

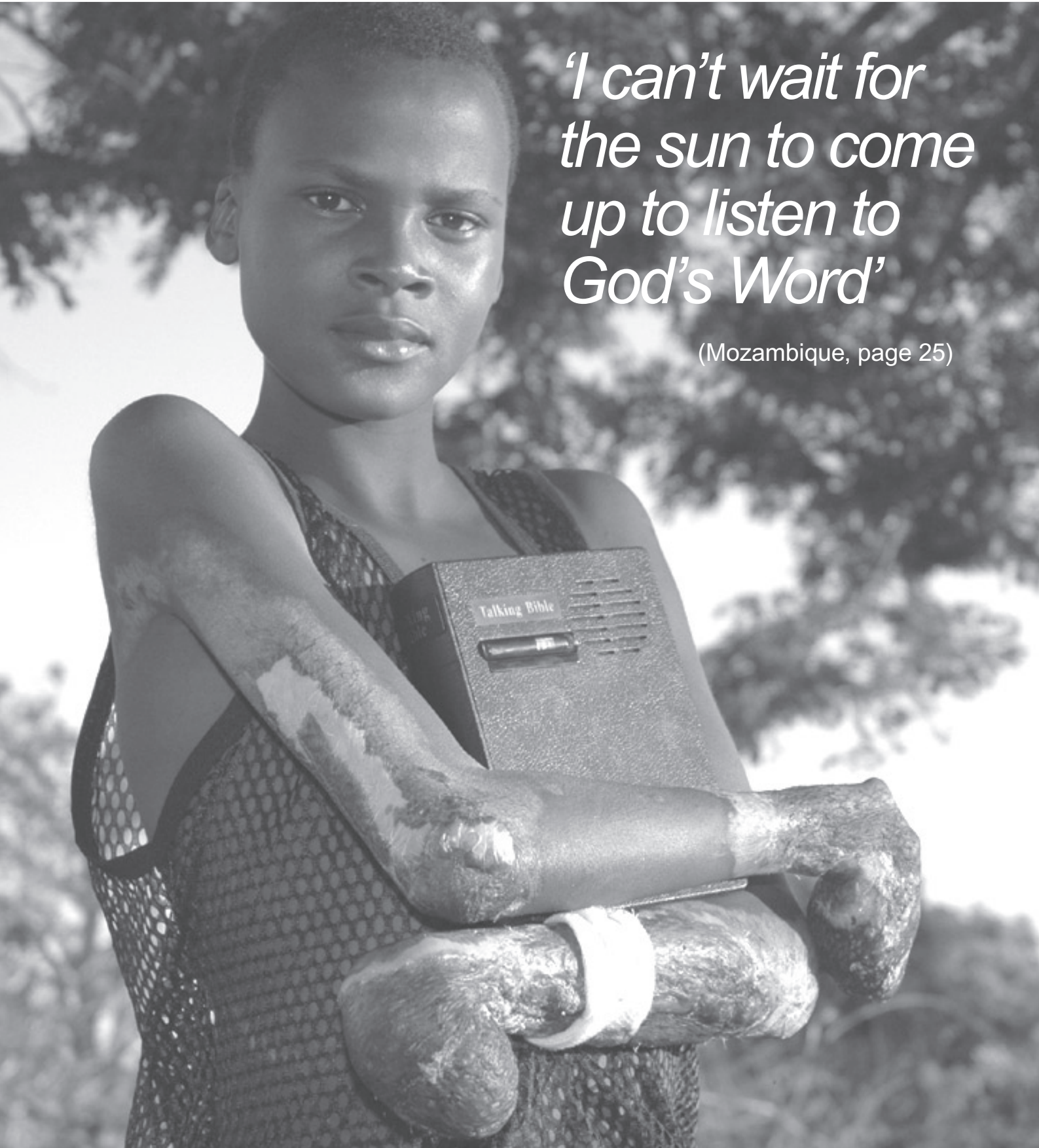
A stylized world map logo where the continents are represented by the outlines of the letters 'W' and 'R'.

World Report

*A World
Fellowship
of Bible Societies*

**UNITED
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SOCIETIES**

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A black and white photograph of a young girl with a serious expression, looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a dark, sleeveless, textured garment. She is holding a rectangular electronic device labeled 'Talking Bible' against her chest. The device has a small screen and a speaker grille. She is also holding a large, round object, possibly a fruit or a piece of wood, in her hands.

