

## May 2012 Latvia, Carelinks UK

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include Acts 16 & 17 and there's an MP3 about these chapters at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/acts1617.mp3>

We are pleased to report three baptisms and a huge amount of activity in **Latvia** over the last week, but there really are some huge, major welfare issues. Brother Steve and sis Sue Gretton from the UK have been in Latvia at this time, with brother Steve presenting a very helpful study weekend on Science and Faith; Steve writes as follows:

*"We met several old friends and made new ones. One remarkable convert was the goalkeeper of the USSR ice hockey team which was invincible at the Olympics in the 70's. He has the reputation for being one of the best goalkeepers of all time!! He's a lovely man about 60 and very enthusiastic for the truth. Two other baptisms - one a young illiterate but intelligent, bilingual gypsy, KARMENA and another young man ANDREJ - one of a group of young people who are friends together. Baptisms tends to be smaller, more intimate affairs than we arrange in UK but the atmosphere is very nice. Perhaps 8-10 there. We pray & read a chapter, then Duncan gives a short talk and then everyone there gives a short personal messages of encouragement to the person. It's very moving.*

**Photos:** *Karmena's baptism. She was so nervous, tearful and emotional before the baptism, but her face and body language was so wonderfully transformed as she emerged from the water and dried her hair:*



*Two brothers, Vladimir and Voldemar, live at the hall and act as caretakers as well as being there in case anyone wants to talk. The place is meticulously clean and attractive. One area of the main hall has been 'fenced off' to create a safe area for the mothers and childrens group that Cindy runs. Needless to say this is a platform for preaching. She hopes to have a few days away with them this Summer - possibly in the house in the North. Last night we spent the evening with 3 medical students studying here in Latvia. Brother Rowan Barton from Australia, one from Germany and one from Cyprus! Had a really interesting time over the lovely meal one of them prepared, talking first about medical ethics: about assisted dying, people in a vegetative state etc. which led well into the subject of Bible teaching about life, death, souls and spirits. This was the first time the German man had come, so it was a tough starting point, but being trainee doctors, we were able to talk about what they saw and experienced of death and dying and were able to relate this well to Bible teaching.*

*By contrast we also went to see bro Slavik who is dying of AIDS, supported by his wife who is also HIV +. They were squatting in a garden shed, with no water, electricity nor toilet. Water from a well in a nearby cemetery. No lighting apart from a few candles. They cook on an open fire in the garden with wood they scrounge from the area. He's in a bad way medically, but they were there for all my talks on Saturday and put on a brave face. You never guess seeing them how ill*

he is. They always turn up smartly dressed and clean! They are almost entirely dependent on Carelinks for food, medicine and clothes. The state provides nothing. It's clear that Duncan spends a lot of his time running around after people like this. His caring attitude is astonishing and his commitment to those he takes under his wing. I don't know anyone else like him and Cindy.

**Photos:** The wooden shed where Tanya & Slavik have been existing, next to a garbage pile at the edge of a cemetery. In the first photo you can see the shed and the fire in the center of the picture. When we arrived to bring food, Tanya was breaking up wood she had collected to burn on the fire, hoping the heat would get into the shed to warm it up; but more smoke than heat seemed to enter. We found Slavik laying there in great pain. Tanya too is sick, her hands shrivelling and in great pain:



Soon after we had been there, Tanya & Slavik were evicted from the shed. They struggled to the room of a contact who had previously allowed them to stay in his room for a time, and who had been studying Bible Basics. Movement is difficult for Slavik. The effect of AIDS means his body is covered in sores, he has intense pain in his bones and now has lost his hearing in one ear. They are in their 20's and life is bleak and hopeless from a human angle. We found the house in 'Ammunition Street' (I'm not jesting!), - a rundown wooden structure - filthy. We entered a dark stinking corridor, where various characters peered suspiciously at us before slinking away into the shadows. On the first floor a small group stood round a tap. It was the only water supply for the whole building. If it were a scene from the most dismal settings for a Dickens' novel, it would have been ideal. It was a menacing place to enter. It was clearly a fire trap and was probably riddled with woodworm. Buildings like this sometimes collapse without warning. It oozed of an underclass of hopeless, helpless people, some having descended into drugs, prostitution and low crime. On the first floor we went into the room about 3 metres square containing one bed, on which Slavik and Tanya sat pathetically. At this point a young girl appeared - a bright smiling face who was introduced to us, - blushing as she was introduced - it was the 'landlord's' 10 year old daughter. She and her father stood together - a beautiful picture of happiness and love. She had adorned the walls with pictures of her favourite story characters, as all girls of her age do. As we left we knew that this was a pretty poor solution, but it was all we could do. It was clear that Slavik need to go to hospital again.

