



Praise & Prayer Winter 2004

Looking back over the year, the first thing I want to say is *THANK YOU* to everyone who has prayed, given money, visited Eastern Europe, arranged meetings for us, encouraged us with letters, etc etc. Our financial year ends in July and in the year 2003/4 we sent more money to Eastern Europe than in any previous year.

Looking back, the emphasis this year has been on exchange visits and new buildings. It has been so thrilling to stand inside 4 different Romanian churches and see them full to capacity within just a couple of months of opening. People are so disillusioned with their politicians and Government. They see neighbouring countries begin to benefit from joining the EU while their standard of living decreases to barely subsistence level especially in the villages and poorer regions. Meanwhile the evangelical churches are filling the gaps by offering a 'reason for living'. I often quote John, a pastor with 17 churches who says "people are like ripe cherries just ready for picking; as soon as they hear the Gospel they respond and turn to faith in Jesus Christ."

A few weeks ago I took part in the Sunday worship in Friendship Church, Russe, Bulgaria and it was such an emotional and exciting time. Exactly one year earlier I had walked over a plot of land between two houses with Daniel and Emilia (the minister and his wife) and we had decided that this was the best piece of land available in the area to build a church.



They produced a design (which had to be in keeping with other houses in the street) and submitted it to the town council and within 3 months it was approved and work began on the 5th May. On the 29th September a group of nine people from their partner church in Bures, Suffolk took part in the dedication service. Only the ground floor is finished and work is continuing on the upper floor which will contain a kitchen and dining room (so that members of the congregation can cook meals in the winter for elderly neighbours). There will be a room for children to use on Sundays and for a kindergarten during the week and a large lounge/club room for local teenagers who have nowhere to go after school

The vision is huge for such a small congregation but they are convinced that reaching out to the neighbourhood is the only way to draw people to Jesus and this Christmas they are planning several 'events' for local children who will then receive gifts, which if there had been room in my car would have been contained in brightly coloured shoeboxes but instead they will have attractive carrier bags full of goodies!

Now another building, this time on a much smaller scale. In the last newsletter I mentioned Sam's need for a house. We didn't raise enough money to buy the house I pictured, but Sam said he was ready to build one himself. Here is the start- the foundations. I think the poor man must dream of bricks and concrete in his sleep as during the day he is working on the large church building in Jibou and then he starts again on his own house.



Looking back, there have been many exchange visits and it has been so encouraging to talk to people on their return from Poland or Romania or Bulgaria or Croatia and hear how they have been blessed by the church members they stayed with or met. A quote from the diary of a vicar's wife. *"It's been an amazing experience. A challenge to all we took for granted; a definite spiritual uplift and a bonding with those Christian brothers and sisters beyond our imagination. The generosity, the sacrificial giving, the hope of the growing churches in Danesti and Prigoria and what we can do to help - we have an important part to play, all of us and we must not let these people down"*.

Looking forward -what about 2005? -more of the same? Yes, because there are plenty of churches who need the help and encouragement that only a church partnership can give.

There is still a need to help with building churches or buying a small house and turning it into a church. People do not have cars and so cannot travel easily from their village to another one, so when a few people become Christians they always ask for a church in their own village.

However I would like to suggest another way of practical help. I know of 3 pastors in Romania who desperately need a newer car. Gheorghe's is 24 years old, Virgil's car is getting on for 20 and John's is 17 years old. They were all old when they received them so the mileages are very high. I saw these men very recently and noticed the strain and anxiety they feel every time they get into their car. Will it get them to the church? Not just a mile or two down the road, John drives over 70 miles to his nearest church, and Virgil does the same, on roads that aren't roads by our standards, and if they break down they don't have the AA to assist them on their way!

One of the problems we encounter when thinking of the money needed is the recent law in Romania which bans cars of more than 3 years old being imported into the country. So to buy a tough, reliable, second hand car will cost at least £6000.

These men and their wives give and give and give to others but never have anything for themselves. I know there are many parts of the world competing for financial help at this time of year and each of us has only so much to give away but I would be turning my back on Gheorghe and John and Virgil if I didn't mention their needs as they have no other source of help.

Looking forward - maybe some of you reading this letter could get me an invitation to speak in your church.

Looking forward - please pray for wisdom for the Trustees and myself as we seek to discern what God wants EPIC to do in 2005.