*'I can't wait for
the sun to come
up to listen to
God's Word'*

(Mozambique, page 25)

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Africa

Cover photo: Mateus Tangoni (14) was deliberately and severely burned by his family and neighbours for being a thief. He believes that listening to the Word of God has changed his life. Vilanculos, Mozambique [photo: Talking Bibles International/Ed Compean WR414/16 MOZ07DJ-59]

Europe–Middle East

Focus on Moldova

--- Part 2 ---

Why the deaf should read the Word



Natalia Boboc signs a story to other members of the deaf fellowship at Bethel Church in Chisinau [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/1 MOL07DJ-363]

MOLDOVA — Deaf people in Moldova are reckoned to number about 4,000. There is a deaf boarding school in every city and most go to one of these until they are 16 – or older in some cases – followed by technical school.

The deaf do not get the opportunity of higher education. After technical school, those who live in the countryside might enter agriculture or perhaps the building trade, but many come to live in Chisinau where they can work making shoes and sewing clothes. That, on the whole, is the extent of the work available.

Bethel Church, Chisinau, the Baptist church where Pastor Anton Placinta, Director of the Interconfessional Bible Society of Moldova, is a minister, has the country's largest congregation of deaf people. Around 30 deaf or hearing-impaired people, young and old, come regularly on Sunday mornings, sometimes bringing non-Christians with them. Victoria Doroshenko, who is responsible for publicity and

fundraising at the Bible Society (see WR 413/6) is one of those who works with them.

The large church complex was built some 20 years ago with money donated from Baptists all over Moldova – an astonishing feat when one considers how poor the country is.

While the hearing service continues in the main church, a deaf congregation – today numbering 28, five hard of hearing, the others profoundly deaf – have their own service in a room downstairs. Normally there would be more, but this being the season of Easter, some are still in their families' village homes celebrating with special meals.

Sign the lyrics

Their worship songs start with a hearing-impaired lady, Alena Brebu, listening to a worship cassette and signing the lyrics to the others. As well as listening to the music, she reads the words to herself from a lyric sheet. Next, two other ladies come and do the same with another song: they sign the lyrics swaying in time to

*Praise the Lord, my soul.
Jesus gave me eyes
to read the Word.
Jesus gave me ears
to hear the Word.
My soul praises you,
O Lord.*

the music together. To an on-looker, it is extremely moving. "Praise the Lord my soul", they sign. Jesus gave me eyes to read the Word. Jesus gave me ears to hear the Word. My soul praises you, O Lord."

Perhaps for the benefit of the visitors, today several of them each spend a few minutes at the front encouraging the rest on to greater devotion or sharing their testimonies of how they came to know Christ personally.

Zina Arseny tells a different kind of story, though. Using not only her hands but very dramatic facial expressions, she tells a painful story of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps during World War II, who survived and later encountered their captors – and forgave them. ☞

“It was hard,” she says, “but they were Christians, so they were able to overcome their bitterness and forgive.”

To someone observing people who are deaf, the relative importance they place on words and actions in various situations is fascinating. Yet there is clearly some tension between differing views of the relative importance given to the Word when acted out in the form of physical mime and gesture, and when it is read as printed words.

No written form

Much of the worship and Bible study of the Bethel Church deaf congregation, demonstrates the importance of seeing Bible stories enacted *alongside* seeing them read. It is salutary for hearing people to remember that the first language of the deaf – sign language – *does not exist in written form*.

Later that day, the Bible Society makes a presentation of its activities and of the available Bible formats to a meeting of another deaf fellowship, in Moldova’s second city, Balti.

About 30 deaf people from several Balti churches have gathered for the presentation at Vifania Baptist Church, and the relative merits of the Bible stories as mime and as printed text are discussed again.

Pastor Anton Placinta, the Director of the Society, encourages them all by predicting that “the deaf will have a church of their own in Chisinau soon.” He then speaks about the Bible Society and its mission of helping deaf people.

