

December 2014 China, Riga- Jim Barton Report, Conferences

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include Revelation 1 and 2 and there is an MP3 about these chapters at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/rev1and2.mp3> .

You can see the archives of our MP3 files at <http://aletheiacollege.net/archives.html> ;

Carelinks Bible Radio is at <http://r-b-c.org/listen.php>

CARELINKS CONFERENCES

We'd like to remind you of two upcoming Carelinks Conferences- more details at <http://carelinks.net/doc/events> . God willing, these will be as follows- do come along if you can:

Sunday 11 January 2015, Hurstville NSW . There will be the breaking of bread at 11:00 a.m. at the *Hurstville Ecclesial Hall* followed by a public dialogue in the afternoon between two Carelinks speakers and two orthodox Jewish rabbis. More details from sis. Robin Jones robinthered@hotmail.com

Carelinks UK Conference: Saturday 28 February 2015 Croydon, Surrey ' Location: *St John's Community Hall*, Upper Seldon Road, South Croydon. CR2 8DD UK Bookings to Steve Gretton: steve.gretton@gmail.com

RIGA

Br Jim & Sis Anne Barton from Canada have been hard at work this week in Riga. Here are their first impressions after a week:

Impressions from Riga

It was with some intimidation that we inquired about coming to Riga to help out with the *Riga Bible Centre* operated by Carelinks. After reading so many Carelinks accounts over the past years about the people who use the center, it left us with an impression that it was a society that was predominantly indigent, living in dire circumstances and perhaps it was even dangerous for westerners to be here. After some comforting discussions with Duncan we were able to step out of our comfort zone and come here to help out.

We do meet many people in the *Bible Centre* who are living poorly, but there is a range of poverty. Some have regular apartments but after paying utilities, can't afford enough food. There are others who use night shelters to survive most nights; there are others who just have to find anywhere to sleep, which in some cases may be at a bus station or under a bridge. Last night we went to deliver firewood to a woman who was squatting in an abandoned building for lack of anywhere else to live. We entered her home through a window off of the hallway. There was one candle for light, which left the room rather dimly lit. She had no power, no water, no bathroom, no toilet, only a small opening in the chimney where she could maintain a small fire to provide a minimum of heat. There was a mattress in one corner, the sum total of her furniture. She had been breaking up a cupboard to provide herself with firewood. It was notable that she did a remarkable job of keeping it clean and organized as one can under such circumstances. It's a sad commentary on a place that fails to provide minimal support to those most in need. For many if not most in Riga and Latvia life is much better. There is a significant middle class and apparently a wealthy class too, as evidenced by some of the luxury cars we see on the streets. They have a rather sophisticated public transportation system and shopping that rivals most stores you might find in the west and the prices are lower in many cases.

Photos: Jim packing firewood and hot soup into the trunk for distribution after meeting; the entry to Sis Brigita's room through a window- she has quite a style to doing it by a swinging motion!



The scene is not too different from what you might find in most western nations. Most of them go to work everyday and come back to their homes at night. Housing appears to be somewhat different as there are many, many Soviet era and style apartment blocks, not always appearing to be in very good repair but quite functional. It's sometimes interesting to see upscale cars outside these apartment buildings.

One thing I did seem to notice about the society, not just the poor, is that they seem somewhat dour. They rarely make eye contact, when they do they quickly look away and usually down. Their faces appear sad, sometimes even a bit angry. If you nod to them as you walk by they almost never nod back or reply. I am not certain if that's just a Latvian or Eastern European way but it seems a bit sad. There is a gloom in the air that feels somewhat disconcerting but not threatening.

Working in the *Bible Centre* has been so very fulfilling. Most days involve going to a market called Maxima, which is a large superstore much like a super WalMart, with groceries and department store combined but more heavily proportioned to the groceries than dry goods. Most days so far we make Borshch soup. It's a comprehensive meal that includes a balance of vegetables, meat, dairy and liquid. It's quite tasty and the guests enjoy it very much and almost always come back for refills, usually several times. Tomorrow we are changing things up with some Split Pea soup. I've been ladling out the soup each evening at 6pm (after an hour Bible Study) and they consume about 50 litres per night, sometimes more. Typically there's between 60 to 100 souls to feed (spiritually and physically). At first it didn't seem like they ever smiled much but in the last few days as they've seen us there a few times, they seem to warm up to us and show much appreciation for the efforts made for them and finally a warm appreciative smile on their face makes our day. Anne helps by handing out the bread and spoons. When they arrive there's always plenty of hot coffee and tea to warm them up.

Photos: Jim, Anne & Maxim preparing the meal, with Sis Hannah at the sink; then serving it up



The language is a barrier that can be overcome. Sometimes it's frustrating and sometimes it's downright amusing. We spend a large amount of time with Maxim, a wonderful brother from the Ukraine who has problems with military service there. He speaks Ukrainian and Russian and almost no English, although he knows more English words than we know Russian or Ukraine. He attempts to teach us some key Russian words but we don't seem to retain them very well. We can usually sign something to indicate what we want, other times we make use of Google Translate, which works pretty well but not always perfectly, sometimes providing a rather amusing interpretation of what we said. We also spend a lot of time with Hannah, a lovely young sister from New Zealand staying here for her Summer (southern Hemisphere) break, three months. She's quite energetic and cheerful and so very pleasant to be around. Together with Maxim, we prepare the food from raw ingredients each day, preparing, cooking and cleaning and

sanitizing. When we're done, the kitchen, dining hall, meeting room and washrooms are all clean, sanitary and ready for another day.

The time here has its challenges but none that match the fulfillment one feels by helping out their brothers and neighbours in need. I can't close without mentioning how nice Duncan and Cindy (and their three little children) are to be around. They constantly open their home to us all for fellowship, prayer and encouragement in the scriptures. They make a significant difference in countless lives every day to help advance the Gospel message. The work being done here in Riga is a very special mission and quite well organized in accordance to the word of God.

Jim (and Anne) Barton

CHINA

Br Donald reports on the Bible weekend he ran singlehanded:

The first I arrived there were 5 people attending our Bible study. We first introduce ourselves to each other, greet, and then we began to pray or read the Bible. Everybody talked about their feelings about the Lord, I used the Powerpoint presentations talking about doctrines about God. On the second day morning, we talked about baptism into Christ, most hesitated for following him in this life, as I told them Mar 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned. I was quite disappointed and thought this trip might come to void. And I start to pray, God willing, and in the afternoon brother Chao and Gen came and insisted to be baptized, they came to Shanghai from rural area of Southwest of China and contact with me by text msg for 1 month, so I immediately decided to buy an inflatable for baptism from local supermarkets as we 4 people stayed in a home-hotel which have no bath. God bless.

Photo: A new brother holding an *NEV Bible*



Prayer Points:

- Sister Brigita in her precarious accommodation situation and others like her
- Jim & Anne & Hannah to keep on keeping on
- Maxim with his military service issues and desire to serve the Lord
- Donald to keep on keeping on in his work in China
- That our conferences will be a spiritual oasis for Western bre & sis
- That all those being baptized will grow spiritually and come into God's Kingdom at Christ's return

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks