me, he included me in his family, and eventually he trusted me completely to manage his business.

I worked at the Aristotle Travel for about 4 years and 8 months (from January 1999 to September 2003). These were years of blessings, prosperity and travelling. It was as if God was saying to me, “You have gone through a lot and have experienced hard things, so now is the time for renewal!” I travelled to places beyond my wildest

dreams. Aristotle Travel specializes in religious tourism and collaborates with many Christian universities and churches abroad. As the leader and guide of many groups of tourists, I had the opportunity to get to know biblical places of great importance for a Christian but also of incredible beauty!

I made many visits to Israel, Egypt, Italy, the seven churches of Asia Minor in Turkey and all the biblical places in Greece. I accompanied dozens of foreign student groups and church groups on cruises to the Greek islands and elsewhere.



My dear brother in Christ, good friend, and employer, Dinos Roussos, who was sent by God to support me in a very critical period of my life.

Combining Work with Ministry: A Place of Miracles!

My life, however, was not just travelling. My dream was not just having work, money and a comfortable life. I wanted to continue to serve God, not only from the pulpit of a church, but also from a mobile “pulpit.” where I would have the opportunity to talk to people about Jesus and minister to their souls. At that point in my life, God gave me that “pulpit” through the opportunity to serve with Helping Hands, a ministry to

the refugees. This organization, in addition to providing for physical needs of refugees and others, also focused on sharing about the Savior of the whole world, Jesus Christ.

At first, I served voluntarily in my free time, and I was involved in the ministry in many different ways. Sometimes, early in the morning before I went to work, I would go to the Helping Hands center and help cook for the 400 refugees who would come later to eat. On the weekends, I would drive back and forth to the churches of Athens and other cities in Northern Greece, or to the homes of individuals, to collect their donations of food, clothing, and other things that the refugees needed.

By keeping a regular correspondence with many people, I created a network of supporters from Greece and abroad, whom I informed about the needs of the work that Helping Hands was doing for the refugees. They in turn responded with interest, prayer, and financial support. God blessed His work among the refugees, so as to meet both their physical and spiritual needs, and He opened doors for me to talk about this ministry to many of the people I met along the way.

For example, every time I went to the airport for my job with Aristotle Travel to pick up a new group of tourists, I was given a great opportunity to talk to them about the social and evangelistic work of Helping Hands. After welcoming them and giving them the necessary tourist information and instructions, I would pray to God to keep them safe and give them a beautiful stay in our country. Then I would explain to them that my job was in tourism but my ministry was to work voluntarily for the care and evangelism of the refugees and immigrants who were in Athens.

After giving my introduction regarding Helping Hands, I was frequently bombarded with questions about the refugee project and what opportunities there were to help. By the time I had driven the tourists to their hotel and before they had even gotten off the bus, many would start collecting money to fund the refugees' meals. These tourist groups would do the same at the end of their trip, just before they arrived at the airport. These tourist groups became allies and supporters, and they would frequently promise to remember us and help. By the Grace of God, this positive response was repeated with almost every group of tourists I ever led.

As the weeks and months passed, God opened new doors to support His ministry. He was always bringing people who were zealous to help. In fact, some were touched so deeply that they even changed the itinerary of their trip in order to find time to come to our center and volunteer. I especially remember one particular example, a newlywed couple who had come to spend their honeymoon in Greece, via Aristotle Travel.

When I picked up David and Joanne Hagemeyer from the airport to drive them to their hotel, we started talking about their trip and the places they would visit. As we got to know each other, they started asking questions about me. Then I told them about my ministry in the Helping Hands. They were speechless. They kept asking one question after another until we got to their hotel. Before leaving, they asked me if I could take them to the Helping Hands Center, when they would return from their seven-day tour. I gladly agreed and let them rest.

The next morning, they were scheduled to start their journey. However, after a few hours, they called me to say that they had returned to Athens because they wanted to join us at Helping Hands in serving the refugees! They told me, "As for our honeymoon, we can enjoy that another time. For now, God has put in our hearts to know up close this wonderful work that you are doing among the refugees, and we want to help." Now it was I who was speechless!

It was an incredible act. They celebrated their wedding by serving the refugees and working in our center! I could not believe it, and yet it was true. Moreover, for more than 20 years, this couple has continued supporting the Helping Hands ministry financially and in many other ways. Only God could do that in their hearts!

The above incident is just one of the many miracles I experienced while serving with Helping Hands, first as a volunteer and later as an employee. More true stories that testify about God's miraculous intervention can be found in Part 2 of this book. For now, I will mention an event that happened while I was still working at Aristotle Travel. It deeply moved me emotionally and strengthened my trust in God. I call this incident "the story of the towels."

One Monday morning I was at my office at Aristotle Travel when I received a call from a Helping Hands volunteer. He told me that we could not help with the "Showers Day" for male refugees that day because we did not have towels. Several times we lacked money or necessities and, very often, the Lord intervened in various ways and provided so as to continue His work. This time, following an inner impulse, I told this man, "Go to our center and get ready for Showers Day, and God will send us towels. Wait for me there, I'm on my way." I left the office and rushed home. I packed all my home towels except for one, for my own use, and took them to Helping Hands so that showers could begin.

The next day at the office, one of our employees came to see me, holding three large shopping bags. He left them in my office saying, "I will not be here on your birthday, so I thought of giving you your present today. It's a practical gift, I hope you like it." I opened the bags, and suddenly, tears came to my eyes. His gift was three sets of towels and a bathrobe! It was an incredible gift from God! I gave my old towels to the refugees and the Lord sent me brand new ones, through my colleague. When I told my friend who gave me the towels what happened and how God had acted through him, he cried together with me.

This miracle of the towels was not over, however. It continued! That evening, as I was praying, a brother's name and an idea came to my mind. I immediately called my dear friend Soto Boukis (who is now with the Lord) and told him, "We need 500 towels for the refugees' showers till the end of the week. Can you do something?" He replied, "I will pray and I will let you know." Three days later, he called me and said, "God works miracles! Come and get your towels!" This is the God we serve!

A New Chapter in My Personal Life!

My job was going very well, and I was completely satisfied because I was able to combine my work with traveling and volunteering at Helping Hands. However, God had another plan for my personal life. Being single for several years, I was praying to the Lord for a wife, and God brought Maria Platsidou into my life. Maria is an amazing person and a woman of great faith, the best partner I could have imagined.

By the grace of God, we got married on April 20, 2002. Since then, my life has become more beautiful and my ministry stronger. I not only have a wife, I also have a partner, a source of strength, a woman of wisdom, and a blessing from God. I want to honor her here in this book by quoting a poem I wrote about my Maria!

If our coming to earth includes
looking for our lost Atlantis,
my soul cries out loud to say:
“There is Atlantis, I found her, it is you,
dearest Maria!

Rest for my soul comes from your touch,
the flow of life from your kiss.
A shadow cool is your presence,
the breath of life is your hug.

Your companionship calms me down,
your hug enlivens me.
Your presence makes me strong,
your absence makes me miss you.