Basic questions

After he has given an introduction to the Bible Society, Victoria and Katea Reapcea, a member of the deaf congregation at Bethel Church, embark on a series of basic questions-and-answers about the Bible which leads into a talk about the reasons why it is important to read



Women with Scriptures at a meeting of the deaf at a church in Balti [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/1 MOL07DJ-599]

the Bible: to grow spiritually and find about ourselves from it, and through it to connect with God.

Guidance

Another visitor from the deaf congregation at Bethel Church in Chisinau, Vasile Mocanu, then continues. The Bible, he says, provides help in answering questions about how God wants us to behave. He gives examples of moral questions and indicates the Bible verses which give guidance on them.

Presenting various Bible formats, Katea then briefly tells the story of Louis Braille and his



(Left to right) Victoria Cucosh, Evdokia Anastas and Natalia Cumanova signing a song of thanksgiving [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/1 MOL07DJ-656]



Katea Reapcea, (above) a member of the deaf congregation at Bethel Church, prepares a drama with a group at the meeting in Balti [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/1 MOL07DJ-567] Women at the meeting (right) enjoy the Scriptures [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/1 MOL07DJ-598]



invention of a reading system for the blind. He developed it, she explains, by improving the invention of a French artillery officer who had devised a system of ‘night writing’ (raised dots poked into a piece of paper) in order to read messages on the front line without risking lighting a lamp.

‘Be honest!’

“Do you like reading the Bible?” Victoria asks the gathering. “Be honest! Is it always clear?” They give various answers.

Victoria then starts to look in detail at the Bibles that she, Anton, Katea and Ivan have brought to distribute today. “One has a dictionary at the end... another is a translation in contemporary language... this one is a collection of Bible stories in chronological order... this one has illustrations... that one uses simple language only...” and so on.

She describes how, when she first started going to church in the 1990s, she overcame the first

difficulties she encountered in trying to read the Bible by reading it in the form of stories.

“Choose the right editions for you!” she urges them. Then she involves those present in a comparison of two approaches to the Bible and reading. She has two groups each prepare and act out the story of Mary Magdalene at Christ’s tomb on Easter Day (from John 20:11 - 17) one after the other, but one having some slight differences from the other.

Two dramas

“In what way were the two dramas different?” she asks afterwards. “And which one was the *right* one?” She does this to make the point that although deaf people attach great importance to seeing Bible stories enacted, these mimes must be carefully presented and closely based on the printed translation or they will mislead. Bibles of the kind being offered today – with aids and dictionaries – are designed to prevent such misunderstandings.

“It is good when people act

out stories from the Bible,” she says, “because reading is hard for you. But although the printed word is your second language, not your first, it is a better medium than the drama.”

Meaning revealed

Not only do inaccuracies inadvertently creep into dramas, she explains, but the meaning of God’s Word is revealed gradually – through successive readings of the same passage. “You find new things in reading it every time,” she says.

The distribution of the Bible Society Scriptures then follows. Various members of the deaf fellowship sign prayers of thanks for them, while the others watch – as well as prayers for the Bible Society and its work. Every deaf person now has a pile of four or five books.

“Through reading these Bibles, which are our present to you, you will come to love and understand God,” says Victoria. *This story refers to project 82104. (WR 414/1 - 08/09.07) [10 photos]*

'I started to hear from God'

It was only after Stas Cucosh started to attend the deaf fellowship at Bethel Church that he began to hear God speaking to him.

"I had a lot of sins," he says, "I smoked, drank and did more besides."

He had married a woman whose mother was a Christian and then his wife herself became a believer, too, and they both told him that Jesus was able to work miracles and that by dying on the Cross he had saved humanity from their sin.

"My wife and I started attending a hearing church, but naturally I didn't understand much of what went on there," he says. "But then my wife brought me to this deaf fellowship, where we have separate Bible lessons for the deaf, and it was here that I started to hear from God. I began to perceive signs that he was speaking to me personally – and when I recognised that I felt a real joy! *This story refers to project 82104.*

"We had been coming here for two years before I finally repented and then was baptised."
(WR 414/2 - 08/09.07) [1 photo]



[photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/3 MOL07DJ-660]

The poor blind of Glodeni

MOLDOVA — Two hours' drive north, over the hills and plains, from the Moldovan capital Chisinau, is the town of Glodeni. In Glodeni lives Tamara Macari, Director of the Glodeni Blind Association.

