

Bosnia July 2005

In addition to supporting a number of welfare projects, our witness to the Gospel in Bosnia continues, and the ecclesia in Sarajevo is thriving. The country is still largely in ruins after the war, with unemployment running at 60%. Major civic buildings are still in ruins, and most homes are still bullet riddled although now habitable again after a civil war during which almost every building was fought over.



Photo:

Major civic buildings are still in ruins



Photo:

Most homes are still bullet riddled

Islam is on the rise in many areas, as Islamic agencies rush in to assist rebuilding efforts. New mosques are going up all over the place. Although the focus of most people is on survival and material improvement, there are many war weary souls who are searching for God in spirit and in truth. It is to these people that we are distributing Bible Basics, Bibles in Bosnian and other languages, and other literature. What is the Gospel? is now available in all the ex-Yugoslav languages- Slovenian, Bosnian, Croat, Serb, Macedonian, and Albanian. We also have our material about alcoholism [a growing problem in the area] in some of these languages.

We have one young man of 17 who is very interested and would like to be baptized, but the almost tribalistic nature of this close knit society means that he faces impossible difficulties at home, and he needs to wait until he is at least 18 before we could even legally baptize him. Family pride and a sense of insulation from other ethnic groups are extremely important to people here, and is a major challenge to the spread of the Gospel. For example, we visited a brother in a village, and the next day, a relative detonated a hand grenade outside his parents' home in protest. Becoming too intimate with foreigners is frowned upon in the mountain communities. There are a huge amount of small arms and grenades in Bosnia, and they are widely possessed.

We are delighted to report the baptisms of MARIO and ADMIR, from Croat Catholic and Bosnian Moslem backgrounds respectively. Their home situation is difficult, and they can't even have Bible Basics in their homes, as they are still living with their families. They had studied the book by meeting with the existing brethren, who make a great witness to the Lord. Finding a place to do the baptisms was quite an experience, and reflective of the problems facing Bosnia. Only the very expensive hotels have bath tubs [they typically have only showers]. We wanted to do the baptism in the open air, but nearly all rivers and lakes in Bosnia have uncleared mines in them. We had a look at one possible location, but were warned off by the familiar sign "Further entrance forbidden: MINES".



Photo:

Entrance forbidden: MINES

So we obtained use of a large apartment which had a bath. We brought our two baptism candidates to the apartment, to find that water was off in the blocks [a common experience in a city still in ruins], and that it wouldn't be switched on for some time. Thankful to have the vehicle with us, we went down to the supermarket, thinking we could buy some large 5 litre canisters of water... to find that these were long sold out. So we bought 60 1 litre bottles of mineral water, with the checkout girl remarking why we should need so much mineral water... we explained to our two new brethren-to-be that this would be typical of their lives in Christ, being fools for Christ's sake, not being understood by the world, and unexpectedly tested by a loving Father. There were no lifts working in the block, so we had to carry these up 10 flights of stairs and then joyfully set up a little production line- some unscrewed the bottles, two others poured the water into the bath tub. Eventually we made it, and our two brethren were baptized in sparkling water, to rise to newness of life. Two of the local brethren performed the baptisms.



Photos: Carrying the water bottles into the block; assembling them outside the bathroom; pouring them into the bath tub; our 'spent ammunition' - the empty bottles.



In all these things we give thanks to the Father, without whose evident blessing none of this would be possible; we thank our brethren in Sarajevo for their enthusiasm and warm welcome; and we thank you for your support without which none of this could happen.

With love from your brothers and sisters of CCM