

## January 2012 Winter Welfare Work, Child Center, Missionary Training

This Sunday's *Bible Companion* readings include Matthew 17 and there's an MP3 about this chapter at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/mk9.mp3>

### WINTER WELFARE WORK

We're very grateful for your donations to enable this vital work in Eastern Europe. The last couple of weeks have seen a huge amount of activity. Br Warren & Sis Jeannie Barton have been actively assisting with the work and we pay tribute to their wonderful caring enthusiasm over several weeks.

Brother Charles Abel of the Horley, UK ecclesia is in Latvia at the moment, filming a video presentation about the Riga Bible Center and the distribution of welfare that's going on. Here he is filming at the outside toilet of a very isolated elderly sister:



Brother Charles will show a preview of the movie at the Carelinks UK conference in Croydon on Saturday February 25th, God willing. All are welcome to a very stimulating event with presentations promised from 11 brethren and sisters. For details, see <http://carelinks.net/doc/events>

The situation in Latvia continues to get increasingly difficult for many, as you can see in a recent BBC report at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-16481679>

Brother Charles gives his impressions of Latvia and some updates on various brothers and sisters mentioned in previous Carelink reports:

It's snowing in Riga. And it matters. Until this week it was shaping up to be the mildest, least snowy winter for decades. Now, as winter tightens its grip, the problems for the many people struggling to keep warm and fed are really starting to bite. Slavik and Tanya are a good example. Previous Carelinks newsletters explained their predicament, living in an uninsulated allotment shed, with no proper identity documents and only occasional work. Now they are sharing a Carelink's-funded flat with Ivan and Judite for the winter. Tanya, who is three months pregnant, had work washing dishes in a shopping centre until recently. She is painfully thin. Slavik has worked on the huge building site for the national library of Latvia. But he has a nasty infection in both legs, with numerous open sores oozing puss, causing him a lot of pain. Visiting a doctor is costly, as is medicine. And with neither of them working their main food is milled oats, supplied by a humanitarian aid charity in the City. It's not much to survive on, so they try to supplement it with anything they can find in the bins. The only good meals they get are when they travel across the city on Sunday and Monday to attend the *Riga Bible Centre*, for Bible reading, breaking of bread and hot food.

Ivan and Judite share the one room flat, sitting on their small bed opposite the bedroll and duvet Slavik and Tanya share on the floor. Neither of them have work either. But their faith is strong. There is humour in the room, and a strong sense of conviction, that no matter what, God is with them. Slavik and Ivan speak movingly of how they have tried to share their faith with people they meet. Slavik is proud of his baptism photo, using it to convince friends to visit the Bible Centre. Several have done, but he is frustrated that they don't return. The snow keeps falling.



Photos: Tennament block where our two couples live; Br Slavik next to the electric radiator

Next it is across town, along slushy roads, busy with expensive western cars, as a population largely oblivious to the plight of the city's poor go about their day jobs. At the Bible Centre Warren and Jeannie Barton from Australia are busy installing equipment for the children's play area. *Cindy's initiative attracts plenty of local mums and their toddlers – there is nothing comparable in the city.* More equipment arrives – the sides for a ball pit, a large red plastic cone for playing in, a bright yellow steering wheel to mount on the side of the sensory cabin. A box of musical instruments from Anna Ryder of Horley, England is added to the inventory of equipment. The toy library, equipped with brightly painted wooden toys from Br Josh & Sis Heidi in the USA, is hugely popular, with many items out on loan.



Photos: Toy library at the hall; the frozen playground which nobody uses in Winter, making an indoor play area at the Riga Bible Center so attractive to many mothers; part of the play area which Warren & Jeannie built, in use

A chat with Irma follows. She is a long-time member of the Riga ecclesia. She speaks passionately about God's hand at work in the city, bringing more people to the centre. She is busy translating a new bible commentary, and there is energetic debate about a key point, which will not read correctly in Russian, if translated literally. The discussion ebbs and flows. Irma gets her way! God willing, she will be in England for the Carelinks conference in February.

In the afternoon Jeannie delivers bags of fresh vegetables to Gennady in his small, but very clean apartment. Gennady is delighted, as he clearly is with his new glasses and the new mattress that sits on top of stacked technical books that serve as his bed. He wants to cook some of the carrots for us, but we chat instead. This 72-year-old former professional metallurgist is determined to give his 14-year-old son Adrian a firm foundation in the Truth. Adrian is a skilled chess player, coming third in a national championship, and his father hopes he might win a scholarship for University. But the teenager must first secure official identity papers. That's not easy for an ethnic Russian.



Photos: Br Gennady with his new glasses received from the opticians after having been taken there by Jeannie; Warren delivering a mattress to Br Gennady's room; the new mattress, still held up above the floor by our brothers many books. Some of them date from his student days as a PhD student nearly 50 years ago. It was a long way to fall, humanly speaking, from gaining a PhD and enjoying a successful professional life, to being forced to eat at soup kitchens because all your pension goes on heating. But it was this experience which drove our brother to search for the meaning of life and to come to the Truth.

Walking back along dimly lit snowy streets with Cindy, with little Evia and baby Daniel snuggled down in the buggy, a young girl bounds up to Cindy. She is just 12 years old, on her way home, with a bloody lip and bruised face from a fall in the snow earlier. But she is irrepressibly enthusiastic. Once she has skipped off homewards Cindy explains she used to teach her in Sunday School.

God's hand is working in Riga. There is real thirst for the Truth. But the workers are few.  
Saturday update

Now it's really snowing, but we head 250km-plus towards the Russian border to visit Sis Nina's isolated small-holding. The snowy track to their meagre home is only passable with four-wheel drive. It is worth it for the welcome. Eighty year old Nina is elated, plying us with home preserved tomatoes and gherkins, fried potato, onions and sausage, an amazing spread – but one our hosts don't touch. We are eating their winter supplies, drawn from a sparse larder, only replenished with what is grown each summer. Clothes bought by Jeannie and Warren are hugely appreciated, as are seeds for the spring and plans for a chicken run. They so value this friendship, to know they are not forgotten, to share fellowship in Jesus, to break the long lonely winter. Refusing their hospitality would be an unspeakable offense. Even more poignant, their ability to be content, even joyous, amidst such hardship, is a true inspiration.



Photos: Jeannie giving Nina seeds for next season, in an attempt to expand the range of her crops and diet

### **MISSIONARY TRAINING**

Carelinks have been concerned for some time that local brothers and sisters be prepared and trained to themselves perform baptisms and take more responsibility in pastoral work for those in their area already baptized. Our desire is to hold 2-3 weeks intensive training in Riga for a handful of appropriate individuals from around the world, maybe 5 - 10 individuals. If you would like to sponsor someone to attend this, know somebody you think would benefit from it, or would like to attend yourself, please let us know. This is a first time venture for Carelinks and we ask for your prayers as we seek to be guided by God how to achieve this aim.

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