She acts as the local distributor of the products of the Interconfessional Bible Society of Moldova for blind and visually impaired people – and helps them over the hurdles imposed by Moldova's well-developed bureaucracy so that they can obtain the benefits and facilities that they need and deserve.

Groceries

This time Pastor Anton Placinta and Victoria Doroshenko have brought with them not only sets of New Testaments cassettes but some bags of groceries. In Glodeni Tamara joins the group and guides them

round to the homes of the severely visually impaired people who depend on her services.

The Bible Society van turns down a white, bumpy unmade-up road and stops outside a tiny, shabby one-storey house. Here live Ivan and Nadejda Bejenari. Both are 54, though they look older. He was blinded in an accident at work when he was 18; she has been only partly sighted from birth.

The visitors crowd into a tiny living room about 10 ft square. It has a small sofa, a dining table with four or five upright chairs, and a television. There are rugs and carpets on the floor and walls

and a curtain over the door. The reason for this is practical more than decorative: since February the couple have not had enough money to buy wood for their stove. Although it is now April and outside the trees are in their spring blossoms, the house feels distinctly cold.



Ivan and Nadejda Bejenari [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/3 MOL07DJ-671]

They have a daughter living nearby, but with no job and three small children to look after, she is not able to help her parents much.

They are delighted to receive the gift of food.

Ivan and Nadejda are members of the Orthodox Church. They enjoy the liturgy and they go, they say, “as often as we can.” The church, though, is three kilometres away and, this being Moldova, there is no bus service to take them there.

This couple already have some New Testament audio cassettes. They display the set in its packaging but it does not look as though it has actually been opened. Tamara explains apologetically that though they were given the tapes in March last year, it has not been their turn to have the cassette player yet...

“Yes,” she agrees. “I could do with some more players... at least five more.” Sometimes she tries to get around the shortage by having a group listening session in her office. Later we see her tiny office and wonder how this is possible.

Large-print Gospels

Next on the itinerary is a visit to Eugen Gernovoi, and his wife Eugenia. Again the visitors are shown into a small sitting room. There is a sofa-bed against either wall and between these, at one end, a television which apparently no longer works. In the untidy way of many old people, things stand in piles around the room: there is a large-print edition of the Gospels and Psalms and a set of New Testament tapes from the Bible Society – and, unlike Ivan and Nadejda, Eugen and Eugenia even have a player on which to listen to them. There are also some magazines published by the Jehovah’s



Eugen Gernovoi and his wife Eugenia with large-print Scriptures and cassettes from the Interconfessional Bible Society of Moldova [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/3 MOL07DJ-527]

Witnesses. In the next room is a shabby but adequately equipped kitchen with a dining table and chairs.

Only one eye

Eugenia leads her husband in from the kitchen. Aged 70, Eugen has only one eye and is almost totally blind. Furthermore, he has been paralysed down his right side since suffering a stroke two years ago and is therefore housebound. He clearly depends completely on his wife, who also speaks for him because he is deaf. Perhaps because his sight and hearing are so impaired, his face remains impassive – though he helps take out the oil, sugar, dried macaroni and porridge from the bag that Pastor Anton gives them. The food has a value of 100 lei (US\$8.00).

Eugenia explains that although her husband should be certified as totally blind, in addition to his regular pension of 450 lei (roughly US\$37.00) per month, he receives only the minimum blind pension. But because he cannot physically get to the medical commission for an accurate assessment, that is not likely to change. “When I

tried to take him there,” she says, “he fell on me.”

Somewhat surprisingly for a woman of 67, she has a job as a guard at a veterinary clinic. In addition to her monthly wage of 350 lei (a little over US\$30.00) she gets a carer’s allowance of 150 lei (roughly US\$12.00) per month and they enjoy a discount on their electricity bill.

On the walls there are large, formal photos of family members, in somewhat unrealistic tinted colours. Their two children both live far away, one in Kiev, the other near Moscow.

Paralysed

Because Eugen is paralysed they cannot go to church. Eugenia can read, however – with her spectacles – and she reads aloud to him.