These and many other things happen
inside my living heart
because you live too!
I love you!!!!

May 27, 2004



By now I was working even harder in the travel agency and serving God among the refugees. A few months after our marriage, God brought a new upheaval into our lives. For a long time, I had been feeling that my heart was pushing me more and more to get involved full time with Helping Hands: to pay more visits to the churches to talk about the needs of the refugees, and to preach about the miracles that God was doing for them. As the numbers of the refugees and the needs of the ministry were increasing, the time I was giving to my travel agency work was decreasing. My employer, Dino Roussos, was very supportive. He even agreed for me to continue working part-time so as to have time for the ministry, but this could not be sustained for long.

At that same time, the director and founder of Helping Hands, Scott McCracken, suggested that I begin working full time for Helping Hands. This presented me with a difficult decision. After much discussion and prayer with my gracious and understanding friend and employer Dino, I agreed to take over as director of Helping Hands and gradually leave my job at the Aristotle Travel.



My Time at Helping Hands (2003 - 2020): Difficulties, Blessings and Miracles!

This decision was very difficult, first of all for financial reasons. The Board of Directors of the Helping Hands, via the then President Stavros Ignatius, had made it clear to me that, “We truly believe that you are the man for this position, but, for the time being, we can't afford paying you more than €300 per month.” I was stunned! This news started a real struggle inside me. The money I made at Aristotle Travel (salary, bonus and tips) was from €1,700 to €3,500 per month. How could I leave the security and the comfort that my well-paid job offered me and agree to work for €300? The President broke the silence and said, “But I want to tell you that God will bring a lot of money to this ministry.” Another five minutes of silence followed, as my inner struggle continued.

I was sure God had put it in my heart to work for Helping Hands, but how would the wage issue be resolved? I took a deep breath and told them, “I want a week to

discuss it with my wife, and to pray, and then I will answer you.” Finally, on September 3, 2003, I informed the Board, “Maria and I, based on our sense of God’s will, His calling, and the prophetic word of the President Stavros Ignatiou that God will bring sufficient money, say ‘YES.’ We do so with the condition that you also will be praying for us!” After we made that decision of faith, God began to perform a new series of miracles in my ministry and in my personal life!



My dear friend Scott McCracken, who inspired and founded the Helping Hands ministry. He came to Greece in 1990 with his wife Vicki, they raised 5 children and returned to their homeland, America, in 2017. From the beginning, we were very close and we worked closely together until their departure.

After deciding to give all my time to Helping Hands, an idea came to my mind. I went to my office and prayed. Then I started calling the Pastors of our Greek Evangelical churches, informing them of my new responsibility as the Director of Helping Hands and asking them to give me the opportunity to speak in their church about the work we do among the refugees. God had given me grace and, on the same day, I booked all the Sundays in my calendar from September 3, 2003 until March 16, 2004. Almost every church I visited made an offering for Helping Hands, so more and more money was raised for the ministry: September closed with €4,000, October with €6,000, November with €7,000, December with €12,000, and January with €16,000! From then on, I stopped recording God's financial blessings, but they have never stopped coming! Each year until 2020 when I retired, I witnessed God suppling miraculously for all the needs of the ministry, and I believe He continues to do so—not because of my influence—but because this is His work.

At the beginning of our marriage, Maria and I kept two apartments, one in Athens where I worked and one in Thessaloniki, where she worked. I had to travel frequently to North Greece to visit churches and collect donations, and Maria had the flexibility to work at home some days, so we spent half our time in Thessaloniki (north) and the other half in Athens (south). In 2006 we decided to move to Thessaloniki, and I began spending two weeks every month in Athens.

Because I had given up my Athens residence, Dimos and Polyxeni Boukis opened their home and hearts to host me once again. For two weeks each month, from June



God brought Dimos and Polyxeni Bouki into my life to generously offer me their love and hospitality!
I am grateful to them.

2006 until the end of 2019, I stayed with them. I truly felt at home with them, and they treated me like their own children! Even when they needed to rent a smaller apartment while their new home was being built, they made room for me. In fact, in their new house I even had my own room! They were and still are “family” to me.

A New Series of God’s Miracles in the Ministry of Helping Hands

As I was worshiping God via serving the refugees, I came to know Him as an Almighty Lord who knows how to encourage, to care for, to save, and to protect. In this

chapter I want to share some experiences of God's interventions reminiscent of the days of the Acts of the New Testament. They are all amazing but true stories that show the magnitude of God and His care for the poor, the broken, and the refugees.

God is the One Who Sends

For centuries now, Jesus has been sending us, His believers, to the whole world with a message: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The closer the time of the second coming of Jesus gets, the more urgent the Lord's command is for His faithful disciples to go to the world and preach the gospel of salvation. In the days we live in, not all of us need to go so far as to preach the gospel to the nations, because the nations have come to the western world, to our country, to our city, and to our place.

Wars in different places around the world force entire peoples to flee to our countries. These are people with many physical, social and spiritual needs, people who know nothing about the living and true Lord Jesus Christ who died for their salvation. So many people are immersed in the darkness of other religions. They pray to other gods and live in ignorance of the True God, with the delusion that if they do the right things, one day their god will receive them into Heaven. Who will open their eyes? Who will tell them the great truth? Who?

Many charitable organizations, even several ecclesiastical organizations, do very good social work, meeting the physical and psychological needs of the people they observe, but they do not speak to them about the true God. In fact, in the projects they fund, they do not allow those who want to talk about Jesus to do so. Therefore, unfortunately, many churches do wonderful social work but without sharing the gospel. As such, the question remains: Who will tell them about Jesus? Who will show them the way for their salvation and for Heaven?

Jesus made it clear to His disciples and tells us today, "Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This is what God asks us to do for those we care for and support in any way we can. If we do not do it, then we are helping to send them, in spite of being well taken care of, to Hell!

I have heard leaders of various denominations say, “But whatever we are doing for them, we do in the name of Jesus Christ and we do it with much love! This is our testimony and the cross that hangs around our neck is our evangelism.” The Apostle Paul addresses their argument when he says, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them (Rom. 10:14)?”

Really, what is the use of giving bread to a hungry refugee or immigrant if you do not also open your mouth to talk to them about the bread of Life? What good is it to give them a glass of water to quench their thirst, if you do not talk to them about the Living Water, thus depriving them the opportunity to hear and, perhaps, believe in Jesus who will quench their thirst forever? As believers, we have a tremendous responsibility. Indeed, we will be without excuse when we stand before the throne of God one day if we only care about the physical needs of the people we serve, such as the refugees and the immigrants, but hide the great truth that their greatest need is Him, the Bread of Life!

Helping Hands is one of those refugee and immigrant care ministries that meets the physical as well as spiritual needs of those who want to hear about Jesus. They sow the seed of the Gospel in the lives of the refugees and, many times, it takes root and bears the fruit of a changed life through Jesus Christ! God opens their eyes and attracts them with His love.

