

## 7 Changing Hearts in Europe

### Reaching Out

*"Who's that? I've never seen him before."  
Mike was the boy who always noticed what was going on with the other kids in school. It could have been because he was new in school not too long before.*

*"I hear his name is Fred," replied Dale, "and that his family just moved here from out of state. Maybe we should ask him to eat lunch with us." Dale was a little bit shy, but willing to get to know new people.*

*Mike looked doubtful. "I don't know. Let somebody else talk to him."*

*"But don't you remember how it was when you first moved here, Mike?" asked Dale. "You just sat by yourself at a table. If I hadn't come to talk to you, you might still be sitting alone. Let's go meet the new kid and help him get used to being here."*

*"Yeah," said Mike, "it's worth a shot. He might turn out to be a good friend!"*

Have you ever wished for someone to come and introduce himself or herself to you? Have you ever sought out a new person at your school and helped him or her get used to the new setting? It can be difficult to reach out to others. It can be especially difficult to reach out with the Good News of Jesus and salvation. But He promises to be with us when we do.

### The Background of Christian Missions to Europe

In the 300s and 400s, the Roman Empire began to collapse. Because Christianity was now the official religion of the empire, many people feared that with the fall of Rome, the church also would decline. But even as the political government decreased, God blessed the church with a period of expansion into northern Europe. In the areas of what we now call France, Germany,

Great Britain, and Eastern Europe, missionaries carried the Good News about Jesus Christ to people who had not yet heard of Him.

Clovis, King of the Franks (in what is now France), was one of the first northern kings to become a Christian. After defeating the Roman armies and making their lands his own, he was exposed to the Christian Gospel by his wife and other witnesses. During a losing battle, he appealed to Christ to help him. The battle turned, and he won. After instruction in the faith, he came to believe the Gospel and, on Christmas Day in 496, he was baptized, along with 3,000 members of his army.

Unfortunately, Clovis did not work hard to convert his subjects. Other rulers, however, did provide a good example to the people under their leadership. Both Ethelbert of Kent and Edwin, King of Northumbria (in what is now England), allowed Roman missionaries into their territories and were, in turn, converted by the message they preached.



### St. Patrick, "Apostle of the Irish"

The effectiveness of Christian outreach in England was in large part due to the efforts of one of Christianity's most famous missionaries, Patrick of Ireland (c. 390–c. 460). Born in Britain to a Roman family, Patrick was captured and sold into slavery and transported to Ireland when he was about 16 years old. During his captivity, the Holy Spirit strengthened his faith. Patrick said that if he were set free, he would become a Christian minister.

After a six-year captivity, Patrick escaped and returned home a different person. He was determined to offer his life to God, who had freed him from slavery. He became a priest and eventually returned to Ireland and helped establish Christianity as the main religion of that country. Ireland later became one of the chief sources of missionaries for all of Europe.

### Other Mission Efforts

Building on Patrick's beginnings were other missionaries such as Columba and Columbanus. Beginning in the mid-500s, they sent many missionaries into Scotland, England, and, eventually, the European continent itself. Wynfrith (St. Boniface) proclaimed Jesus Christ to the Saxons in what is now Germany. Boniface amazed the people of Germany when he cut down an oak tree supposedly sacred to the Teutonic god Thor. When Boniface was not struck dead as they expected, many were converted. Boniface used the wood from the tree to construct a chapel. In Eastern Europe, the brothers Cyril and Methodius took the Gospel to the Slavic people and helped to set the stage for converting Russians to Christianity.

Public preaching, worship services, Christian liter-

ature, and personal conversation carried the message of Christ crucified and risen well beyond the boundaries of Palestine and Rome. Through humble people, God changed the course of human history in ways that continue to affect us in the present. The lives of earlier missionaries provide us with heroic examples of how we might also dedicate ourselves to God's mission.

### Things to Think About

1. Define the chief goal and mission of the Christian church. See Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:14–16.

2. Why is the work of missionaries so important?

3. How did the decline of Rome change the direction of the church?

4. Does our country need missionaries sent to it? Why?

5. In what ways can each of us play a part in the ongoing mission of the church?

### Did You Know?



The Chi-Rho symbol, which uses the first two letters of the word *Christ* in Greek, was commonly used in early Christian art.

### To Review and Remember

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. *Acts 1:8*