In spite of their circumstances, she seems to be cheerful and well able to laugh. “Sometimes, when I’m in despair, I put my trust in the Lord,” she says. “Recently I prayed, ‘Dear Lord...’ and suddenly a call came from my sister promising some money. She sent me 500 lei (roughly US\$41.00)! It was a miracle!”



Dag Smemo (left) meets 87-year-old Feodor Butscatski [photo: UBS/Andrew Mathewson WR414/3 MOL07DJ-686]

The third visit is to a widower. At 87, Feodor Butscatski, has outlived two wives, the second of whom died two years ago. Now he lives alone in a two-room house in a suburb of Glodeni with no proper cooking facilities. Social workers visit him but he doesn't seem to expect much of life from this point on.

"I try to cook and wash clothes," he says cheerfully. "The social workers can't help much."

Glaucoma

He has sight in his left eye only – and even in that one he is suffering from glaucoma. With the aid of his glasses *plus* a magnifying glass, he can just make out large letters.

"Even thinking is difficult," he says, not without a smile. "I walk down the road, forget why I'm going – and come home again! Maybe God will help me in the life I have remaining. Others have died but I'm left still struggling here on earth."

For Tamara, though, he has great affection and gratitude. It

was Tamara who facilitated his registration as completely blind.

"She's like a mother," he says.

As well as the groceries, Pastor Anton Placinta gives Feodor a large-print New Testament. He expresses his appreciation, immediately starts asking questions about it and, peering closely at it, reads a passage aloud to the visitors.

Aware that this man, too, will have to wait his turn with a cassette player in order to be

able to listen to the Scriptures, Dag Smemo, the Norwegian photojournalist with UBS, consults Anton and then turns back to Feodor.

"I will get you a cassette player – today," he assures him. "It can be a present to you from me."

Good health

The old man is delighted. "I'll pray 'Our Father' for you," he declares. And when he has finished the Lord's Prayer, he moves swiftly on to ask God for good health for his new friend and benefactor.

He bids the visitors farewell at his door and, true to their word, their next stop is at an all-purpose shop in the town centre selling electric kettles, irons, electric clocks, spare parts for bicycles – and cassette players.

Half an hour later the visitors come out of the shop with no fewer than seven cassette players and a deeply grateful Tamara – and leaving in their wake one astonished young shop assistant. *This story refers to project 82104.* (WR 414/3 - 08/09.07) [8 photos]



Buying cassette players in Glodeni [photo: UBS/Andrew Mathewson WR414/3 MOL07DJ-548]

Co-ordinating help for the blind

MOLDOVA — Tamara Macari's office is cold and rather dark, lit by a single light bulb, with bare floorboards and patchily painted blue walls. On the windowsill some plants in pots are struggling to find light through the cracked, dirty glass. Apart from a telephone, the only sign of technology in her office is a manual typewriter.

Tamara has worked among the blind people in Glodeni for six years. Her job consists of co-ordinating help for them from a range of agencies. These include government departments, the Bible Society, churches – at one time a Pentecostal church used to provide bread for the blind – businesses and individuals. The work is exhausting and she is keen to find helpers for it.

Tamara herself listens to the New Testament at home every night. The Russian version is dramatised with actors and music – “but I understand the Romanian version better,” she says.

Her ministry

Her ministry to the blind people varies widely: in the case of Feodor (see preceding article) she helped him register as fully blind which increased his financial benefits and, after some training in Chisinau from the Christian Blind Mission, she taught him to walk using a cane. Without proper cooking facilities at home, he can now make his own way to a café where he can get a hot meal. She also helped Eugen and Eugenia



Tamara Macari, Regional Director of Glodeni Blind Association, Moldova, with new cassette players to distribute to visually impaired people in the Glodeni area [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/4 MOL07DJ-546]

Gernovoi (see preceding article) obtain a new bed. At holiday times she is sometimes able to gather some of the 70 blind people whom she is in contact with together for a social occasion.

As the Bible Society visitors bring in some large-print Psalms and Gospels to Tamara's office for her to distribute later, two women are waiting to see her. They need help in registering for new glasses. Zinaida Perevoztcikova looks after both her paralysed mother and her handicapped husband. With one of their sons in prison, they are

struggling to take care of his little boy who has been abandoned by his mother. She gratefully accepts one of the bags of groceries that Pastor Anton Placinta has brought. She has a cassette player at home and Anton gives her a set of New Testament cassettes in Russian. Although she goes to a Baptist church, she has never been baptised. Her mother is Orthodox and is therefore against the idea.

