

Carelink: Russia, March 2005

Both as a result of fresh press advertising and also the continued witness of local brothers and sisters, there are many contacts throughout Russia seriously interested in the truth. A major visit was made throughout the country recently, also seeking to minister pastoral support to those already baptized.

Northern Caucasus

Following the Beslan massacre and the very recent murder of the Chechen leader by the Russian forces, security is extremely tight. Almost every 10 km. there are road blocks. The economy has suffered terribly, and several of our local brethren and sisters there are in serious difficulties. Further, as a result of this, corruption has become a major problem. We were stopped and hassled for money by the military police on several occasions, on one occasion being threatened with deportation unless we paid up!

We began by chartering a car to get to visit a long term contact, LUDMILA, who lives in an isolated village populated largely by Chechens, Ingushetians etc. She is one of the few Russians there, and she has to live on the far outskirts of the village, 5 km. walk from the nearest shop. Ludmila is a hunchbacked dwarf, now elderly and sick. Her conversion is surely a great triumph for the Truth's progress, and the way the light and hope which is in the Lord Jesus breaks into the most tragic and dead-end of lives. She has nobody to support her, and struggles to the Post Office each month to get her miserly pension. She grows what she can. Her prize possessions are her Bible, which she has read constantly for many years and is very familiar with, and a 19th century British made sewing machine which her grandmother was given before the 1917 revolution, by someone who'd been rewarded by one of the royal family for her duties. The snow drifts this Winter were so deep that they came up to her window and totally covered her well. The drifts were taller than Ludmila herself. So she was totally cut off, and could only get water by melting snow. It's a long walk for her to gather firewood, but she's very sensible about everything. She heats her oven and puts special stones within it, which keep the heat a long time after the fire goes out. The boom and bucket of her well was stolen recently- she is totally defenceless- so she lowers an old saucepan into the well using old electrical cord to get the water up. We have a video of her doing this. Some of her windows are broken [see photo], and her outside hole-in-the-ground toilet [see photo- it's just visible across the snow to the left of the house wall] is in need of rebuilding. She lives amongst aggressive people and her dog is not much defence. When she says that she hopes in the Lord alone, and quotes from the Songs of Degress in the recent *Bible Companion* Bible readings, she does so with such evident integrity.



Photo:

Sis. Ludmila's isolated house, photographed from where the track finishes at her nearest neighbour's house



Photo:

Sis Ludmila reading her beloved Bible



Photo:

Sis. Ludmila pouring the water for her baptism



Photo:

Sis. Ludmila and her heat holding stones



Photo:

Sis. Ludmila pulling water out of the well. The snow this Winter came up to the level of her broken windows, thus covering her well. You can see the tub she uses for washing in the snow, and her outside toilet to the left of the house, across the snow.

We're committed to helping our dear sister as much as we can, although ultimately she needs to be rehoused.

Travelling further, we met up with Br & Sr Alexei and Galina Hodusov. They are very active in spreading the Truth. Galina has a relative who is an invalid, suffering from cerebral palsy and other complications. He can speak only with difficulty, and has major problems controlling his arm movements and walking. After studying the beliefs of many churches, he was persuaded by careful study of Bible Basics and Sis Galina's instruction that he needed to be baptized, and it was a pleasure to baptize VITALY [not without some practical difficulty]. Sis. Galina is very determined to start a club for the invalids of the town where they can meet together and she can teach them the Truth. Her vision is that they would meet together for social contact, play chess, drink tea together, take strength from each other etc, but would be taught the Bible's truths by her. She has costed out the project as follows: Registration: \$200; monthly rental of building: \$120; monthly running costs [tea, soft drinks, electricity, heating etc.] \$100; initial purchase of furniture etc \$200. Many invalids are in real problems as they receive low pensions which aren't enough to pay for their heating, and they get very little care or therapy. Galina's vision is that they would meet together and care for each other. The CCM are more than fully stretched and can't possibly help in this. But we offer it to the brotherhood for your support, if anyone is interested.



Photo:

Sis Galina with her first convert, her invalid relative Vitaly

Western Siberia

Readers of carelink will have followed the story of Bro. Leonid, the dramas associated with his tribunal, and his being sent to do alternative service in a remote town in Western Siberia. He was sent to work as a welder in a plant making railway wagons. But he has no training or experience, and was initially threatened with being sent to the army and having his alternative service cancelled if he didn't do the work- which was obviously beyond his ability to do. We went to visit him and are pleased to report that our prayers have indeed been heard. We contacted his immediate boss and got the message over that we are watching his treatment carefully. He has now been removed from the factory work itself and assigned care of a huge herd of rabbits, associated with the factory, used for meat for workers. His job is to feed them, make sure they don't escape from their very weak cages, build them stronger cages, etc. It's been quite a job keeping them warm enough so they haven't died this cold Winter. He's happy and was of course delighted to be visited. Along with a group of JWs, he's billeted in a well heated block, where he shares a small room with another young man. They have a two ring electric plate, and are given a small allowance on which they have to buy food and feed themselves. Money is obviously tight but as Leonid says, it could all have turned out so much worse. So he's consigned here for three and a half years [42 months], looking after the rabbits... Our brother is strong in the Lord and doing his Bible readings each day. We assured him of the continued prayers of many for him around the world.

Northern Russia

One of the problems with living in northern Russia is that the long Winters, poor communication with the rest of the world and heavy snowfall mean that people tend to sit indoors with little income and little to do. We have many contacts in this part of the world, who have studied *Bible Basics*, some having read it several times over. The problem we face are the long and expensive journeys to get to them.

Without going into the details of the long, challenging and Divinely enabled journeys undertaken, involving chartering 4WD vehicles to drive a few hundred km. beyond where the railway network finishes, driving along a frozen river and even hitching a ride on a helicopter, we're pleased to report the baptisms of ELIZABETA and ELENA. Our new sisters live in poverty and thanks to your generosity we were able to give some help towards their heating debts for this Winter, medical and other needs. Medical care is pathetic in these regions. There is virtually no specialist care, and the cost of airlifting or transporting those in need to the nearest hospital or specialist has to be met by the patient. In Soviet times there was far better care in these areas, which were 'opened up' by the Soviet 'settlement of unused lands' policy. But now with subsidies withdrawn, many people are left living in areas which the harsh climate make unfit for normal human habitation. With pensions not large enough to pay for basic food and heating, let alone warm clothing, travelling for health care is out of the reach of most people. There's an interesting turning to traditional medicines and plants in the area. We were most impressed with the 'snow garlic' which Sis Elizabeta uses- a plant which grows beneath the snow. We shared

with them some of the ideas found in the recently distributed book *Where There Is No Doctor*. These brothers and sisters need our prayers. If anyone fancies an 'adventure trip' to go and see them, we'd be happy to be your guides.

To God be the glory in all this.

Your brothers and sisters of Carelinks Christadelphian Ministries