This happened to an Afghan woman, named “R,” who came to Athens as a refugee. She participated in all the programs and attended the Bible class with other women. While the other women had many questions about Jesus, “R” seemed to be indifferent. However, the Word of God that she heard was working in her spirit, and she was writing down questions, waiting for the right moment to ask her questions privately with one of our colleagues. Eventually, the time came when, in front of a male-dominated audience, she dared to stand up and pray—asking Jesus to come into her life!

God is the One Who Provides

In I Timothy 6:17, Paul writes, “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” None of us would have existed in life if it were not for Him, the gracious God, who knows how to care for us and provide our needs. In the long history of Helping Hands, we have had many such interventions of God. I will mention only a few examples.

At some point, with a miraculous intervention of God, the state authorities included us in the governmental grant programs and gave us four to five tons of spaghetti, rice, cheese, and other goods. Then, however, the recession time came, and these food grant distributions were greatly reduced. All the organizations and churches each received only about 882 pounds of rice, and all of them were complaining about the reduced quantities they received. When it was my turn to pick up our quantity for Helping Hands, I found that they gave me more than double—1874 pounds of rice.

Not only that, but God did something bigger. As soon as I returned to my office at Helping Hands, I got a phone call from the food distributor, who said, “Mr. Stefanidis, now that everyone is gone, please tell me how much rice you want?” “What do you mean how much I want?” I asked. “If I ask for 11 tons, will you give it to me?” He answered, “Sure, in half an hour it will be in your warehouse.” I was shocked, once again! Knowing our capacity, I asked for 4.4 tons of rice and they sent it immediately. We had no relationship with the distribution manager nor with any other political agent, but we served the living God who knows how to provide for our needs and bless us!

Another of God’s miraculous interventions came was through the toy company “Mattel.” Every Christmas we organized special programs for families where, along with their food, we were giving toys to the children—when we had toys to give. Every year as we prepared our programs, we prayed to raise the money for all the needs and especially the toys for the refugee children. Of course, we were informing the friends and supporters of Helping Hands about these needs. It never occurred to

us, however, to apply directly to toy companies for funding. My only contact with toy companies had occurred once, long ago, I had met an employee of a toy import company and told her about the ministry of Helping Hands. The years passed, and we lost touch, but God had not forgotten us!



A blind refugee from Iran confesses his faith in Christ whom he met when he came to Greece

It was December when my phone rang. A woman said, ‘Mr. Stefanidis, I am the employee of the Mattel toy company who spoke with you years ago. I want to ask you if you are still working with the refugees. If so, I have good news for you!’ The news left me—once again—speechless. She told me that Mattel wanted to help us. “First, our employees decided to donate clothes and food for your projects. Second, Mattel has decided to give you all the toys that were not sold last year! We will bring them to your warehouse to distribute to the refugee children.” Moreover, for four years, the Mattel company continued sending numerous toys to Helping Hands. We distributed them not only to "our" children, but also to other social work ministries in Athens and outside Athens. Once again, we saw the hand of our God who knows how to provide abundantly for the needs of His work!

Such incidents have happened often, and I am sure they still happen in every ministry of mercy because God our provider is always the same. He is powerful and omniscient and cares for the needs of the poor and the weak. Many times, it was as if the supporters themselves were finding us, as if someone were introducing us to

them so as to help the refugees we were serving. I will mention several more examples, which I experienced myself during the years of my work in Helping Hands.

God mobilized the company “PIZZA FUN,” who sent us over 500 pizzas every day for a week. God inspired “OPTICS Mitromara & Anastasiadis,” and for several years they made glasses free of charge for many refugees that we sent to them. God also mobilized the telephone company, Forthnet. This company supported Helping Hands with donations amounting to €5,800.



Speaking to refugees at a Christmas party, with the help of a translator

It is this kind of warm support and care from hundreds of individuals, churches, companies and organizations that has made it possible for Helping Hands to do a great social and evangelical work among the refugees over the years. Of course, as the amount of work grew, so did our needs for money and space. Eventually, the need to find a larger place to accommodate the increasing needs of the ministry had become imperative. Once again, God our Provider provided a shockingly incredible answer to our prayers.

Not having the money to buy a new property, we made it a matter of intense prayer. Beginning in May of 2014, we began to pray, “Lord, please give us a bigger space and cover the cost of the renovation, so that we will not need to spend the money that is

allocated for the ministry itself.” Almost two years passed, and there was no response to our prayer, but then in October of 2016, the miracle happened! We received an email from the family of Ioannis and Clara Pappas. They were completely unknown to us, but they had read about Helping Hands on the web. They asked, “Would it be useful for your organization if we donated the 5th floor of the building at 94 Aiolou Street? It is a total area of 722 square feet and consists of 5 offices of 131 square feet, each with its own toilet.”



Speaking to refugees on a gospel night, with the help of a translator

We were dumbfounded! God continued to work miracles, exceeding all our expectations! He gave us—completely free of charge—a property appraised for €424,075! Furthermore, God did not stop there. Answering the other part of our prayer, God provided an additional €95,000 for the notary expenses, the necessary renovation, and the equipment of the property! Finally, after many time-consuming bureaucratic procedures and renovations, the second center for Helping Hands was born, at 94 Aiolou Street. It was named “To Patriko” (that is, “the Father's house”)!

God is the One Who Protects

Deuteronomy 31: 8 says, “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” This

is our God who, with His angels, knows how to protect His people. In the 23 years that I worked among the refugees and immigrants, I got to know firsthand the dangers that this profession involves, but I also experienced the protection that God can provide for His children who serve Him. With much gratitude to Him who has protected me so many times from visible and invisible dangers and has enabled me to serve Him until now, I will mention the following events that I personally experienced.



Handing out women's shoes

A murderous attack which became a lesson of forgiveness. It was Tuesday. The program for that day with the meals and all related tasks was over. The place was cleaned. The Helping Hands team and volunteers left for their homes. At our center, only Scott McCracken (the founder of Helping Hands and a good friend and collaborator) and I stayed to finish some paperwork. We locked our office and went down the stairs to open the large barred door and leave. An Afghan refugee, Nesrola, who was coming regularly to our center, was waiting for us there.

Before we could ask him if he needed anything, his look changed, he drew a 14-inch knife, and rushed at us. I spontaneously lunged to grab his hand holding the knife, a totally foolish act because he could have turned the knife on me and stabbed me. He pushed me aside and fell on Scott to stab him. At that moment, Scott slipped and fell. Nesrola's knife scratched him on the side of his heart, and his wound was bleeding. Realizing what had happened, Nesrola started running. I ran after him with the intention to catch and kill him, thinking that he had killed Scott. (I was still not thinking clearly in the midst of this traumatic event.)

And as I was running after Nesrola, I heard Scott—still lying on the floor—shouting in English and in whatever other language he knew, “Nesrola, I love you and forgive you! God loves you too! He then called to me, “Tell him that God and I love him!” Nesrola ran away, and I was flabbergasted by Scott's reaction, which reflected so much love, grace and godly greatness.