“When my mother dies, I shall get baptised,” she declares. *This story refers to project 82104. (WR 414/4 - 08/09.07) [2 photos]*

Orphanage with a warm heart and an entrepreneurial spirit



One of the houses at the Christian-run orphanage where Romica Hutsutsui, the President of the Interconfessional Bible Society of Moldova, and his wife Viorica are house parents [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/5 MOL07DJ-385] and (inset) the couple with Serghei, Yuri, Constantin and Pavel, some of the boys at the orphanage [MOL07DJ-405]



MOLDOVA — The Christian-run Bethel Orphanage on a pleasant seven-hectare site 20 km outside Chisinau used to be a Communist-run children's camp. Now there are 10 large, modern family houses with spacious lawns between them. Each house has its own garden and each is the setting in which two parents with their own children live as one family with up to a dozen orphans – though visitors, at least, find it delightfully baffling trying to identify which children are which. The Interconfessional Bible Society of Moldova supplies Christian books for the children as required.

The original finance for the orphanage came from a range of sources abroad – in Switzerland, Germany, Norway and the US.

The running costs, though, remain considerable. Romica Hutsutsui, the President of the Bible Society, is a teacher to the orphanage children, and he and his wife Viorica are house parents at the orphanage. He is full of amazing stories of its dependence on answers to prayer: how teams came from overseas to rebuild two of the wooden houses... how 50 tons of coal came just in time from the US to heat the place through the cold months of winter... how a much needed van was supplied thanks to a donation from Norway and so on.

God helps those who help themselves, though, and there is also an entrepreneurial spirit about the orphanage. They raise pigs and cattle, some of the older young people work in a shoe factory on the site producing some 50 pairs of shoes per week and – the newest enterprise – it also has a bakery. To Mr Hutsutsui's annoyance, however, this is running at less than full capacity because it has to compete with inferior-quality bread which is sold at state-subsidised prices. (WR 414/5 - 08/09.07) [5 photos]

An unwanted child no more

MOLDOVA — Patrick was the unwanted child of an African student, who spent some time in Moldova in the 1980s, and a local Moldovan girl.

When his time as a student was over, the father went back to Africa. But, sad to say, the mother, who had a serious alcohol problem, later died. Little Patrick was then looked after by some of her relatives but they decided later that they couldn't continue looking after the little boy. So at an early age, he came to the orphanage (see previous story).

He was brought up there and, it being a Christian-run home, he was given all the love that his birth-parents had not been able to give him. He also developed into a very bright little boy.

Much later, when he had gone away to study, he asked his adoptive parents where he would go in the holidays. By way of reply, his 'Mum and Dad', asked him, "Well, where do all the rest of the boys spend the holidays?"

"They go home..." he said.

"Well, this is *your* home!" they told him.

"You can come here whenever you like." And for a long time they kept his room for him.

Since then the couple who were his house parents have left the orphanage. But he still has a home there whenever he may want it.

Patrick is currently in the first year of studies at medical school. Whenever he comes back to the orphanage these days he stays in the family home of Romica Hutsutsui, the President of the Interconfessional Bible Society of Moldova, and his wife Viorica.

Asked if the Bethel Orphanage automatically says goodbye to the children it raises when they reach 18, Mr Hutsutsui's answer is emphatic.

"No," he says. "If you do that, you may well destroy all the work you have done in all the years before."

It is a philosophy that seems to pay off.
(WR 414/ 6 - 08/09.07)

Helping the people who need an aunt



Ira Lavreniuc, known as 'Aunt Ira', helps families in difficulty [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/7 MOL07DJ-668]

In Moldova, even though one in ten of the workforce has left to find work abroad, unemployment among those who remain is high – at least eight per cent. The pensions paid to the elderly are tiny, nowhere enough for them to survive without help from their relatives.

This situation leaves a lot of people at – or somewhere near – the bottom of the pile. They try to survive either by selling whatever comes to hand, or they pick through what others have thrown away, or they take refuge from their troubles in alcohol.

