

A Journey to Eastern Europe



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Last year I was privileged to visit Hungary, Romania and Ukraine as a part of my Scripture distribution work amongst Hungarian speakers. During this visit I was pleased to be able to distribute the Society's newly translated Hungarian edition of the "Church of the Living God" booklet in addition to Hungarian Bibles and Words of Life Calendars.

One question I have been asked is, why go to Hungarian speakers? Much of Eastern Europe – including areas in which many Romanian and Ukrainian speakers live – has opened to Scripture distribution since the fall of the Soviet Union, providing many avenues for ministry. But in the early days after the fall of the Ceaucescu regime, I saw that much vital help was being given to the Romanian-speaking people. What I came to realise was that in Romania there were some three million Hungarians, and in Ukraine's border with Hungary and Romania another one million, besides the fifteen million Hungarian speakers in Hungary itself. Historically Hungary had been influenced by the Dutch Reformed Church over some centuries, but that has begun to diminish, leaving a void which I have sought to help fill.

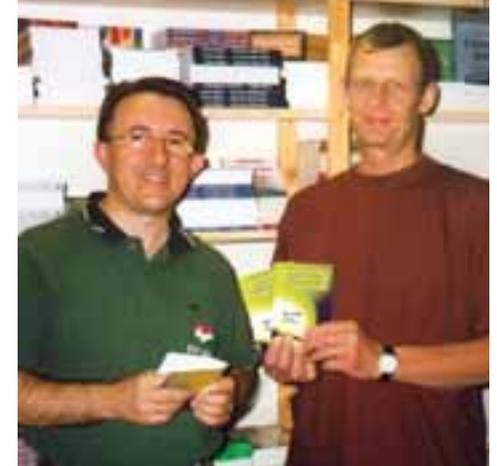
Many contacts have been made through whom we have been able to distribute the Hungarian Words of Life Calendars and Bibles over many years now. The number of calendars has been gradually increasing, as has the number of Bibles, and now with the "Church of the Living God" booklet the contacts have been growing. This growth has necessitated a spreading of the responsibility for the successful distribution over a wide area of Hungarian-speaking parts of Eastern Europe. But it is a blessing to be able to maintain personal contact not only with those who have taken the main responsibility but also with many individuals who are being blessed with the Word of God.

The Journey to Eastern Europe

I had taken with me some 16,000 "Church of the Living God" booklets and about 500 Bibles – the maximum I could carry in my car. I had not driven out to this region for four years, and I was on my own. There was an urgency in my heart particularly to get these booklets into the hands of Hungarian speakers. I knew they would benefit from this simple list of Bible texts on topics that we all most surely believe, such as "True Worshipers", "Christ is the head of the Church", "One Mediator between God and men", "Who can forgive sins but God only?". It was my prayer that, in reading these texts and following the references given, some would by God's grace come to a knowledge of salvation. Many have no Bibles, and few would have a Bible that had any references like these at all. There was much prayer for me before I started and I felt that prayer supporting me on the 4,500 miles I travelled.

The joy of seeing and meeting those again who were our friends in the Lord, and going from Budapest, the capital of Hungary, to the town where our main distributor in and around Hungary and Slovakia (a Brethren pastor) lives, was very wonderful. I was able also to meet our friends at the Bibelbund who this year have taken a sizeable quantity of Golden Thoughts Calendars in English for the schools in Hungary where our language is becoming so important to them as their country seeks to join the

A Scripture warehouse in Budapest





European Union. How good that the Word of God should be used in this way! Another brother, whom we have known since the early days some fourteen years ago, came with me into Romania on our journey to Cluj-Napoca (called Kolozvár in Hungarian), where we met a number of ministers whom I had not seen for some years.

Staying the weekend there we returned to Oradea and I went on to Satu Mare where I was able to stay for the first time with a Baptist Pastor there. He has two churches and three outreach churches to the Gypsy community in outlying villages. The Bible and the booklets were gratefully received by him, and in the evening I preached at his Prayer Meeting. They sang some hymns, most beautifully and unaccompanied, during the service. At the end of the meeting I was received with many “kisses” and thanks and was thus sent on my way.

From there I went back into Hungary and on to Miskolc, a city in the north of the country where I was able to meet our friends from the Hungarian Reformed Church who would be organising my visit to Ukraine and the region of Transcarpathia. After delivering the booklets there I returned to Romania, and then on to Debrecen, the second largest city in Hungary, and then on to Ukraine.

My visit into Ukraine served several purposes, not least of which was to see the area that had been greatly flooded in March 2001. In many places the water had risen some thirty feet in twenty-four hours. Many buildings still bore the scars, left with the flood marks on the walls. Now I saw the houses that had had to be completely rebuilt, and one village school that could not be.

In the three days I was in Ukraine I was able to be present at two graduation ceremonies where the 6th form students were being given a farewell by the whole school, staff and students. At one school, TBS Hungarian Bibles – provided by the Dutch Reformed Church who financially and prayerfully supported these church schools – were being presented to each of those who was leaving. There was also a church service afterward at which I was asked to

give an appropriate address. I spoke from Proverbs 1.7, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction”.

In addition to these occasions, I preached on the Lord’s Day (a very hot day, with temperatures over 30°C) at Nagydobrony, where there was a large congregation, and then in the afternoon at the Gypsy church of some forty people, many of whom had been converted. It was a very moving time for me, as I thought upon the grace of God which had reached out to so many in this village. The joy on their faces I shall never forget as I spoke from 1 Peter 2.7, “Unto you therefore which believe, *he is precious*”. In the evening I attended the Synod Meeting at which a friend was re-elected for another four years in the onerous task of caring as a Pastor for some sixty churches and their ministers in Transcarpathia.

The three weeks that I had been in Eastern Europe went very quickly, and I am thankful for the many answered prayers, particularly for all the kind hospitality that I received from so many people, entering into their homes and being treated like a member of the family. Most of all I am thankful to have had true Christian fellowship and friendship. I had seen and met most of my friends in this region, and had made many new friends. The gifts of friends and the support of TBS have been invaluable in all that has been done.

As I write this report, some 40,000 calendars, most in Hungarian, some in Romanian, some in English, have now been sent to this region and will be sent soon to the ministers and friends who will distribute them to those homes, offices, hospitals, old peoples homes and prisons where the Word of God will be on display for another twelve months in the language which the recipients speak and understand. The winter weather soon comes on out there, and with it the consequent difficulty in travelling and distribution. Praise the Lord for all His mercies and goodness in this work, and pray that this work will continue to His glory!

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.” *Isaiah 55.11*

A village church in Ukraine