The hospital doctors told Scott that his wound was fortunately superficial, and it healed quickly. Later, the police found Nesrola, and we never saw him again in our center. As for the two of us, not only did God save us from danger, but He also taught me a practical lesson about forgiving your enemy. Scott taught me a great lesson on forgiveness. I praise God for having protected the lives of both of us!

A fight among refugees which ended up with a miracle. Ping-pong was one of the games the refugees enjoyed playing in our center. One Friday, two Kurdish teams were playing in our little court, and two Nigerian teams were waiting for their turn to play. When the Kurds finished the game, they did not want to leave the court to the Nigerians. Thus, a fierce fight broke out, and they hit each other violently. (It was the first and last time in the history of Helping Hands that something like this happened in our center. Not that there was a lack of motives, challenges, or opportunities on other occasions, but God's grace always protected us.)

The fight escalated and someone called the Police. One of the Kurds was hit in the head, and the opponents went out to the street to resolve their differences. While I was explaining to the police officers how the fight started, the Kurds and the Nigerians split into two groups down the street, the Kurds on the left sidewalk and

the Nigerians on the right, ready to clash. They tore down the metal sidewalk bars to use them as weapons. Scott and I tried to calm them down. I was begging the Kurds to reconsider because what they were doing would harm themselves. If the Police would close our center, they would lose their meals. Scott, on the other side, was trying to calm down the Nigerians, but neither he nor I was successful.



Serving the refugees

In the midst of this pandemonium, the police officers called me back to the building for more questions. As I was talking to them, I could hear Scott shouting from the street, “Nikoooo! Niko, where are you?” When I finished addressing the police four or five minutes later, I went out in the street, and I was astonished! I saw Scott standing in the middle of the street with no one else around. Everyone had gone,

without the intervention of the police. They just left, leaving the metal bars behind. Astounded and puzzled, I asked Scott what had happened.

Scott replied, "I do not know exactly what happened. What I remember is that when I saw the two groups marching against each other, I fell to my knees in the middle of the street between them and prayed loudly in whatever language I could, asking God to intervene. I prayed with my eyes shut, until I could no longer hear any voice around. When I opened my eyes, there was no one around! Everyone was gone. Only the bars were left on the street."

We hugged each other and cried, thanking God for the miracle He had done! I will never forget that. The living Lord we served was there with us! This is the Lord I serve and will be serving at every opportunity because He is true, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent and all-encompassing!

A frontal car crash without a single injury! It was 7:00 am, and I was going to work, driving quietly on my daily route. Suddenly I saw a car coming against me at high speed. Before I could react, it crashed into my car head-on. The airbags exploded. I carefully got out of the car and saw how big the damage was, but I was untouched! I did not have a single scratch on my body, not even a muscle ache in the following days. It was the angels of God who protected me from getting hurt! In addition, God sent another "angel" to defend me in the conflict that followed regarding whose fault the accident was.

The other driver was a hunter who was in a hurry to meet his friends. The dogs he had with him were killed in the accident, and he exited his car with a significant head wound. It seems that this was his neighborhood because many of his friends gathered and declared that I caused the accident, claiming that I had driven through a red traffic light. I was one against many. I knew I was in the right, but how could I prove it? I prayed to God to protect me.

In the midst of this turmoil, a gentleman came quietly and said to me, "I was right behind you, and I saw that we both passed the traffic light when it was green. Here is my card; you can call me if you need me. I will come to court as a witness for your

defense.” Suddenly, all the onlookers, who heard this man, became silent. Eventually, the other driver had to take full responsibility for the accident, and his insurance paid the cost for the repairing. My car became as good as new!

A robbery where the angels of God prevented the worst! On Sunday, May 10, 2010, I returned from Northern Greece driving my car loaded with food and other donations for Helping Hands. I went to our Refugee Center to empty it. It was 3:00 in the afternoon. After emptying the car in the warehouse, it was time to drive home. Twenty yards meters from our center, I stopped the car at the traffic light. Before I realize what was happening, four men opened the two front doors and snatched my backpack and bag, where I had checks and €2,500 in cash for Helping Hands, identification documents, and my credit card. I was so taken by surprise that I did not think properly. I left the car alone in the middle of the street, with the keys on engine, and started running after them shouting for help. I soon lost them in the crowd of refugees and drug addicts flooding the street at that time. Fortunately, I decided that it would be too dangerous for me to get into the crowd, and I stopped chasing them. Suddenly, I remembered that I had left the car unlocked and with the engine still running, and I realized that I might have lost the car too! I turned and ran back, panicked with the idea. From far away, I saw that it was where I left it. When I approached, I saw two elderly ladies standing by my car and watching over it. “We tried to warn you that they were coming to rob you,” they told me, “but you had the windows closed and you could not hear us shouting. When we saw you running after them, we stayed here to protect your car from being stolen.” I thanked them and without thinking I said, “You are the angels of God who were sent to watch over my car for me!”

After parking the car, I went back to the place of the robbery. A refugee who knew me from Helping Hands approached me and said, “I know where they are going to open the bags they are stealing.” I was about to go to the place he pointed out, when—fortunately—a municipal employee who worked nearby came to me and said, “It is very dangerous to go there alone, I will come with you.” He was right, so, we went together to the abandoned building that was used as a hideout by the local thieves. We found my bag and the checks burned. They took the money, of course,

and my ID, but they left my credit card, my driver's license and other documents. I praised God for sending His angels to help me: the two ladies, the refugee, and the municipal employee. Above all, I praised Him for sparing my life and my car!

An accident, a surgery and a miracle! November 27, 2007 was a busy day for our Helping Hands center. In the morning we distributed food to over 1,000 refugees, and in the afternoon we continued with giving away men's clothes. We prepared the dining room tables for placing the displaying the clothes, so that when the refugees entered, they could choose the clothes they needed. The clothes were new, donated by a sportswear import company. There were many items, and there would be enough for everyone. In the announcement we made, we had made it clear that there would be clothes for everyone, and we asked them not to rush or push each other so as to prevent accidents from happening.

Sadly, it was as if we had told them the opposite. Long before the designated time, more than 400 men had gathered in our front gate pushing each other. Four men of our team went downstairs, trying to have them form a line, and I opened the barred gate asking them in my loud voice to go up the stairs cautiously.

It was as if they had heard nothing. They all rushed to climb the stairs to enter the dining room first. On their rush, they threw me down, and I fell with my back to the stairs, while the horde of refugees trampled me as if I were part of the stairs. I shouted for them to stop but no one heard. Their mind was only on the clothes they wanted to get. A refugee who saw me lying down under their feet started shouting at the others, and the stampede finally stopped. A hand reached and helped me get up. However, I was badly injured by the fall and trampling on the stairs. One of the discs in my spine broke between the second and third vertebrae. Over the months, the pain grew, and my walking became more and more difficult and very painful. For six months, I suffered greatly and visited one doctor after another, until a friend referred me to a team of specialized neurosurgeons at St. Luke's Clinic. When they examined me, they said I needed surgery. The pain would stop after the surgery, but the possibility of a disability was not ruled out. "Time will tell after the surgery," they told me.

The operation was performed on June 6, 2008, and the result was amazing. The surgeons did their best, and I believe God used them so I could walk with no pain any more, praise the Lord! I believe that God by His grace intervened to protect me from the worst and healed me.

The aneurysm broke but God saved me! It was December 13, 2018. Three days before I had returned from Athens, after a heavy couple of weeks of Christmas programs at Helping Hands. As Maria and I were relaxing in the evening, I felt a severe stomach upset. I vomited a few times, and I saw that there might have been some blood. I was temporarily relieved, and we waited to see how my condition would develop the next day. The next morning, however, I woke up very early and was not feeling well.

I got up with the urge to vomit again, and while in the bathroom, I fainted. Maria woke up from the thump of my body falling down. When I came my senses, I vomited a lot, including a great deal blood. Maria called our neighbor who is an ambulance driver, and he "happened" to be on duty at that time! He came immediately with the ambulance crew, and they took me to the hospital. I remember that, while in the ambulance, I was talking to God and feeling totally calm, and I was saying to Him, "Lord, I am coming, please take care of my Maria."

Amazingly, we arrived from our home in Pylea at the Papageorgiou hospital in six minutes, a mere fraction of the time it would normally take by car! When I woke up in the hospital bed after the operation, the doctors told me that an aneurysm in my upper abdomen had broken and that if I had been late, I might have died. Great and wonderful is the Lord who permitted me to stay here on earth! That day, I did not know why the Lord kept me alive, but I believed that He has a good purpose that He would show to me at some point, on earth or in Heaven! Already, I have seen ways that God has continued using me in his service since that time, and I am grateful!

Temporary Farewells of My Family

I want to close the first part of my life story with a brief reference to my loved ones who have left this world and now are with the Lord. In this way, I want to honor them and thank God for letting me be part of their lives. All of them played an

important role in my life, along with my dear brothers Dimitris and Stefanos Stefanidis and their families.

- On March 8, 2004, my mother Eftychia Stefanidou passed away, at the age of 84.
- On March 8, 2013, my father Anastasios Stefanidis passed away, at the age of 104.
- On June 7, 2018, my brother George Stefanidis passed away, at the age of 75.
- On August 7, 2018, Georgios Platsidis, Maria's father passed away at the age of 87.

I lovingly remember them as I waiting to meet them again in Heaven!

PART 2

STORIES OF MIRACLES IN THE LIVES OF REFUGEES

The last words of Jesus Christ to His disciples were to entrust them with the great mission, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto the whole world. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, and whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16: 15-16). Since then, God has gathered His people from every nation, race, and language. Nowadays and globally, the Lord works especially among the Muslim refugees and immigrants. Throughout all these years, with every opportunity I have had to speak to churches and individuals about Helping Hands, I have had the privilege and the joy of sharing many true stories of Muslims’ conversion to Christ. They are testimonies of people that either I met personally or a member of our team met. In what follows, I will report some stories of miracles as a legacy to every reader, in order to strengthen your courage, trust, and faith in Christ the Savior. As incredible as these stories sound, I guarantee that they are absolutely true. After all, our God is a God of miracles, through which He reveals Himself to us!

An Iranian Family that "Must Be True Christians"

A typical Iranian family, albeit a small one, was visiting our center: a father, a mother and two children. Like every other family, they came to get food and clothes, to bathe, and to participate in our various programs. In the process, they were deeply touched by the love of God and followed Him with all their hearts, surrendering

themselves to His sovereignty. While they were with us in Athens, they did not stop talking to their countrymen about Jesus and leading others to meet Him. Unable to obtain residence papers in Greece, they decided to leave for Norway. We said goodbyes with prayer and provided them with recommendation letters.

A month later, they called us from Norway and said, “We arrived well, and we want to tell you that—in the refugee center where we were assigned—we met a lot of refugees who know Helping Hands because they passed through Athens. We talked to them about God, and many accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. We went to a local church and asked the Pastor to give us a room to hold our gatherings. He told us that he would gladly do it. In fact, he wants us to sing a hymn every Sunday in their own worship!”

Their story has a sequel. Two months later, a lady visited me in my office. She was a senior executive of the Norwegian Embassy in Athens. She showed me a file containing all the paperwork of this family's asylum application and asked me to confirm if it was genuine. As I was looking at the documents, she asked me, “Do you think they are true Christians?” I replied, “If they are not Christians, then neither you nor I are Christians,” and I explained to her how much their lives had changed since they believed in Christ while they were with us. After we talked for quite some time, she got up to leave. Then, she stopped at the doorway, paused, looked at me, and said, “They must be true Christians.” I asked her, “Why do you say that?” She answered, “Because in every refugee camp where they were placed while in Norway, they helped others to become Christians!”

How wonderfully God works! He brought a family from Iran to Greece and He changed their lives. Then He sent them to Norway, and there, by confessing His name, they helped others believe in Him too. Their testimony reached even a government official, who confessed, “They must be true Christians.” All glory belongs to God, and I thank Him for the honor of making me part of the process of saving souls, as well as anyone who supports His work in every way.

Forgiving Even Your Enemies

“N” was born in Afghanistan. His father was a military pilot. His own life was comfortable, but his country was in a civil war. The Taliban were gaining more and more power. One day, when he was 9 years old, “N” went to visit his grandfather in a city far from his own. While he was away, one night, the Taliban invaded his family home and killed his father, his two brothers and his mother who was pregnant. He was left alone.

Growing up, “N” was full of hatred against the Taliban and promised to avenge the death of his family. At the age of 18, he set out for Europe with the aim of gaining power to avenge the murderers, but God had other plans for him. Here in Greece, the Lord used other refugees who had believed in Christ to speak to Him about God’s forgiving and liberating love. Soon, “N” believed and gave his life to Christ.

God changed his heart and filled it with love even for his enemies! He did not keep this experience to himself, but began to share it with other Afghans. Now he set a goal to return to his homeland and talk about Christ to his people. He wanted to start a Christian church in the capital Kabul. For now, he is married and lives in America with his family, where he continues to talk about God's love. He and his wife have started a home church with Afghans.

Two Girlfriends Who Became Sisters in Christ

“M” and “S” have been good friends since they were in their homeland, Afghanistan. They each got married in the same village. “S” had two children, three and six years old. Their husbands decided to leave for Europe, looking for a place away from the fear of the Taliban. They started their journey while both wives were pregnant. Their traffickers led them to Iran and then to Turkey. There, “S” heard the gospel, believed in Jesus Christ, and was baptized. This did not happen for “M,” but the two still remained close friends. They traveled together in Greece and, at some point, they visited Helping Hands. “S” started going to the Afghan “Church of Love,” which was planted by Afghans who believed in Jesus and were disciplined by staff at Helping Hands.

One night, “M” had a dream. She saw a long corridor with many doors. She was lost and did not know where to go and which door to open. Then a man appeared, whom she recognized as Jesus. He opened a door and invited her in to follow Him. At that moment she woke up!

