

## First Timers In Eastern Europe [2] October 2009

*Brother John Aldersley from New Zealand concludes his report:*

### 1) ENGLISH CLASSES

The past week has also given us the opportunity to be witnessing the God at work in the lives of people here in Latvia. After the Bible school, God provided many wonderful highlights to be a part of in the following week. Carelinks had advertised free English classes for beginners. This is another way of being able to come in contact with people and ultimately share the gospel. These were held for an hour each evening at 7 pm in the Riga ecclesial hall, from Monday to Thursday nights. We had about 15 different people attend and were able to distribute some copies of Bible Basics. On the Thursday night, a group of women who had so enjoyed the classes pleaded for them to continue. Duncan and Cindy agreed to do them again on a Tuesday and Thursday night. On the Sunday one person attended the meeting as a result of this outreach, and the classes are now growing in number as people bring their friends. These women were not only enamoured of the class, but commented at the friendly and family atmosphere in which it was done, and have already started studying Bible Basics. They were also amazed that the classes would be done for free. We were able to share our faith and invite them to the Sunday meetings. It was through such English classes that our sister Lilya came to be baptised some years ago, and she continues to fervently preach the gospel to the homeless and in the shelter.

Photo: English classes in swing



The idea of teaching the Gospel through teaching English seems a good way to go for those with immigrant populations. Many people in Eastern Europe already have a basic if passive knowledge of English; these classes were specially written and designed for such people, taking them as it were "from zero" but progressing quite quickly. Anyone interested can download the course material from <http://www.vards.info/english.htm>. There's a video of the first study session so you get the idea, at <http://www.hristadelfiane.org/engcourse.html>.

### 2) HOMELESS BAPTISMS

We noted the wide range of people within Latvian society- some very wealthy, many very poor. The English language outreach tends to attract those with a reasonable standard of living; but a huge amount of work is being done in spreading the Gospel amongst the homeless and those living in the night shelters. On Monday we baptized IGOR and AIGARS – 2 unemployed men living in a derelict house with three dogs. They say they prefer to live there than in the men's shelter where there is much noise at night and many alcoholics. These men were rough because of how they have to live, but very sincere and quite intelligent. We talked with them about God's truth and the Lord Jesus, and the hope of His kingdom. Satisfied with their grasp of the Gospel, we baptized them in Duncan & Cindy's bath tub. Cindy and Hannah treated them to a grace they had likely never experienced- a cooked breakfast served to them waitress-style.



### 3) UK VISITORS

Coinciding with our visit was also a team from the UK – Mark, Chris and Adam from the Maidenhead ecclesia. They had come to give of their time and carpentry skills to do further work at the hall and the housing project in northern Latvia. It was a pleasure for us to meet with them and share our faith. They are a wonderful part of the body of Christ and were so happy to be able to offer their gifts for his service. They built new cupboards and shelves; installed a hot water cylinder; tiled the kitchen and around the sink. Mark has been over a couple of times before and has been a major contributor in the building projects. One valuable thing they did was to draw up a list of outstanding work needed to finish off the home / Bible School venue- it's online at <http://www.vards.info/english/worknauk.htm> . Anyone interested in helping is welcome!

While over here, Chris' wife in the UK at home advised that she has decided for baptism - great news! Also my own daughter Hannah who is travelling with me (15 yrs) has decided for baptism. One of my prayers before leaving home was: "Lord, show yourself strong". Mark, Chris and Adam accompanied us on a further visit to the refugee camp, where we broke bread with brother Walter and heard him give us an excellent study on Isaiah 53; each week Duncan gives him a chapter to prepare a talk on, and Walter really did very well.



In many ways including the baptisms, and the leading of God in our brothers and sisters' lives, God has answered this prayer wonderfully! I hope I never lose the import and significance of God's word which tells us: "There is joy in the presence of the angels in heaven over one sinner that repents". EACH INDIVIDUAL ONE who turns from sin to the Lord, receives an eternal hope with the God of the universe forever!

It is important to realise that here in Latvia , most prices are expensive. For example, a loaf of bread costs about 40 santims (NZD1.20) and the average wage is Lat120 / mth (NZD360), it translates that in NZ, we have about at least 7 times the buying power for our money in comparison – and that is basing it only on earning the minimum wage in NZ. There is very much a "have" vs "have nots" economy here as is evidenced by the multitude of Audi, BMW, Mercedes motor vehicles being driven. In contrast, there are many homeless with access only to very low amounts of money. Hence much corruption and a high crime rate.

