

A Brother In Latvia, September 2005

Today we had an experience we'd like to share with you, because it is typical of the urgent needs of many brethren and sisters as they face Winter in Eastern Europe.

Brother Mikael was baptized 7 years ago by brethren Marcus Heaster and David Whitehouse of the CBM. He is Russian but fled to Latvia from the persecution of Christian Russians in the southern republics of the USSR when the USSR broke up. As such, he doesn't have Latvian citizenship, but a 'non-citizen' document, which makes finding employment very hard. His wife has left him and he can only find casual work on building sites, for which he is paid only enough to buy basic food each day, i.e. a couple of dollars. His mother has died and he has no relatives to support him. We've said before in carelink messages that many people are earning enough only to buy basic food, and all other costs of living, such as accomodation, clothes, medicines etc are impossible for them. So he has been driven to living in the cellar of an old apartment block, and we visited him there today. Of course, you're not supposed to live in the cellars, they are the space under the blocks where people store things. He slips in late at night and out early in the morning so residents don't notice. We slipped in there today with him. A friend, who's now in Russia, gave him the keys. He opened the cellar door, and we went down a flight of steps into the darkness. We turned left and climbed over a low brick wall, and along another corridor. It was pitch black there, there's no power operating in the cellar. Rats and mice run around, and bare wires hang loose out of the walls- not sure whether they were live or not. The photos make it all look different because of the strong flash. Mikael opened the padlocked door of one of the storage spaces, and we went in. It's about 2 square meters, and it's hard to stretch oneself out on the floor. There he has his few possessions. By candlelight he showed his Bibles, pile of Glad Tidings, Bible Basics and a few other of our books in Russian. They're his most treasured possessions. He only asked for more leaflets to distribute- he distributes them around the blocks in the area. We're aware of this because we have got some replies from his work. There is no fresh air down there, and Winter is approaching fast. The central heating pipes from the main boiler for the block run overhead so there is some heat from them, but there are huge cracks in the concrete walls which let in drafts. He's done the best he can to insulate the tiny box, putting cardboard on the wall and hanging up some old carpet on another part of the wall. Other parts of the walls are just the care concrete from which the foundations of the block are constructed. We looked around and saw that this is for real, and explained we were taking photographs in order to share his plight with our brethren world-wide. We went back the way we came, and at the top of the stairs heard the 'clip clop' of someone passing. Mikael was obviously scared and we froze... if by chance one of the residents went down to the cellar and found us there, there'd be some explaining to do. This is why he usually slips in late at night, and out early in the morning.

Although he didn't ask for anything we obviously gave him some money, yes some more leaflets for distribution, toiletries, some food etc. He wears all the clothes he has and anyway doesn't have anywhere really to store any more clothes. So as you lay down to sleep tonight, please pray for our brother and those like him.

The CCM believe this kind of situation is intolerable, and in a few days God willing we'll be releasing a more comprehensive scheme via which we can all do something to try to put an end to this kind of suffering.

Here are the series of photos:



Mikael opening the door to the cellar



Going down the flight of steps underground



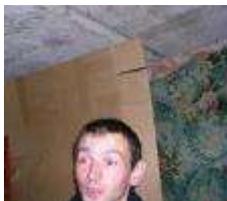
Climbing through into the next passageway



Walking along the passageway- note dilapidated heating pipe and damp walls



Opening the store room door



Inside the 'cell'- cardboard and old carpet on the wall for insulation



Mikael's most treasured possessions- Bibles, Bible Basics, pile of Glad Tidings. Note the

candle- it's pitch black down there, only the flash of the camera makes it look like there's light there



Outside the apartment block

With love to you all

Your brothers and sisters of CCM