

Refugee Camp Baptisms, Carelinks Conferences, Women's Shelter September 2009

REFUGEE CAMP BAPTISMS

In some countries such as Turkey, arriving refugees are dealt with by the United Nations. In others, the state itself deals with them. Given the effective bankruptcy of several smaller Eastern European states, they have no funds to spend on welcoming refugees and asylum seekers who cross their borders. Yet they are under international obligations to deal with these folk reasonably. This they do, but all the same life in a refugee camp isn't a pleasant experience.

In one such Eastern European republic, a Soviet era labour camp has been brought out of dereliction in order to serve as a holding centre for the refugees. It's a pretty fearsome looking place, comprised of dilapidated barracks and with barbed wire all over the place. By the hand of pure Providence, copies of Bible Basics were taken in there by someone quite unconnected to us. We were permitted to visit the camp to meet with two men who were earnestly seeking after God's Truth and baptism into His Son. W had previously been a refugee in another country, where he stayed for 8 months. During that time he became convicted of the need for baptism into Christ, and had asked no fewer than 6 churches to baptize him. Each had refused or not shown any interest in him- after all, who wants an asylum seeker living on the street as a member of a respectable church. Once he entered the camp and found Bible Basics, he realized why God had so strangely delayed him- he now learnt about the true Gospel in more depth. He read the book all through one night, and gave it to a former Moslem refugee, S. He had been considering Christianity for a long time, discouraged from Islam by the Islamic extremism he had suffered from in his homeland. The camp inmates have nothing to do at all, 24/7. There are few books for them to read, and no access online. So it was inevitable that W would share his new found convictions with S and that S too would devour the message.

So it was with great joy that we made visits to the camp, culminating in the baptisms of W and S. Baptizing people in a former Soviet labour camp is no easy matter. There are no bath tubs, for a start. We got permission to bring a large plastic paddling pool into the camp, and filled it up with water in the exercise yard- surrounded by barbed wire. We had to hold up the sides of the pool to get enough depth of water for the immersions. But, we got there, and with much joy baptized these two brethren. The camp guards even assisted us with this, and also with the considerable task of emptying the pool of all that water afterwards. The photos speak for themselves:



So we continue to marvel at how God so earnestly seeks to draw out a people for His Name in these last days. We are delighted to report that brother Rowan Barton has moved to Eastern Europe for 6 years whilst he studies medicine at the university; Rowan has become a solid supporter of the work and has already gone to visit and break bread with our new brethren. If the paperwork is arranged ahead of time, visitors can spend most of a day with our brethren. They speak English, and it's a wonderful pastoral opportunity. It may sound a lot to ask, but we wonder if anyone, maybe from Western Europe, would be up to the challenge of flying out for a day and spending it with these wonderful brethren, discussing the Bible readings, breaking bread with them, giving and taking words of comfort? Whatever, please do pray for these new brethren- life is really quite depressive living in those circumstances with little contact with the

outside world, and with nothing to do all day. At least we have been able to give the camp many copies of our Speaking About Jesus 'Improve your English through reading the Bible' course as well as Bibles and other literature.

CARELINKS CONFERENCES

We'd like to remind you of the Carelinks Australia conference to be held in Sydney on December 12, and the Carelinks UK conference to be held near Bath, UK over the weekend January 22-24 God willing. There's an interesting and challenging program being arranged; see www.carelinks.net under 'Events' for more details.

WORK AT THE RIGA WOMEN'S SHELTER

Our witness here continues, and whilst Anna & Barbara were over they were able to witness the baptism of ZOYA. The women are allowed to stay in the shelters for a limited number of days / year. The other days they sleep with friends for the odd night, or we provide shelter for them. They are not allowed to leave any baggage at the shelters- they are just literally night shelters, they are allowed in at 7 p.m. and must be out by 8 a.m. This means that all their possessions they have to take with them during the day. That's why our meeting place in Riga has a back room full of various bags of possessions belonging to various sisters. There are too many of our brothers and sisters in the shelters to be able to think of providing all of them permanent accommodation. But there is now a subsidized shelter, a kind of bed and breakfast arrangement, that offers accommodation for about 3 LVL / night in dormitories, that's about 6 US\$ or 3.50 GBP. So we seek to ensure that none of our brothers and sisters are left on the street or sleeping at the railway station. If you feel moved to support these expenses, please let us know. We've explained before that the minimum wage is so low that many who have jobs can't afford to rent a room, and so they end up sleeping at the night shelters if they have no friends or family to live with. Unlike many Western countries, these places aren't simply a refuge for alcoholics or drug abusers. There are also many elderly people without families who have to live there. Generations of Communism sadly destroyed family life, with the failed belief that the state would always provide.



Here's sister Anna [centre] with sister Zoya [right]

As a cameo of the kind of poverty we're trying to assist, consider this recent incidental report of Duncan & Cindy to the Carelinks Committee:

“We were sitting here in the flat at 9:30 this evening and I had a missed call- it's the usual thing, most people have cheap cell phones but no credit, so they call you in the hope you'll call them back. It was one of our sisters, a lovely, sincere, good living widow with three children. She asked if I could come with the car and meet her somewhere and transport her and some heavy bags to where she was staying. So I went and found her standing on the street wearing a heavy, very nice fur coat. As it's not yet Winter I was surprised. She explained that she knows a postlady, and this woman trusts her as a reliable, Christian woman of her word. This woman hadn't delivered the mail for the last 2 days. So, she had called our sister and asked her to come and take the mail off her, and deliver it. In return she gave her the nice fur coat and some small money. Our sister explained she had sold her coat at the end of last Winter to pay some bills,

and she needs a warm coat for this coming Winter. So, she agreed. Now she has mail sacks at her place and tomorrow will go out with her kids and deliver the mail”.

So please do continue your prayers and support for the great work going on.

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks