

Ukraine and Baltic States, June 2006

We continue tutoring large numbers of contacts through the Bible Basics course throughout Europe, and also empowering local brothers and sisters to witness to their families. We're pleased to report that this has again given fruit, in the baptism of OLGA in Latvia, and SHURIK, LENA, LUBA and SVETLANA in the Ukraine. These latter are the result of the witness of our beloved brother Boris and his sister in the flesh Sofia.

Visitors to recent CCM Bible Schools will have met this delightful couple. Separated by large distances, they both found the true Gospel in their old age, and have devoted themselves to sharing it with their family and family friends throughout the ex-USSR. Both of them can only be described as frail; Boris has had several heart attacks, and walks slowly and with difficulty. He's been advised not to go out alone, but with his wife's death and no children he has little option. But what is an act of pure faith are his journeys, his missionary journeys as he calls them, to visit members of his large extended family and see how they are doing with their studies of Bible Basics. His journeys this summer have been over 1000 km. Struggling with emphysema, heart problems, hardened arteries, he has fainting episodes every few days. It was a sober moment to be with him in a tiny railway halt in Eastern Ukraine as he passed out, and to see him sitting there with his head between his knees [his head has to be lower than his heart because of his complications]. We were pretty concerned but he slowly said that it happens every few days when he's on the road. Boris and Sofia are a couple with whom God is working, that's all we can say. They both believe the Lord is at hand, and pray each day for strength to take His word to their brothers, sisters and many nieces and nephews.



Washing facilities at Sis Sofia's



Photo: Sis Sofia and Bro Boris. You can see a stock of asbestos sheets in the background. Our efforts to support the re-roofing of her place lead to the purchase of these. We tried to explain the dangers of fitting asbestos, but she insisted she knows a young guy who'll cut them to size and drill holes to fit them. We urged her to consider the dangers of asbestos, but her tumble down dwelling is half made of it.

It was a wonderful day for them when four of these were baptized recently near the poverty-stricken home of Sis. Sofia. She wore her pink dress she'd been given by overseas sisters, and had made head bonnets and white costumes for the sisters to wear as they were baptized. Sofia's home has only a well for water, and all washing and cooking must be done outdoors. That's OK in the Summer, but no fun in the extreme Winters of Eastern Ukraine. However, we're pleased to say that her indoors stove has now been rebuilt - here is an overjoyed sister Sofia with some flowers to celebrate the rebuilt stove [and walls]. So this Winter she will God willing be able to cook indoors, as well as have more heat, although she still needs to gather firewood.



Sister Sofia with her rebuilt stove, for which she is very grateful

Sofia has no bath tub, nor did any of the neighbours. So we had to walk a long way across country to a river. It was a worrying walk, taking about an hour each way, with frequent stops. Boris and Sofia wouldn't miss the baptisms for anything. There was no road or even track leading to the river, so getting a vehicle just wasn't an option. We helped Sofia and Boris over railway tracks and up and down embankments, until we got to the river.



Helping elderly Boris and Sofia make it to the baptism site

Amidst many tears from them both we performed the baptisms in a large but very muddy river, near a railway bridge. Boris exhorted them to read the Bible daily and break bread weekly, and to spread the hope of the Kingdom to others. He explained for the 10th time how they were not to wear crosses, and how he wished to be buried with no cross on his grave [unusual for Russians] but simply a Bible verse about the resurrection.



After the baptisms



Walking back from the river with flowers for the newly baptized picked by Sis Sofia from her gardens



breaking bread together in Sis Sofia's humble home



A new ecclesia born:

We can only take heart from this lovely couple and redouble our efforts to spread the Gospel further.

Whilst in Ukraine it was a pleasure to meet with other brothers and sisters in Poltava and Kiev, and to congratulate Bro Vitaly on his recent marriage in Kiev.

Whilst writing, we'd like to remind you of the problems faced by our sister Nina in Latvia whose farm burnt down to the ground. We appreciate the donations you've made, and so does she.

However the cost of fixing her up with even a basic building and animals is going to be quite high and we really need about another 500 GBP [US\$900]. We'd appreciate any help anyone might be able to offer, realizing you're so wonderfully generous anyway. We're at the stage of purchasing materials.

With love from your brothers and sisters of CCM