

AUSTRIA

Today, most Austrians are deeply influenced by secularism and materialism, like most Europeans. Traditional churches have been losing large portions of their membership during the last four decades. Roughly 60 percent of the population are still registered Roman Catholics, but regular church attendance has dropped below 10 percent. Islam is the second-largest religion, soon reaching 10 percent of the total population. Despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Austria has one of the highest suicide rates among young people. There is a great spiritual need for the message of true hope and new life in Christ.



STEFAN USING THE RAT TRAP ILLUSTRATION

OAC in Austria got its real beginning in the early 1990s when Korkey Davey (OAC UK) took some summer teams, trained in Hungary, to Vienna. In May 1996, Al Nucciarone, who pastored an international church, invited Korkey to teach local believers how to do open-air meetings. This was the beginning of what became known as "Reach the City." Among those trained that year was Stefan Hoefler, who came into the ministry full time in July 1997 and later became the director of OAC Austria. That same year, Korkey was back with a team of evangelists from the UK. The first week involved training and outreach in Vienna, and the second week involved outreach into Bratislava in Slovakia. Hundreds of Christians, from ten countries, received training. In succeeding summers, teams went and did outreach in other cities in Austria, Slovakia, Poland, and Romania. By the time

the program ended in 2006, the profile of open-air evangelism was raised significantly in Central Europe.

Stefan Hoefler became the OAC field representative in Austria in 1998, after he and his wife, Judith, spent a year of training in Bristol. OAC Germany took responsibility in nurturing the work in Austria during the international conference held in the UK in 2002. Austria became an official OAC branch in 2004 at the OAC international conference held in Pennsylvania that year. Martin Podobri joined the Austrian staff in January 2001.



STEFAN USING SKETCHBOARD AND OBJECT LESSON



A TERRIFIC OPEN-AIR MEETING LOCATION

The ministry continues in weekly outreaches in Linz, Wels, and Vienna, with good results. They are joined by a great team of volunteers from a variety of different churches. Normally, five to ten locals are handing out tracts and involved in

counseling. Some of these volunteers have been trained to preach. Training, including puppet ministry, also continues in churches in several cities during the summer. An opportunity arose in 2017 at an international missions conference held at Lake Constance in Switzerland to teach about 15 Latino Christian young people the sketchboard so that they could evangelize in Europe, as well as at home.

When OACI President Rob George and his wife, Gayle, were visiting Austria in 2017, they got into a conversation with some locals at a gas station coffee shop. They noted George's Australian accent and asked them what they did. Rob described the OAC ministry, and one of the locals said that he had seen that very type of outreach in Linz!

The Austrian team also reaches out to the tourists and the immigrant Muslim community in "Little Istanbul." They had not expected any good response among the Muslim Turks but were surprised how open they were and how willing they were to talk.

God continues to do a good work in Austria. The ministry there remains one of the "bright spots" for OAC in Europe.

