

April 2012 Brother Viktor, Winter Welfare

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include John 17, and there's an MP3 about this chapter at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/jn17.mp3>

There is no easy path to God's Kingdom for any of us, and that becomes very clear as we consider the lives of those God calls Carelinks to baptize. This week we have witnessed the baptisms of young and old at the **Riga Bible Center**, each with their stories which are testaments to God's grace.

Brother Viktor

A hunchback elderly looking man who shuffled his feet came to the Riga Bible Center a while ago. He lived in a night shelter, and had heard of us from a brother who also lives there. He took *Bible Basics*, studied it carefully, and regularly attended. This week, he decided for baptism. In our discussions, he mentioned his full name. Brother Vladimir said that that was a name he had heard a lot of at one stage. "You can search for me online. I'm mentioned on a few Wikipedia pages, and a lot of sports sites. But that doesn't matter, all yesterday's glory". "So... are you online?" we enquired, surprised this nondescript old man from a night shelter would have access to the internet or even know how to use it. "Not really", he replied, "The line for the computer is too long, there are over 400 men in our shelter now. Six showers and one computer between us, and only a few hours in the evening to use them, from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.". He explained that he had looked himself up out of interest last year, and had checked how his latest interview with a sports journalist had finally been printed in November last year. Intrigued, we went off at a tangent from checking out his understanding of Bible teachings. "So... who were you? Who... are you?". It turns out that if you search for him [in Russian], you will sure find out who he was. He was one of the greatest ice hockey goalkeepers of the USSR, played for the USSR in the olympics and world cups of the 1970s, voted greatest icehockey goalkeeper of the USSR in 1974. One interview with him recalls how the Soviet sports press dubbed him "The dynamite of Riga", alluding to his membership of "Dinamo", one of the greatest Soviet hockey teams. Here he is from press photos published in the 70s, including a much published photo of him making what has been called one of the greatest saves in Soviet hockey history, against Czechoslovakia:

Viktor explained how "glory days" only last for so long, and life after hockey wasn't easy, especially for him as a Russian living in Latvia after the break up of the USSR in 1991. He recounted how he had thought deeply of how it was his career had been so succesful, as goalkeeping involves many elements of "chance" quite above any natural skill. He felt there was some hand between those many "chance" saves he made which propelled his career and led to his nickname as "The Dynamite of the Dynamo". Sports stardom had no financial reward in the USSR. After hockey, Viktor worked for 13 years as a night watchman, watching over a parking lot. In those long and often cold nights, he looked at the stars and thought about God. The "other" hand he felt in his life, he concluded was God. But how to find the God beyond the stars? The Bible was the answer, but how to understand it? The Orthodox church was no help. Sitting around in the bars of old town Riga with other Soviet era heroes reminiscing about "glory days" was no answer either. And so Viktor shared his search with a quiet man who slept on the same bunk as him in the night shelter. This was brother Sasha. Sasha was delighted to bring Viktor along to our meetings. And now his search is over. After his baptism, brother Viktor spoke of the huge sense of peace he felt within, now that finally, all was answered and clear. It was an honour to baptize this humble brother; for time and the hard realities of post-Soviet life have taken their toll on the one time "Dynamite of Riga". Brother Vladimir recalled watching hockey

games on TV in the 70s and marvelling at Viktor's saves. And now... he helped baptize him. Again we see the triumph of the hand of providence, the victory of God's ever searching love and grace which is constantly seeking for human response.



We also baptized ALLA during the week. Her story is quite different but all the same a testimony to God's grace in calling her.



Again, she exuded great joy at finally being baptized:

We'd like to thank you so so much for contributing to enable the Riga Bible Centre to continue functioning. It really is being blessed by God.

With temperatures still below zero at night in some areas, we're continuing our Winter Welfare program, assisting with heating bills and other utilities, and providing firewood. This week we made another firewood distribution, literally putting firewood and food on the needy tables of brothers and sisters. The subsistence farmers are especially hard hit at this time of year as they are now living off their last crops which they grew last season, and can't sow anything yet.



We're sorry to report that our young HIV positive couple sis Tanya & br Slavik are currently in a downturn in their health. Slavik's AIDS means he again is covered in sores and hardly able to get out of bed even to go to the toilet. He also is experiencing blood loss from his facial areas and his blood isn't clotting well, which means he and Tanya have to take it in turns to hold plasters against the various outbreaks to stop excessive blood loss. It's really so tragic to see a young couple like this and yet a great essay in the determination of love to the end, both of ones' partner and of the Lord who loves us.



Please do continue your prayers for all the brothers and sisters we're working with, and for our work of preaching and caring world-wide.

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks