

Iranian Update April 2004

The ongoing miracles associated with the Lord's work with our Iranian brethren continue.

Fresh Preaching

Firstly, we'd like to update you about preaching progress. A great feature of our Iranian brethren is their zeal to preach, despite the evident dangers associated with preaching to Moslems. Converts from Islam to Christianity are declared murtad, and under the death sentence, which can be executed by any citizen. Those who preach intending to convert Moslems are likewise placed under the death sentence. Yet despite this, and perhaps spurred by it, the preaching of the Gospel in these circumstances is going ahead, first century style.

A BBFU co-worker was able to spend some time in Azerbaijan, and met two Iranian contacts who made the difficult and risky journey from Iran over the border in order to be baptized; we're happy to say that they were interviewed and baptized in the presence of the Iranian refugee brethren already holed up there. Performing baptisms in Iran is really taking ones life in their hands, especially as we are under surveillance, and therefore it is best wherever possible that our contacts meet us in another country. It makes quite a salutary image for the contacts- for here are fellow Iranians who once enjoyed a prosperous Tehran life, now holed up in relative poverty in another, poorer country, fearing for their lives, living a stressful and uncertain existence with no easy way ahead for them. And all this- because they were baptized. So the contacts are faced clearly with the obvious and radical implications of following Christ.

Photo: The two newly baptized brethren [centre and right] who came from Iran to Azerbaijan for baptism, along with one of the Iranian brethren there who is on the run.



On another front, a visit was made to the Iranian refugee brethren holed up in Kurdistan, just the other side of the Iranian border. Preaching has been very responsive here and a large number of Bible Basics in Kurdish, Farsi, Arabic and Turkish have been distributed. We do continue the appeal for support to enable this book to be kept in print, as it is the only comprehensive witness to our faith which we have in those languages. We are very pleased to report that after excellent confessions of faith, a total of 6 Iranian brethren and sisters were baptized.

One of these, brother F, has an amazing Bible knowledge. He has been involved with several churches but realized their errors. An American-run evangelical group in the town where they are living as refugees would only baptize them if they paid a tithe! As desperately poor refugees living on their savings and a few donations from relatives over the border, this just highlights the terribly mercenary attitude that seems to plague to many groups, and one is truly relieved that these very dear people have been saved out of these abusive systems.



Photo: Bro F and his sister wife and another newly baptized sister

We mentioned in a previous carelink message that there are several contacts in Iran who have completed Bible Basics and are likely ready for baptism. Thanks to funds donated we were able to help two of them come over the border to be baptized, and with the provision of more funds there are others whom we could likewise invite over the border to have discussions with us and [we hope] to be baptized if they are ready. Anyone interested in sponsoring these cases should please contact us as soon as possible.

Welfare Issues And Prayer Points

- Carelink readers may recall our mention of the baptism of brother R from Iran. He came out of Iran to meet us last year and was baptized, and then returned there. He's been in touch with us every few days until a few weeks ago, he suddenly stopped. We are very concerned for his safety, especially knowing that Iran security agents are actively seeking to hack emails and bug telephones of Christian converts. We ask for your prayers for our very zealous brother.

- Brother S was a professor of fine art in Iran. He expressed his Christian faith to his students through art, painting a wonderful copy of Raphael's rendition of the crucifixion. He was warned to desist, but refused. Then, two of his colleagues were arrested and imprisoned for association with him; he now understands that subsequently they were given the death sentence. So he grabbed his wife and two young children and fled the country immediately. They live in poverty in the refugee area of a small town, with all the indicators of a family once used to living a good life but now suddenly plunged into poverty. Our brother is a fine painter, and he gave us some scans of his paintings. You can view them at www.carelinks.net/paintings.htm . We have removed his signatures from the paintings. He is a very fine artist, and is continuing his work as a refugee. One practical way that you could get support for our brethren is to commission a painting from our brother. He's very good at doing portraits. So what we are suggesting is that you email us photos of yourself or loved ones, or maybe of your ecclesial hall, and our brother will paint a portrait from the photo. We'd hope that you could then make a donation for this. Here's a way that we can provide a fishing rod rather than a fish, as it were. If, say, 10 brethren or sisters or ecclesias would sponsor 10 such portraits, the donations might raise up to \$2000 towards the huge welfare responsibilities which we now have for our Iranian brethren and sisters. So please do share this possibility with others and let's see what can be done to raise funds for these new cases of need which have just now emerged. They are not supported by any other organization in the brotherhood apart from the Bible Basics Follow Up Fund. The very wrong thing is that the Turkish Government doesn't allow such refugees to work in Turkey- so they have to support themselves either from their savings or from donations.



Photo: Brother S



Photo: Brother S with his two children. He grabbed two beloved portraits he'd painted of dear

family members [hence we've had to cover up the faces] as they fled their home. They got very scrunched up- as they fled without passports, and paid their savings to smugglers to smuggle them over the mountains into the Turkish side of Kurdistan.

We ask for your prayers that their appeal to the UNHCR will be accepted.

- Brother H comes from a family which were once leading members of an outlawed Communist party in Iran. His father was a major leader, and he was given the death sentence- and, as so often happens, his whole family [wife and children] were declared worthy of death. One of the sons- who is now our brother H- was arrested and spent 42 days undergoing torture and interrogations. He subsequently was smuggled out of Iran without a passport and there, having realized the folly of both Islam and Communism, dedicated himself to find God in truth; he was baptized some months ago.



Photo: Brother H [far right] along with his parents [far left] and sisters, at the humble birthday party of one of them which we attended. She is now 20 but has spent her formative years living in constant fear and with little education. He is the only family member baptized. They are all under the death sentence in Iran because of their father's political activities.

Brother H and his family have been turned down by the UNHCR- along with the majority of Iranian asylum seekers, no matter how sincere their case. The case has been closed by UNHCR and will not be reopened despite our pressurizing for this. It all seems so unfair, as they really have a very clearly documented case- replete with court judgments, prison records etc. So they face deportation to Iran, which would mean the death sentence. The only other option is that when threatened with deportation they flee illegally over the border into Iraq. This too is a very dangerous thing to attempt.

It's easy to think 'Well, the Truth will spread to Iraq', but it's a hard thing to smuggle yourself, your ageing parents and younger siblings over the mountains into a war torn country, where you have to somehow find somewhere to live- and somehow find money to live on. We are aware that only our brother is baptized and the rest of the family aren't, but we do feel that we have a Christian duty towards them. Any who feel moved to support them- and the BBFU now has really very low funds- please contact us. And if you can't then, please, do pray for them.

- Brother H [another one!] has been accepted by UNHCR, along with his unbaptized wife, and they are now being taken care of by an American ecclesia which he hopes to join, God willing, when he arrives in the USA. We give thanks to God for this great blessing, remembering that he is still awaiting final exit papers in an uncertain situation.

- There were several contacts who were not yet ready for baptism. Although they're not yet baptized, their plight is really very sad. These refugees are given no free health care, no state benefits, and rely solely on donations from their remaining friends or families back in Iran or elsewhere. The UNHCR application and appeal process can take even years to work through- and they aren't allowed legally to work during that time. Those who don't have such support, or whose supporters are themselves persecuted, are then left in an awful situation - they either go back to death or imprisonment in Iran, or steal or sell their bodies to stay alive. Those who are sick or elderly are in a very bad situation.

One of our new brethren, who had been a male nurse back in Iran, spends a lot of his time caring for such people and even performing minor surgeries which he is totally unqualified to do, with poor materials and little hygiene. By doing so he too is spreading the Truth by his witness. So for those contacts whom we have in these situations, we also pray.

Most of these people were once the families of intellectuals or Christian preachers or those otherwise picked on by the Iranian regime as 'enemies of the 1979 Islamic Revolution'; they were used to a good life. Significantly and understandably, they are ashamed of their poverty, and despite many such meetings with such folk, we were never once asked for help. Indeed, we were offered instead their hospitality and generosity.

- Our two brethren still stuck in Istanbul have been visited by several visitors recently, including some from the CBM, and have been found strong in the faith. They are eagerly looking forward to getting to Canada, but the long wait and endless bureaucratic hassles are enough to wear down the most buoyant of spirits.

We have brought many urgent and needy and wonderful brethren and contacts before you in this carelink. Please, try to do what you can for them, and please do pray for them. We'd also like to thank you for your prayers for our brethren and sisters who are involved with this dangerous and challenging work. They testify to a special sense of God's blessing, protection and presence in their work, thanks to your prayers.