

Austria

Challenges for Prayer:

Austria, a nation of culture, music, art and beautiful scenery, lies for the most part spiritually empty. While 84% of Austrians believe in God (high for Europe), few have met Jesus personally. Rates of suicide, abortion and alcoholism indicate the great need for spiritual foundations. Pray for the shell of religion in this nation to be filled by the living presence of Christ.

Austria's longstanding Catholic culture is in serious decline. Record numbers leave the Church each year. Annual membership loss accelerated through the 1990s and 2000s to around 1% per year, a trend showing no sign of changing. The church tax (1% taxable income) and prominent sex scandals among the clergy both contribute to breaks from the church. Seeking God outside the confines of Catholicism is little understood at present. Pray fervently for the growing renewal movement in the Catholic Church.

The Lutheran and Reformed Churches have been in decline for decades. A year which passes without numerical decrease is seen as a victory. Formalism and tradition have little attraction for the younger generation. There are a number of Bible-believing pastors, but

nominalism is as common as in the Catholic Church. Pray for ABCÖ and PGB, two groups of evangelical pastors and lay leaders seeking to deepen spiritual life and combat theological liberalism within the Lutheran Church. Pray too for a move of the Spirit of God that makes these churches a force for the evangelization of the land.

Almost all church growth occurs within evangelical/charismatic churches.

Pentecostal churches nearly doubled between 2000 and 2010. Even so, all evangelicals number only 0.5% of the population. Pray for further multiplication of congregations where the Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed and honored. Pray also for the efforts of the *Runde Tisch* (WdV) working across all Christian blocs, as well as the Evangelical Alliance (ÖEA) and the Fellowship of Evangelical Congregations in Austria (ARGEGÖ). Their work is vital in bringing cooperation and partnership to the diverse Christian framework.

Pastors for the multiplying congregations are a great need. Locating leaders, training them capably, then supporting them adequately is a challenge. BAO (Bible Training on Location), a decentralized program of non-formal courses based in Vienna, has over 500 students receiving training and is seeking to expand further in Austria. The Evangelical Academy (EVAK) operates a Bible college in three locations. Pray for these as well as the Evangelical Education for Austria (EBÖ) and other training programs. Pray for God to raise up men and women with passion for the Kingdom, for holiness and for people to be won.

Austria needs more full-time workers. It is possible that more Austrians are serving God outside Austria than inside it. Major foreign agencies: **OM**, International Teams, **WV**, **DMG**, **CEF**, *Missionhaus Bibelschule*. The majority of evangelical churches were planted through the ministry of these Kingdom workers and are often still dependent on their leadership. A traditionally slow and difficult field, Austria is showing signs of accelerating

response to the gospel. Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send more workers, both Austrians and foreign missionaries, to this needy field.

Less-reached sections of the population:

a) Provinces. Lower Austria and Burgenland in the east, Styria in the southeast and Voralberg and Tyrol in the west have fewer evangelicals.

b) Rural areas. People living away from the cities have little chance to encounter the gospel. Most do not have an evangelical group in their midst. Pray for believers to reach out to these neglected areas.

c) Cults and sects. The aggressive activities of New Age movements, Eastern religions, Jehovah's

Witnesses (more numerous than evangelicals), Mormons and the New Apostolic Church have gained thousands of followers. The Dalai Lama conducted a rite wherein he released 722 spirits to make Austria the bridgehead of Buddhism for Western Europe. Pray both for the nullification of these efforts and for the release of those ensnared in false beliefs.

Foreign migrants and refugees have flooded into Austria since WWII – fleeing Communism up until 1990, then the Balkan strife, and now increasingly hailing from Asia. Pray that Austrian believers may demonstrate compassion to these strangers in their midst as the Bible commands. The gospel is being shared through Bible Society material and ministries such as Oasis Christian Centre. Pray for fruitfulness.

a) The six ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia. There are several evangelical congregations, but these peoples are some of the least reached of Europe.

b) Muslim Turks, Afghans, Kurds, Pakistanis. Unabated immigration, high birthrates and poor integration stoke the fires of xenophobia from the far right.

Young people are more open to the gospel than the previous generation, but churches are poorly equipped for effective youth ministry. Pray for the necessary training for the churches and for a spiritual harvest amongst the youth.

a) Witness among the 250,000 students is one of the most fruitful in the land today. The majority are in Vienna, which also hosts many thousands of international students. The seven universities all have active ministry in them. Pray for the ministries of ÖSM(IFES), CCCI and Navigators on the campuses of Austria. Both CEF and SU have ministries focusing on school-age children.

b) Growing prayer movements among teenagers led to the formation of an Austrian Prayer Congress (APC) of over 1,000 meeting biannually. SU started a prayer movement within schools equipping and encouraging students to pray for peers and teachers. Pray for these efforts and others such as JAM among older youth in Vienna, and ABÖJ among younger youth country-wide.

Media ministries for prayer:

a) Literature ministries. Scripture distribution by The Bible Society and the literature ministries of Austrian Bible Mission, *Christliche Bücherzentrale* (CBZ) and CLC all need prayer. The Bible

is widely available to all.

b) Radio and TV. Plentiful programs are broadcast by radio and on satellite in English and

German, though good German-language programming is not accessible in large areas of Austria. Material in German on the Internet abounds. Most expatriate languages have Christian radio broadcasts, though again accessibility is limited.