### 4) ENGURE VISIT

On Saturday 24/10, we travelled to a small town called Engure in Western Latvia for a pastoral visit with about 10 brethren – hosted by sister Veya. Those who attended included 4 teenage sisters – Rivka and Sulamita and Dace and Daiga [twin sisters] – and a deaf family – Vladimirs, Maruta – Dad and Mum, and Diana, and Janis; and Rowan from Australia, Duncan , Cindy, Hannah and myself. Veya gave us a very nice lunch, and we did one of the daily readings – discussing from John 20 and 21. The exhortation took quite a while- being translated from English to Russian and Latvian, then being written down by a sister for brother Vladimirs, who then interpreted it in deaf sign language for his family.

In John ch 20 v 21, we discussed our great responsibility in that Jesus has sent us to be his ambassadors. We certainly appreciate the great commission in that God the Father sent Jesus,

but “as my father has sent me, even so I send you”. We need to capture the import of having been sent by Jesus and do his bidding.

We broke bread together, and got to know Vladimirs and his family with sign language and written words and symbols. I had taken a power point slide show of some NZ photos, my family and my spiritual family, which we showed.

With the little time we had left before catching the bus back to Riga (about 1.5 hrs drive), we took a walk along the beach nearby. It is at this spot, that many baptisms have been performed in the Baltic sea. It was another wonderful opportunity to encourage our brethren in their faith, who do not necessarily have the option of attending meetings regularly. May we who can, value the ease we have to do so.

## 5) SUNDAY MEETING

On Sunday, we had the breaking of bread meeting at the hall in Riga. 32 people attended including a number we had met at the Bible school, and a number of new faces to us– some of whom from the homeless shelter. The service started at 1 pm with prayer requests asked from all and prayer being offered by Duncan. We read the daily readings and an exhortation on each chapter, majoring on Daniel 3, interdispersed with our songs we had done at the Bible school. There's an MP3 of the talk, including the Russian translation,

at <http://www.hristadelfiane.org/audio/dan3.mp3> . We also got the whole meeting joining in to sing: “As the deer pants for the water” in Latvian. Rowan on guitar (Aust), Daiga on piano (Latvia), Hannah on violin, John – vocal (both NZ); meant we had a small music group from around the world! You can see a clip of the singing

at <http://aletheiacollege.net/video/deerlv.html>

Photos: Doing the Bible readings from the Bible Companion, and singing- with piano kindly donated by Maidenhead, UK ecclesia



Cindy and the girls had prepared a meal for a shared lunch half way through the meeting. I also showed the NZ power point pictures at the end. We concluded with a song written specially for the occasion- "Goodbye Riga ecclesia". It wishes God's blessing and "Shalom" on them all. You can view it at <http://aletheiacollege.net/video/attariga.html>

Later that night Duncan and I visited Rodion and his family [wife and 4 young children] at another refugee facility and heard his full story – having been converted to Christianity from being a muslim despite the dangerous opposition in the Islamic regime in which they lived. His wife who initially was a strong muslim divorced Rodik as a result of his conversion, but in time she came to see the truth of Christ and they were remarried and had another 3 children, all with Bible names. Another testimony to the grace of God working. As a result of all this, they found people attracted to them and they in turn accepted Christ, resulting in a house church developing; but for all this they were rejected by their families and persecuted, including imprisonment for Rodion [Rodik] and having their apartment taken from them and signed over to the State. They are very genuine with a good Bible knowledge. There's a huge amount of prayer needed for them, and also for Duncan's efforts to teach them the great doctrinal truths we have

been blessed with.



On our final evening, a visit was made to distribute Winter welfare to a very wonderful sister. She lives in a room which costs 120 Lats / month, but is in a very bad block, partly destroyed by fire, and where a murder was committed a few months ago, just a few metres along the corridor from her room. She is so full of the Gospel and eagerly shares with others. Carelinks are distributing such welfare all the time at the moment, and it really is needed.

We travel home to NZ tomorrow as different people – more aware that we have brethren in all manner of corners of the world; that there are needs to be met that we can help with; that there are prayer needs; and that “there is no situation where the grace of God cannot go” – but it goes with us – the body of Christ, led by Jesus the head.

**With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks**

PS Don't forget the *Carelinks Australia Conference on Dec. 12 and the UK Carelinks Conference January 22-24*; more details at <http://carelinks.net/doc/events>