

PRAYER FOR BR. LEONID'S TRIBUNAL / WORK IN RUSSIA, June 2004

Note: At the end of this carelink there is an urgent prayer request.

We have mentioned in previous carelinks that major advertising work continues in Russia, and we are in correspondence with many people who are studying Bible Basics from all over this vast country- from Chechnaya in the South to Archangelsk in the north, and to Sakhalin island in the East. There are well over 200 brethren and sisters scattered throughout Russia, and the economic situation is increasingly desperate for the lower rungs of Russian society. There's plenty of money in Russia, but only in the hands of a select few. Generations of total state care have now been removed, leaving many people with tiny or no income, and no state support, especially noticeable in the fields of health care and support for the elderly. This large group of impoverished people, especially in the rural areas, are responding amazingly to the Gospel.

Two brethren, co-workers with the BBFU, recently made a visit around Russia, meeting brethren and sisters and contacts. Our first stop was the small town of Irbit in the Urals, two time zones east of Moscow. The small ecclesia there had been for a long time urging us to assist them in the interview and baptisms of contacts there. We arrived at 03:00, having chartered a car to drive four hours through the night. We slept for 3 hours, and then at 06:00 the first eager contacts arrived for interview! Others arrived later in the morning, one having walked 12 km from his isolated farm to the nearest bus stop. By the end of the day we had assisted the ecclesia to interview and baptize 7 excellent candidates: VLADIMIR, SVETLANA & KRISTINA, husband, wife and daughter. Vladimir has been through the Russian Living with alcoholism material under the guidance of Br. Anatoly, and his wife and daughter are proud to tell the whole world that he has quit alcohol, their family life is so very happy now, and they are now all baptized. We also baptized NINA, ALLA and NIKITA, and also ALEKSEJ, who works on a farm far from transport, and who has been studying our literature and using the Bible Companion for 5 years already. We were very struck by the welfare needs of this group. Health care has to be paid for, and very few have any real income beyond being able to buy tea, bread and pay for some heating expenses. Various requests for medical welfare were received, e.g. the need to get asthma treatment for a sister's son who is a chronic asthmatic; and the wife of our dear brother Viktor, who has leukaemia. Such requests for assistance with medical expenses are becoming increasingly widespread, and the brothers and sisters desperately appeal for your support. We left what welfare we could.

Br. Anatoly and Sis. Nadia are the core of this wonderful ecclesia. They are refugees from Kazakhstan, where Anatoly was a famous actor. He starred in many shows, and now lives the life of a refugee, with no income, with failing health, given a broken down apartment to live in by the Government in a small mining town in the Urals. However he and his wife have devoted themselves to following up Bible Basics contacts, and there is now an ecclesia of 14 in their small town. Some of these were also refugees from Kazkahstan, others are victims of the unemployment and breakdown of state care in this rather forgotten town. There were several requests for medical help- from chronic asthma to leukaemia, health care all has to be paid for, and these folks can't even afford to pay for the heating on their apartments let alone eat properly or buy medicines. The crisis for poor people in the ex-USSR is real; our brethren and sisters here are truly the salt of the earth, and do seriously need your support.



Photo: New sisters in Irbit, Russia

We then went on to Sverdlovsk, meeting up with Sis Lidija of the Talitsa ecclesia en route. We raced down to Chelyabinsk, some hours south, to meet with the ecclesia there, and we spent a very nice time doing the readings and fellowshiping together, discussing the various issues which have arisen in the brotherhood in recent times. We left the ecclesia deeply encouraged that the Truth is alive and well in Russia, noting with pleasure the desire expressed to be autonomous ecclesias, and for Russian Christadelphians to be Russian Christadelphians and not a branch of Western Christadelphia. Our next task was to fly 3 hours South to Southern Russia, to visit a small yet active ecclesia near the Chechnaya border.

Communication with them is so hard as there are no telephones around, mail and telegrams often don't arrive. We got a message through that we would arrive late that night, but didn't hear whether or not they had received it. We went anyway, arriving at midnight, being driven there at high speed in a brand new luxury vehicle by a colleague of a sister. Our brother and sister there had received the message and had invited another married couple from a distant village whom they had been teaching, to come and stay the night in the hope of meeting us. They had come, along with their baby, and so we conducted a detailed interview through the night, and baptized SERGEY and NADIA soon before dawn. There were us two, and another 6 adults and 3 children; we had two rooms and two beds to sleep in! They insisted we had one room whilst they all piled in to the other room, sleeping on the floor and on chairs. The poverty was really moving, and again, there were evident medical needs especially amongst the children, which need funds to resolve. We left what welfare we could.

Two of the sisters in the ecclesia are refugees from Chechnaya, where they lost literally all they had. We heard reports about the dire cases of Bre. Vladimir and Nikolay. Vladimir's house was burnt down by Orthodox extremists, and Nikolay is still in Chechnaya, where he is living in a ruined house in fear of his life. He is not permitted to come and live in Russia legally, although he has come recently to meet with the ecclesia and then returned. The ecclesia urged us to pray for him earnestly.