After this experience, she started attending the Bible class in Helping Hands, and she went to the Afghan “Church of Love” with her friend, “S.” Still, she was not yet ready to follow Jesus. When the time came for the summer camp, which was attended by refugee women we served during the year, we invited “M” to come. There she had the opportunity to learn more about Jesus, to ask questions and get answers, to hear the testimonies of other women who believed in Jesus and spoke of how He changed their lives.

Eventually, she decided to give her life to Jesus. On the last day of the camp, she was baptized. (In the same camp, three other former Muslims were baptized, after giving their testimony in public!) The two beloved friends now became sisters in Christ.

Jesus Visits an Iranian Prisoner

Daniel from Iran heard the gospel for the first time when he was in Turkey, on his way to Greece. One Sunday, along with other friends, he visited a Christian church. That morning his friends believed in Jesus, but Daniel did not. He was preoccupied with many questions for which he could not find answers in Islam. After his first contact with the gospel in Turkey, he continued his trip to Europe, and he eventually arrived in Greece.

While in Athens, Daniel was arrested and imprisoned. In prison, he had a vision of Jesus saying to him, “Follow me!” Unable to comprehend what this meant, he began to pray to Jesus for help. After his release, he began looking for other Iranians who were Christians, and eventually he came to Helping Hands for help. There he met our Iranian teammate who was in charge of the Persian Christian Fellowship. He spoke to Daniel about the love and grace of God and about the salvation of every soul who believes in Jesus.

Unfortunately, Daniel was arrested and imprisoned again. There in prison, God again spoke to him in a dream. This time, Daniel prayed and called Jesus into his life. As soon as he was released, he came to Helping Hands and shared his experience with us. He did not remain a secret disciple of Jesus but began to publicly confess his faith in Christ and to be actively involved with the Iranians sharing the gospel.

A Restless Young Man Seeks the Truth and Finds It!

Arian was a Kurd from northern Iraq. His father was an Imam (the Muslim equivalent of a priest or pastor) in the mosque of his village. From a very young age, Arian rebelled against Islam and the way of life it imposed. He joined the Communist Party and became actively involved in politics. Because he was a restless spirit and was searching for the meaning of life, however, he soon became disappointed as he saw through the vanity of political promises and political systems. Thus, he abandoned politics, but he did not return to Islam.

While still in Kurdistan, he met some Kurdish Christians. At first he made fun of them, but slowly he started asking them questions and became interested in learning more about Jesus, the Bible, and Christianity. The seed of Truth had been planted in Arian's heart, but it did not take root right away.

Like so many others, Arian sought a better life in the West, and he left Kurdistan. On his way to Europe, he arrived in Greece, where the Holy Spirit had prepared other Kurdish believers to water the seed of the gospel with their own testimony and prayer. In Athens, Arian continued his search for Jesus and the Truth.

Eventually, the time came when Arian realized that Jesus had led a consistent life and had practiced all that He taught. Arian understood that, for the salvation of the soul, Jesus did not establish a number of religious laws and practices. Rather, He offered His life so that anyone could find salvation through His grace. Thus, Arian—with faith and repentance—asked Jesus to come into his life and become his Lord. The Lord told us, "Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7: 8), and Jesus kept this promise regarding Arian, who had consistently been looking for Him.

“What Is It that Makes Christians to Love and Serve the Foreigner?”

Ahmed from Afghanistan knew nothing about Christianity. Although he believed in God since he was a child, he was never interested in learning anything about Him. The same indifference characterized him even after he came to Greece in October 2007. He began coming to Helping Hands for food, bathing, washing clothes, and companionship. Gradually, however, he was drawn to the love he saw in the lives and behavior of the believers.

Ahmed saw Christians cooking for the refugees, washing their clothes and in many other ways serving them without having any personal gain. Realizing this shocked him greatly, and he wanted to know who this Jesus is who could change people to be so loving. At the same time, he had problems with his residency papers in Greece and sought the help of Pisro, a refugee who had become a Christian two years earlier and was volunteering at the Helping Hands. Ahmed began to ask him questions about Jesus and Christianity, while at the same time, he continued to observe the lives of the Christians who readily served so many foreigners with patience and compassion. Ahmed wanted to know more and more about Jesus and kept talking with Pisro for days. Eventually, Jesus' love prevailed, and Ahmed accepted Him as His Savior and Lord. In August 2008, he publically shared his testimony of his conversion to Jesus and was baptized.

The Lord Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The practical love of the Christians who let their lights shine attracted the formerly indifferent Ahmed to Jesus and changed his life!

A Teen Confesses with Emotion, “No One Has Ever Cried for Me.”

Helping Hands is a place to host people with many needs. Some needs we can meet, for others we can only pray. In every way, we try to show God's love and care for each person. Scott McCracken, the founder of Helping Hands, described the following incident as he experienced it:

One Friday in 2010, I met “H,” a 15-year-old Afghan, who had come to Athens three to four months before, and since then he had been sleeping in the park at night. That day he was sitting alone in our center. When he saw me approaching him, he pulled a chair for me. I sat by him and noticed that his eyes were full of tears. He didn’t talk to me for a long time. Finally, in a trembling voice, he said, “Why does my family not want to talk to me? My own mother and siblings do not talk to me and hang up the phone every time I call them. Why have they rejected me?”

We talked for a while without it becoming clear why his family was holding this attitude. Eventually, I asked him if he would like me to pray for him, and he accepted my offer. I took his hands in mine and prayed to the Lord. As I was praying with compassion for “H,” we both began to cry over his condition, as I asked God for mercy. When we finished, I saw a smile on his face, and he thanked me. On that day, he went for the first time to the Bible class for those who were interested in learning about Jesus. The next day he came up to me, hugged me and said, “Scott, I want to thank you for what you did for me yesterday.” “But I did absolutely nothing,” I told him. “H” replied, “You cried for me, and that was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. Nobody has ever cried for me!” For a long time, our prayer for him was to meet Jesus Christ personally, but only in Heaven will we know what happened.

The Journey of “P” from Afghanistan to Greece and to Christ

Every refugee who comes to our center has a dramatic, personal story. For “P” that history was full of pain, like that of many women living in Afghanistan under the Taliban's rule. One day, when she was little, “P” heard gunshots near her family’s house. She and her brother ran to the window to look outside. At that moment, a bullet hit her brother in the head, and he died in front of her eyes.

A few days later, the Taliban arrested and tortured her mother for going to the market without being escorted by a man. Shortly afterwards, the Taliban stabbed and robbed her father, who eventually died. Then, her mother took her children and

fled to Iran, as many Afghans did at the time who were being persecuted by the Taliban regime.

Time passed, and "P" grew up, married, and had three children in Iran. Because they were Afghans, her children could not go to school and her husband could not find work. Thus, they decided to go to Europe to give their children a chance for a better life. One night, "P" and her family rode horses and traveled for 13 hours straight, until they approached the borders of Iran with Turkey. Before the border, they hid in a truck carrying sheep, full of worry about how they would cross the borders. For some reason, however, the guards let the truck go without checking it. In Turkey they stayed for a few hours in a small apartment and then were picked up by another truck that was suffocatingly full of refugees.

