

# Chapter 38

# Spain

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Over 48 million people live in Spain, and they all need the gospel. There is freedom to preach the much-needed message of salvation and many great locations at which to do so!

After a brutal civil war followed by many years of dictatorship, Spain is now a modern democracy and one of the most enthusiastic members of the European Union. The Catholic Church, closely identified with the Franco regime, has lost much of its privileged position and many members. However, most have turned to secularism, and some to cults.

There is encouragement for evangelicals in the turning to Christ of one-third of all Gypsies in the country (part of a Europe-wide movement of God among this people group), along with the effective work of several Christian agencies in reaching and rehabilitating some of the significant number of Spanish drug users. In the past twenty-five years, many immigrants from around the world, especially Nigeria, Romania, and Latin America, have arrived, including a significant proportion of evangelicals. It has been challenging to integrate these into the established church culture, so many have set up their own churches. But if the churches once looked foreign because of a missionary pastor, the reality of so many immigrant believers has made it even more challenging to reach native Spaniards, though the number of believers in the country has multiplied.



KORKY DAVEY

In 1978, OAC UK staff member Korky Davey conducted ongoing open-air outreach in the town of Bath. This attracted great interest from Spanish pastors who were on holiday in England. As a result, Korky, his wife, Anni, along with their two young children went on a camping holiday. They drove around Spain visiting churches, and as Korky relates it, "...getting no response at all! In the last few days, I met up with a chap named Chris Mathieson in Sabadell, where he was teaching English. He came to Bristol for training the following

year, having previously completed a degree in Spanish and Catalan at Bristol University. Then, we met a Christian who was the director of the cleaning team at Madrid Airport. That afternoon, around 2 p.m., he took us out to a small dormitory town just north of Madrid, where there was a town square, and we held the first Spanish open-air meeting. We had a tremendous argument about where to put the

sketchboard, with quite loud voices, because I knew where to set it - and so did he – at opposite sides of the square! So, we were determinedly walking backward and forwards with the board, and eventually compromised on a site midway between the two. Our noise attracted a lot of attention from people in the surrounding flats, who had been trying to enjoy a quiet siesta. We ended up with a crowd of 400 people! This widely publicized event led to an invitation to speak at the missions conference in Madrid. Later that year, we found ourselves heading up open-air evangelism on the summer missions for several different American missions agencies, including the Billy Graham Association (John Blake), and World Team (Jim Reed) for several years.”

Chris Mathieson and his wife, Hilde, have been responsible for developing the work in Spain since 1982. During the early years, the emphasis was on training local churches and conducting short-term team outreaches. Based in Madrid in 1989, Chris and Hilde developed regular local outreach in the city’s center, worked in schools and among people with disabilities, plus continued their national itinerant ministry and campaigns. They left Madrid in 2001. Since then, the regular ministry in the city center has developed into a daily outreach called OnTheRedBox. From 2001 to 2003, the Mathiesons were in the least developed region called Extremadura where they helped to coordinate church-planting and outreach. They did this in conjunction with Operation Mobilization, whom they have had a close relationship with for many years. Between 2003 and 2005, they made their base in Switzerland, supporting Spain through itinerant and web ministry, including an information-packed website.



*HILDE & CHRIS MATHIESON*

In 2006, Chris and Hilde returned to Spain on the island of Mallorca. Ministry has included support of local churches in outreach, along with encouraging evangelism throughout Spain as webmaster for the Conference for the Evangelization of Spain.



*CHRIS MATHIESON IN MADRID’S MAIN PARK CONDUCTING A GOSPEL PRESENTATION*



This web involvement included Spanish and English language websites and Facebook pages. Also, in 2015, Hilde and Chris were among the founders of a crisis pregnancy counseling hotline, 'Sifra,' the first evangelical service of its kind in the country.

While serving as the field representative for OAC Spain, Chris also served as the European Chairman of OAC for 10 years. He currently acts as the international webmaster (including Facebook) and postmaster, keeping OAC's lines of communication open.

The Mathiesons are also happy to be regularly encouraged by missionaries Ken and Alison Barrett, based in Madrid, and linked with OAC for many years. Ken, Alison, and Chris were students together in Bristol in the 1970s. They were involved together in the Christian Union (IVF). One day, Ken was walking through the city center and saw a man (Korky Davey) painting on a sketchboard. He stopped and then heard this extraordinary speaker preach the gospel. Ken had recently become a Christian and was delighted to discover that he could also learn to present Christ in this way. About a year after this, Ken became an assistant evangelist with OAC, Korky announced he was going to Spain to look into outreach



*KEN MAKING GOOD USE OF THE SKETCHBOARD IN MADRID*



*AN OPEN-AIR MEETING AT THE ROMAN AQUEDUCT OF SEGOVIA, A LOCATION ALMOST AS OLD AS THE GOSPEL*



*CHRIS CONDUCTING A CHILDREN'S PROGRAM*

opportunities in the country, as it had recently become a democracy after the death of the dictator, Franco. Ken told Korky about Chris, who was at the time teaching English near Barcelona. The long and the short of it is that Chris became "Korky's man" in Spain because of Ken. Later, Ken and Alison wanted to become missionaries in Peru, but due to medical concerns about his ability to cope on the Altiplano, they went to Madrid in 1985 to study Spanish, living in Chris's apartment. In 1988, Ken linked up with the Madrid

City Mission to start regular, weekly open-air meetings in central Madrid. Later, both Ken and Chris were no longer able to conduct these meetings, but that same year, the Lord led another missionary to start a similar outreach, which became known as OnTheRedBox, as mentioned earlier. Ken joined up with them after a few years and has continued weekly for the past

decade. Since 2018, he is no longer an elder in the local Brethren Church, so ongoing open-air ministry has become almost his main ministry, going out at least twice weekly, along with supporting outreach in other cities and places. He is the person who represents the OAC-style ministry on the streets of Spain nowadays, while Chris is more in the back office. Had Ken joined us as a staff man, the ministry could have been officially



*ROB GEORGE & CHRIS MATHIESON MINISTERING*

established. The laws in Spain require a minimum of two staff members in order to become an official organization; thus, it never happened for us. But as an informal arrangement, there have always been two evangelists doing OAC work in Spain.



*KEN BARRETT MINISTERING THE GOSPEL IN CENTRAL MADRID*