Baptisms are small but powerful, intimate occasions for those able to attend. After discussions with Rolik, the meeting opened with prayer and then a reading from Romans 6. Rolik read the passage himself in Russian and we followed in our Bibles. "If we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection". Duncan then gave a short talk explaining the privilege and responsibilities of living in the gospel of grace. After this all those present gave Rolik words of encouragement welcoming him to the fellowship. And in this way Rolik was baptised in the same way that all true believers have been since the Lord's own baptism and he joined us in our walk to the kingdom. After his baptism that evening, I asked him what it was that had persuaded him to be baptised. He said that he had been looking into the Bible and in his search for the truth had previously attended a pentecostal church. He rejected them for a combination of reasons, partly doctrinal, but also practical. But more than that he had seen how the church here in Riga really cared for Slavik and Tanya. It was this aspect of care

*that he realised was something he wanted to be involved with. It was what made life worth living. We took photographs and these were printed the next day to be given to Rolik as soon as possible, together with his own copy of a Bible. These photographs are treasured very highly by our brothers and sisters and are frequently brought out and shown as precious memories of the most important occasion of their lives. The Lord is very busy calling people to his gospel truth.*

**Photos:** *The scary wooden tenement where Rolik lives; Tanya & Slavik at Rolik's confession of faith, and rejoicing with Rolik after his baptism, their first "convert":*



*It started Sue and I thinking about the need to sponsor such people. At present Carelinks are paying out quite a lot each for accommodation, food, medicine and other bits and pieces for so many. A sister has been in hospital with her sick child, but funds for food, prescribed medicines and various nappies etc. all have to be found. Obviously we don't want to make them dependent on us, but for the time being and from time to time the needs are so great that one cannot simply ignore them. We need a flexible fund and regular donations, ideally... we'd like to propose that as many of us as are willing and able start to give whatever we can even 5 or 10 pounds a month into a Carelinks fund to ensure that money is there for these very genuine needs.*

*We spent a night in the north with Liga & Raymond and their 6 children. Raimond was in fine form this visit and is a deeply spiritual brother. We broke bread with them and he gave a lovely prayer. However he can only do manual work, when he gets anything at all, and hasn't been paid for last month yet. Liga is a parttime cleaner and earns a pittance. When we got there they had no food left after feeding us, so we bought them 50 pounds worth. The children are delightful and the older ones speak good English. They sometimes go for whole days without food or just bread. They are good students and musical and one lad is a top class footballer. To supplement their food they collect the rising sap from the birch trees in the springtime. It contains minerals and vitamins and makes a refreshing drink. Raymond insisted we took 2 bottles though they really should have given it to the children, but you can't refuse. Also visited Nigerian bro. Charles and his Latvian wife sis Evita and their little baby boy. Fortunately they live only 3-4 miles from Naukseni where Liga and family live and the only other black man in Northern Latvia - our brother Robert lives there, so they get together several times a week. Charles is spiritually quite a power house.*

*We went to collect br. Viktor from the care home where various supporters have been paying the costs of his care. He movingly said that if it hadn't been for our support he wouldn't be alive. He is attending whenever Duncan can collect him and has been preaching to fellow residents and sometimes 3 of them come to the meetings. Tonight Vladimir is going to teach me more about his Jewish / Hebrew views on the next 3 days of creation. I had a lesson on days 1-3 last time. He's also written book on Genesis and wants me to have a copy. Trouble is that it's in Russian.*

*The situation here for the Russian underclass is really very bad. The apartment blocks where they live are clearly in poor condition and in between are tumble down buildings - often wooden - and surely no-one lives there? Why if that were in my garden it would have been torn down long ago. The roof is clearly collapsing and must leak, the windows are broken and there is debris everywhere. But then the families emerge - for whom this is home. They scrounge a living - if*

*work is available for the stateless neglected people who live here. The story is repeated all over the place if you have eyes to see. After the collapse of Communism there was a new class of people - mainly the Russians who had settled here, who call Latvia home, yet now, under the present government are not welcome. They often have no papers, and so even if they wanted to go to Russia would not be allowed to enter. They have no rights and so are exploited as cheap labour, but they have no legal representative to ensure they even get paid. The pay they get is not enough to pay the rent, so they are evicted. It is not enough to buy food, so one man told us that at night time he goes through the rubbish bins for food, so his daughter has something to eat in the morning. It is not enough for medicine so they become more and more ill. It is not enough for transport, so they risk not paying the fares in the hope they are not caught. But the police are becoming more vigilant and if they are caught and cannot pay the 20 Lat (25 GB pound) fine it is not unknown for a strip search on the road side.. Their details are noted and they acquire a criminal record. This has happened whilst our brothers and sisters are attempting to get to the meeting. So where do they go? Well there are the partly abandoned allotments with sheds there where Slavik and Tanya found temporary refuge; or the dreaded night shelters.*

*Carelinks really needs welfare funds to enable them to support people like Slavik and Tanya. Please, if you are able to make a small regular donation it will be appreciated and may well save the life of some. Who knows who else they will take the truth of Jesus to in the course of their prolonged lives".*

**Steve**

#### **CARELINKS UK**

We're pleased to report the baptism of PAUL CARROLL who came into contact with us through our material about the non-existence of Satan at <http://www.realdevil.info> . After much correspondence our brother was introduced to brother Marcus and the Walton ecclesia, who earlier this week baptized him at the Erith Ecclesial hall. We are grateful to these ecclesias for their cooperation in our brother's baptism. Here he is along with brother Graham Mitchell:



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