The following day, they arrived in a small coastal village. The traffickers put "P" with her family and another family in a room and locked them in. There was some cheese and bread in the kitchen and nothing else to eat. They feared that they would be held captive or sold as slaves. Three days later, the traffickers took them to a forest near the coast. They waited in silence until it got dark. Because of the fatigue and the mosquitoes, the children cried and the traffickers pressured the mother to drug them so that they would not betray them.

When it finally got dark, the traffickers took them to the beach where a small rubber boat was waiting for them. It was big enough to hold eight to ten people, but the traffickers brought another 40! None of the passengers knew how to paddle or swim. The traffickers told them not to worry because they would be with them, but when they were about 100 meters away from the shore, they jumped out of the boat and abandoned them in the sea. The boat started to make circles without anyone being able to navigate it. After 12 hours of suffering and terror, they saw a Greek island from afar. As they approached the shore, their boat sank, and they fell into the water. Fortunately, it was quite shallow and they were able to walk to the seaside. Amazingly, they were all saved.

"P" remembers the police guiding them to go through the passport control. Then they put them on a bus and took them to the island's airport. There they were put

on a plane to Athens. When they arrived, the police took them to the center of Athens and set them free. Once again, they felt despair. They did not know what to do, who to talk to, or what language to use. Eventually, they found some of their compatriots living in Athens who took them to an apartment. Out of fear, "P" and another Afghan woman who was with her did not leave their apartment until some people told them about Helping Hands. Then, they ventured out and came to us to get clothes. Soon, "P" was attracted by the love and acceptance she found in Helping Hands. She started coming regularly and was hearing the gospel, about Jesus and salvation. Thus, "P" was led from Afghanistan to Greece and to her acquaintance with Jesus Christ, to whom she finally gave her heart and faith!

The Question that Changed Fatima's Life

Fatima grew up in a privileged family in Iran. Her father had great power in religious and political circles, and her husband was a senior government official. She herself was studying medicine. At university, she was required to attend classes on Islam, like all students in her country. Fatima was a devout Muslim. Her "disastrous" mistake was that she asked questions that she should not have asked.

In one of the Islam lessons, she asked a question that would change her life forever. She asked the theological professor, "Why do Muslims become so angry and kill other Muslims when they become Christians? Why don't people have the right to investigate and choose without fear of being executed?" Immediately, she was removed from the classroom, taken to the director's office, and the religious police were summoned. She was interrogated for many hours on the charge that she was a Christian. She insisted that she was not a Christian but a devout Muslim and asked them to talk to her father. When they found out who her father was, they let her go.

A few hours later, her husband came running home and told her they had to leave the country at once! Someone at work said he had heard government people say they would catch her and kill her. They said that not even her father would be able to save her. Thus, that same night, they left Iran for Turkey.

In Turkey, Fatima found a Christian church speaking her language (Farsi) and began to visit it. She sought to discover who this Christ was, given that she had been forced to leave her country simply because of asking questions about Him. She recalled her final days in her home country:

At first, everything seemed like a big joke, but very quickly it turned into a nightmare. The irony of the matter is that the Religious Police and the political forces were so angry because they thought I had become a Christian, even though I had always been very faithful to Islam. I just asked a question! But their actions pushed me to learn about Christ and to discover Him and finally to become a Christian!

At that church, a few months later, Fatima and her husband believed in Jesus and accepted Him into their lives. They continued their journey, and when they arrived in Greece, they started going to an Iranian church in Athens.

A 12-year-old Afghan Girl Gives Her Heart to Christ

Znav came to Greece with her parents and her 17-year-old brother. In early 2016, her father believed in Jesus. After a while, her mother believed, and her brother followed, but Znav was hesitant. She observed how her parents and brother were living and behaving in new ways, and this surprised her but also motivated her to learn why these changes could have taken place. She began reading the gospel and attending sermons at the Afghan Congregation. Still, she was not convinced.

Months passed and, in the summer, the whole family went to the family camp organized by the Helping Hands in collaboration with other ministries. There, she made the big decision. She prayed and gave her heart to Jesus! On the last day of the camp, she was baptized along with her mother, her brother and 4 other refugees. In her confession shortly before she was baptized, she said, "Ever since my father came to believe in Christ, I have been watching his life and wanting to know more about Jesus who has changed him so much. After several weeks of studying the New Testament and listening to God's Word, I decided to invite Jesus to come into my life. And I pray that one day Jesus will use me to speak about Him."

Many Iranians Come to Christ

At one of the Christmas programs in December 2015, we hosted over 170 refugees, including men, women and children. As soon as we opened the door and the refugees started coming, we saw an Iranian woman with her children going straight to our colleague who was talking on the microphone at the time and giving instructions to the refugees about the night program. This Iranian woman tried to take the speaker's microphone to say something.

Assuming that this woman wanted to complain about something, our colleague called for me to intervene. I approached the Iranian woman and asked her to sit at a table with me to talk. Then I asked her, "What do you want? How can I help you?" She stood up and said to me, "I am a Muslim and you are a Protestant, and I want to be like you!" Surprised, I repeated her words, saying, "You are a Muslim and I am a Protestant?" She enthusiastically replied, "Yes! Yes! Can I be like you?" With some disbelief I asked her, "Do you mean that you are a Muslim and I am a Christian?" "YES," she replied. Then I asked her, "Are you saying that you want to become a Christian like me?" Ignoring all that was going on around us, she jumped up and shouted loudly, "Yes, I want to be a Christian! Can I become a Christian right now? Can I? Can I become a Christian?"

I asked her to sit down and invited two women from our group to sit at the table with her as the volunteers began serving food. However, she did not want to eat, and she persisted with her requests. Then our female team members invited her and her children to go to the office to talk quietly. As soon as they got up, the Iranian lady pointed to a couple of other Iranians sitting at the same table, saying, "Can they come too? They also want to become Christians. They heard about Jesus in a house church in Iran but feared for their lives and had stopped going, but they want to become Christians today!" During the ensuing discussion, these other Iranians said, "We have heard about Jesus in Turkey, but we were in a hurry on the trip to Europe and did not have time to learn more. But we have to become Christians today."

That day, four Iranian refugees received Jesus as the Savior and Lord of their lives. As soon as they left the office and came to the main hall, our Iranian sister picked up

the microphone and boldly announced to the other refugees, "I have accepted Jesus into my heart today, and I know where I will go when I die. From today I am a Christian!" What courage, what daring this single Iranian woman showed by saying publicly that she now belonged to Christ!

Still, God had not yet completed His plan. Before the end of the day, in another room, "D," a young Afghan brother led three more Iranians to Jesus! A few days later, in another Christmas program, two more women and their husbands were dedicated to Jesus. That year, a total of 11 refugees were prepared by God during their journey to Europe, and we at Helping Hands were simply the reapers. Four Sundays later, in one of the churches of Athens, they all publicly gave their confessions and were baptized.

The Salvation of a Deaf Iranian

The Hellenic Refugee Council, with which we worked closely, sent us "E," an Iranian refugee, to give him clothes and food and to allow him to shower. "E" was deaf and could not easily communicate. An Iranian woman who "just so happened" (by God's grace!) to know sign language (because both her parents were deaf) offered to accompany him to our center. There, God used Nadir—our faithful Iranian partner and head of our Persian Fellowship—to act as a catalyst in this man's life. Nadir described his experience as follows:

At first I did not understand that he could not speak, until I saw the Iranian lady speaking with him in sign language. Then my heart was filled with joy because I thought, "There is a way to talk to him about the saving grace of Jesus." With the help of the Iranian lady, we talked for over an hour. He asked many questions, and I had the opportunity to explain God's wonderful plan to him and to invite him to give his heart to Jesus. He absorbed everything he was reading in the signs and on the lips of his Iranian assistant. Everything was new to him. No one had ever told him about Jesus or Islam! He agreed to pray with me. As the Iranian lady translated my prayer, he answered in sign language, accepting Jesus into his heart!

How wonderful is our God! He works in ways we cannot imagine! It was God who brought this man to the Greek Refugee Council. It was God who prepared the woman from Iran who spoke sign language, and God sent her there at the right time! It was God who led the Council official to send this man to our center. He was and is the God who put us there, a door open for evangelism, and it is God who saves people, even despite communication difficulties, like our brother "E" from Iran!

"Nothing Will Stop Me from Loving Jesus."

Mernavaz was a 23-year-old man from Iraq. He grew up in a family of devoted Muslims where he was taught that he should pray every day according to the laws of Islam. He says:

It was my habit to wash my hands and face and to pray every morning before the others got up. It was a Friday morning in 2003 in Bam, Iran, where we were staying. I got up early to wash, before the morning prayer. As soon as I turned on the tap, I felt a strong shaking under my feet and the earth began to tremble. I turned around and saw the earth opening and swallowing everything. Our house disappeared, and my family inside was buried along with 40,000 other people. I was left alone!

I went to Afghanistan with some of my surviving relatives. There, under the pressure of my relatives, I got married and had a baby girl. But things were difficult, and I had to leave my wife and child behind and go to Europe. That is how I arrived in Athens.

Arriving in Greece, the first thing that caught my attention was the cross I saw in every church building. An inexplicable emotion filled my heart. A desire was born in me to learn about Christianity. I visited the Persian Christian Fellowship twice and I got a Bible. My uncles strictly forbade me to go back to the Persian Fellowship, but they could not stop me from reading the Bible. For two years, when everyone was asleep, I would read the Bible with a flashlight under my blanket. That's how I learned about Jesus Christ. On the night of Monday, January 31, 2006, I had a dream. In it,

a man came and said to me, “You must be born again from above.” I took courage and came back to Helping Hands to help me understand what it means to be “born from above.”

Nadir and our teammates explained to him what this meant, and the following Sunday at the Persian Fellowship, he stood up boldly and prayed, asking Jesus to save him. Nadir asked him, “Now that you have become a Christian, are you not afraid of your uncles?” Mernavaz replied, referring to the final judgement, “If I deny my Jesus today, that [last] day my uncles will not be able to save me.”

On Sunday, April 30, 2006, he publicly confessed his faith to a Greek church and was baptized. However, one of his cousins who lived with him found out. That morning, after getting up very early, this cousin boiled water and threw it on the Mernavaz while he was still asleep, to punish him and prevent him from going to church. The hot water caused him severe burns on his arm and thighs. Screaming in pain, Mernavaz got out of the house, and his relatives locked the doors behind him. With Nadir's help, he went to the hospital. There he begged the doctors to treat him quickly and let him go to church. Finally, he managed to arrive at church on time, and when it was his turn to speak, he got up and simply said, “No matter what they do to me, they cannot stop me from loving Jesus!”

Jesus Calls His Child, “Follow Me!”

“Nh” from northern Iraq was a Marxist, whereas his father was a fanatical Muslim. In their discussions, “Nh” often argued against the existence of God. The way God acted in the life of “Nh” brings to mind the words of the prophet Joel who wrote, “The Lord also says: After these things I will give to every man according as my spirit richly gives. So your sons and daughters will preach my message, your elders will see divine dreams, and your young people visions.” “Nh” described his life change as follows:

I left Iraq for many reasons and went to Iran, and after a year, I moved on to Pakistan. In my attempt to make my life better, I took the road to Europe and arrived in Greece. Ten days after my arrival in Athens, I became

seriously ill. My roommates tried to help me by bringing me medicine, but nothing helped. I could not eat or drink and shivered from the fever, and I was going worse and worse.

On the seventh day, while I was in bed, I had a dream. I heard a voice say, "Open your eyes and look up." In my dream, I opened my eyes and looked up. I saw someone standing dressed in white, surrounded by a glow. He told me, "If you want to get well, you have to follow me." He showed me a beautiful garden and said, "If you want to walk in this garden, then you must follow me." I asked him, "Who are you? What is your name?" He replied, "There is no other name in Heaven by which one can be saved, except mine. Whatever you have, leave it now and follow me." He said many more things to me and, in the end, he put his hand on my head and said, "May my peace be with you," and he disappeared. I immediately woke up crying—not out of sadness or pain—but with peace and joy in my heart.

Full of questions I woke up my roommates and told them my dream, but no one could explain to me what it meant. An Iraqi friend told me to go to Helping Hands. He said that I might find some Christians to help me. Thus, I came here, and I asked you to help me understand who that man was and what he meant when he said, "follow me?" I wanted to know what this dream meant.

Our Iranian colleague, Nadir, along with others of our team sat down with "Nh" and, opening the Bible, they read to him the words he had heard in his dream. Until then "Nh" had never read the Bible! After answering his questions, they prayed with him, they gave him a Bible, and "Nh" left as a new man. In fact, he took another Bible with him to give to his friends. The next day, he brought two of his friends to Helping Hands to hear about Jesus, and he brought two more the following Sunday. "Nh" had never read the Word of God but the living Word Himself, Jesus Christ, was presented to him to open his spiritual eyes! This is the Lord we worship as we serve His people.



Iranian believers sing and confess their faith in Jesus in the Greek Evangelical Church of Nicaea, Athens



One of the many baptisms of refugees who came to know Christ as their personal Savior

Epilogue

My attempt to compile just a few of the miraculous stories I have experienced in my life in this book was motivated solely by my desire to give glory to God and show my gratitude to the Lord who has worked miracles in my life. Also, my intention was to encourage everyone who reads it, especially my dear relatives and friends, to help illustrate that our God is good, faithful, and always present in our lives, whether we feel it or not. He is the one who continues to attract people from every place on earth in order to complete the building of His temple, His Church, so that Jesus may come to take us to be with Him for eternity. He is the one who sent a poor child like me from a small village in Kozani to the other side of His world to study in America, and He called me to His service. He is the One who gathers His children from every people, race, and language, even those on the refugee highways, and He reveals Himself to them. He is our hope in this life and in the next, eternal life!