

## Lithuania & Latvia Update November 2004

The amazing progress of the Truth in the Baltic states continues, with large response to press advertising, and a significant spreading of the message to the families of those recently baptized. We rejoice in the further baptisms of JUSTAS in Lithuania, and of SARMITE, ANITA, INDOLS and ZINA in Latvia.

Our 'Alcolink' counselling outreach is very fruitful, although as yet no baptisms have resulted from it. We specialize in offering counselling to the families of alcoholics - which is something relevant to well over 50% of the population here. The material we use is available in Russian, Lithuanian and Latvian, as well as English, Esperanto and other languages- see [www.carelinks.net/alcohol.htm](http://www.carelinks.net/alcohol.htm) .

Entry to the EU has meant rising prices, but pensions haven't risen much, and this Winter many of our elderly and low income members face heating bills they simply cannot meet. Even if you own your flat, the Government will take it off you if you repeatedly fail to pay heating and utilities bills. If you don't own your flat, even if you have a rent-free Government flat, you will still be thrown out of it if you don't pay your heating and utilities.

This creates a major welfare issue which we are striving to meet. We are grateful to some Western brethren and sisters for 'adopting' some of the more needy cases, to whom they are sending heating funds directly.

Just a few days ago, we visited our elderly sister Anita. She lives next to the village school, and she has the job of constantly feeding the [very inefficient] wood-fired boiler, in order to provide heating for the school. Last year, she and her husband virtually lived in the boiler room, because it was cheaper to live there than to heat their dilapidated wooden home. They have a bed down there, a wash room and kettle. With temperatures down to -35 Centigrade [for American readers, water freezes at zero centigrade], the boiler room was the only place to keep warm. They're settled in down there for the Winter now, well below ground, just surfacing to get their pension, their pittance of a salary, to buy food and to chop the firewood. But they're happy enough, with their Bible literature, and were overjoyed to see us.



Photo: Sis Anita in her boiler room Winter home

We're sorry to report the falling asleep of our dear brother Sasha. He had been a tower of strength both to us personally, to the ecclesia, and to so many around him over the years. We were with him for the last few days of his painful suffering from cancer, in a run down rural hospital, in a dirty room along with four other dying men. His death was a release really. His last words to us were that in his pain, he felt he was fellowshiping the sufferings of Jesus on the cross, and, that he loved us and would see us again. We conducted the funeral on a cold, bright day, burying him in a field near his village home. We were able to give a lengthy testimony to the Truth, to the need for baptism, to the reality of resurrection, the promises, the Kingdom, and salvation in Jesus, to a good crowd of about 70 local people who attended. Our prayers and support are with Sis Tanya and the family. They would appreciate funds to erect a gravestone as a testament to his faith in Christ and hope of the resurrection.

There are several of our members sick and suffering at this time with inadequate medical care, not because it's not available but because it is all so costly now. If there are any homeopaths out there who'd like to offer their advice for cheaper or local remedies for various ailments, please do contact us.



Photo: Struggling to break bread- a sick sister needs two helpers to help her take a sip of wine

We enjoyed a very profitable Bible School in Jurmala, and we are grateful to brother David Webb of the Walton ecclesia, UK, for coming over to give the talks, which we greatly enjoyed. It was there that we witnessed the baptism of our elderly sister Zina, who now wishes to have her cataracts operated upon, simply so she can better read her Bible.



Photo: Sis Zina



Photo: Br David Webb explaining the Cherubim to us at the Bible School

Gwladys, Marcus and Duncan made a long journey to locate a contact who had completed Bible Basics and sought baptism. Her address was just her name and the area she lived in. When we first entered the region, we asked at a local shop, and they gave us directions to get to her about 25 km away! There were only tracks, no real roads, and it took us a long time and many questions of whoever we saw around in this sparsely populated area, before we found her. She lives in a derelict house in a clearing in the forest. There are boars and bears in the forests, and sometimes the hunters come and spend a night in the house. She has one room reasonably liveable in, in this rather spooky house. Her husband comes home at weekends as he works in the town. Her biggest problem is loneliness and a total lack of anybody around her. She has no mobile, so contact is difficult. What she does have is plenty of time to undividedly study the Scriptures, and she had come to master every doctrine of the truth in great detail. Marcus and Gwladys conducted a thorough interview which was a delight to hear. We then found there was just nowhere to baptize her- no bath tub, the river was too cold... So we arranged for her to come in to the Riga ecclesia the next week. She had to walk a long way to the nearest bus stop and then make her way to Riga, which was quite an adventure for her. We met her off the bus and she had a great time meeting with the brethren and sisters, and it was then our pleasure to baptize her. She returned home and later wrote to us:

I think I will always remember the day of my baptism. It was so wonderful to know there are others holding the same faith in Riga, and spending the day there with the ecclesia was

wonderful for me. My journey home was maybe a parable of the life I will have now, on the journey towards the Kingdom. I was taken from the ecclesia to the bus station by a young brother I had never met, but he was so kind, and got me a ticket for the bus to Aizkraukle when there were no tickets for sale. Anyway, I had to stand all the way. I arrived there after some hours but it was raining so hard and was so cold. So I slept at my daughter's place there. In the morning I had to travel to my village. The last part of the way, there was no bus, so I had to walk many kilometres. It was raining hard, the roads have no asphalt, so I was covered in mud from every tractor that passed me. Then a kind person stopped and took me home in their car, and then drove off. Maybe this is how it will be as I journey to God's Kingdom, that things will be strange, hard times but also grace, and help from my brothers. I am looking forward to continue this journey with you. Now I sit at home having washed myself, collecting my thoughts, and wanted to share this with you.



Photo: A brother from the Riga ecclesia welcoming Sis Sarmite into fellowship and presenting her with a Bible Companion