Photo: Outside toilet at a Brother's home- not much fun in the Russian Winter

We got a few hours sleep and then had a hair raising trip back to the airport, with a driver who was using his friend's car and hadn't driven for 15 years...we kept pleading with him to let us drive! He was really hazardous and we did pray that he got back to the village in one piece.

The last stop on this exhausting but exhilarating trip was Kazan, where our beloved Sister Ludmila Kuritsyna lives. Whilst she lived in Kazakhstan, she converted [and in many cases baptized] around 200 people, the vast majority of them sisters. She is now living with her daughter in Kazan, but it would seem her natural and spiritual strength are not abated. The

ecclesia, which has grown to 33 members, meets at her home, and she tirelessly works for them. Attending the memorial meeting was a wonderful experience. Three members had each brought along their comments on the day's Bible readings, there was eager discussion on each chapter, and Sis Ludmila had recently baptized a Muslim contact, ILDAR. We reviewed the answers to the Bible Basics course done by OKSANA and ROMAN, relatives of sisters Svetlana and Valya, and baptized them with much joy in Ludmila's bath tub. The various sisters had brought food with them and we all sat down to a joyful if cramped meal after the memorial meeting. One feels that the Truth is here to stay in Kazan.

URGENT PRAYER REQUEST: MILITARY TRIBUNAL OF BRO. LEONID

[Please copy and paste and distribute this to as many as possible!]

Our young brother Leonid, 20 years old and baptized 4 years ago, came in to see us. He had received his call up papers a while ago and had asked for help from CBM, who sent him a faxed statement saying he is a Christadelphian. This was in November 2003 from what he told us. He had heard no more, and now has received his summons to military tribunal on WEDNESDAY 23 JUNE at 14:00, i.e. 2 p.m., Moscow time [this is GMT +3]. He is a very young looking brother, very devoted to the truth and doing his readings, living in a remote village in poverty. None of his family are in the truth, indeed they are opposed. He has faithfully attended Bible Schools and come in to the ecclesial gatherings, and loves doing his Bible readings daily. We had assumed his case was being dealt with by other brethren as promised, but he has received very little help; he will be defending himself when he really needs a lawyer, and he had been informed that faxed documents are no good- he has to show an original document, with an official stamp, and officially translated by a registered translator into Russian.

We were unaware that his case was so urgent; it was a Saturday when we found out, and we had to leave that evening. It was a Tatar feast day and many shops were shut. We had a fervent ecclesial prayer for him, and then went to the city centre to do what we could. All internet cafes seemed to be closed, so eventually we persuaded a girl in the Post Office to let us use her computer to print out a letter vouching for him, produced below for your information, along with the Russian translation. We found a shop that makes up stamps to stamp it with and make it official, but they were shut. We found the phone number of the owner, called him, and arranged that Leonid will go there Monday to get a stamp made up to stamp the letter with. We also tried to find licensed translators to stamp that the translation we made of the letter of support was valid; but again everywhere was shut. Having given our brother some funds for whatever he may have to face, deeply regretting that we simply can't be with him on Wednesday as we both had to be thousands of km away, we prayed earnestly and saw him off on the train back to his village.

We have contacted CBM and asked if they can send someone to support him at the tribunal. The case came at us out of the blue and we did what we could to help him at the last minute. We are especially concerned that our brother had not been given help in answering the questions he may have to face, e.g. 'What would you do if your wife was being raped, would you use force against an enemy?'. He asked us how he should answer this. We hastily went through these sorts of questions with him and got him to note down the answers. He has a lovely faith, a good knowledge of the Bible, and a great desire to do what is right. The church in his village which he no longer attends supports army service, and he is sure that this will be quoted to him, he said that he will tell the Officer that he is a Bible believer independent of anyone else and will do what God says and not what he sees others do whether or not they call themselves Christians.

He has a wonderful attitude and so we ask for your prayers for him especially on Wednesday afternoon Moscow time.

Here is the English text of our hastily produced letter:

Christadelphian Advancement Trust
Reg. Charity No. 1014615
P.O. Box 3034, South Croydon, Surrey CR2 0ZA ENGLAND

I, **, testify that LEONID ** date of birth **/**/****, was baptized by us in * on 09/07/2000 and became a full member of the Christadelphian church. Before his baptism, ** finished our Bible study courses and passed through a very detailed interview with us before witnesses.

He accepted the position of our church, that we cannot serve in the army, although we are prepared to accept alternative service in place of army service. This has been the consistent position of our denomination from the very beginning of our movement in the 19th century.

I myself conducted the interview with *** and several times visited him subsequently; we are persuaded that he is sincere, and his conscience does not permit him to participate in army service.

Yours faithfully

**

We are delighted to announce that Br Leonid was granted alternative service at his tribunal. He thanks you for your prayers. Sadly no other brethren came to be with him in his ordeal, but he says that the letter he was given was crucial, and he wishes to thank old Sis Ludmila of Kazan who was a rock to him and had him stay at her flat. We also thank you for your prayers!