Hard times

One of the members of the church where Pastor Anton Placinta, Director of the Interconfessional Bible Society of Moldova, is a minister, is a woman called Aunt Ira. She ministers to people who, for one reason or another, have fallen on hard times. They include people who live on the streets, people suffering violence at home and



Svetlana (left) who comes from a divided family, with 'Aunt Ira' [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/7 MOL07DJ-670]

people who have been pushed to the margins of society after suffering injuries in accidents.

When we meet Aunt Ira one Sunday morning, she comes across as an instantly friendly, highly talkative soul.

It is seven years since she repented and came to know Christ. At that time she was working as an accountant but on becoming a believer she decided she wanted to do something for the Lord.

Called to serve

"I had seen always those people sitting around on waste ground," says Ira, "and I used just to pass them by. But then I felt called to serve them. And as I talked to people I found that I had gifts of communication and I decided that God was giving me my opportunity."

Ira has the patience to listen and talk to people, to help them in practical ways and to tell them of the faith and hope she places in God. She also makes gifts to them of Bibles and New Testaments that she receives free from the Bible Society.

She originally knew Svetlana just as a girl in her son's class at school. But when they struck up a conversation in the street one day a couple of years ago, the troubled teenager, whose mother was working in Istanbul, found in the older woman a sympathetic listener to whom she could pour out her woes about her life with her father (*see World Report 413/2*).

"When Svetlana came to my home she saw how my family was different from her own," says Ira.

Spiritual journey

Ira began to read Bible verses to Svetlana for her comfort and encouragement. But Svetlana had already been on her own spiritual journey for some time – since buying a Bible at the Bible Society shop at the age of 14. So by the time Ira befriended her, it required only "only a small step" for her to accept Jesus as her Saviour.

Svetlana is one of more than 50 people that Ira is an "aunt" to. She tells us this without pride. She is just a woman responding to God's call to use her gifts to reach out to the less fortunate people she sees around her. *This story refers to project 82115. (WR 414/7 - 08/09.07)[7 photos]*



Wine and spirits on sale in a small grocery shop in Chisinau [photo: UBS/Dag Smemo WR414/7 MOL07DJ-444]

Weak in body, strong in mind, living in hope

With a team of colleagues from the Bible Society of the Republic of Belarus, Anatoly Greben, Charitable Projects Department Officer, visited several care homes for children and adults earlier this year. They faced heart-breaking scenes and listened to tales of courage and resilience. The following articles recount some of those experiences.

BELARUS — Leonid Sergeyevich has no relatives and no-one comes to visit him. He lives in a home for elderly and disabled people on the outskirts of the capital, Minsk. For much of his earlier life, Leonid served as a sailor in Murmansk, a large Russian port on the Barents Sea, and was away for months at a time.

Frostbite

One day, more than 17 years ago, he returned home on leave and was befriended by a group of strangers. This led to a drunken gathering at his home, where the strangers drugged him, stole his possessions and left him on the verandah in a deep sleep. That night the temperature fell to minus 20 degrees. As a result, Leonid lost both his legs to frostbite.

“As a helmsman, I had been at sea for 20 years and survived severe frosts, but ironically it was back home in Belarus that I succumbed to the cold,” he said.

“All my family died in the Second World War. My father and mother were killed on the front line.

Escaped death

“My elder sister, then a girl of six, was shot by Nazis while playing in the village yard. I was three years old at the time and only escaped death because they hadn’t noticed me.”

Now 65, Leonid is a lonely man. He was grateful for the visit of the Bible Society team and for the large-print Gospel they gave him.



Leonid Sergeyevich lives at the home for elderly and disabled people on the outskirts of Minsk [photo: Bible Society of the Republic of Belarus WR414/8 BYE07DJ-15]

That night the temperature fell to minus 20 degrees . . . Leonid lost both his legs to frostbite.

Nina, 34, has lived in the home in Minsk for disabled people since 1989. Born disabled as a result of complications during her mother’s pregnancy, she was immediately abandoned and has never seen either of her parents.

Fencing competitions

“Do you ever experience depression?” Anatoly asks her.

“What is that?” she answers brightly. “I take part in fencing competitions for disabled people, I have designed my own web site, and I have many friends!”

In 2005, a Minsk newspaper published an article about Nina.

“Nina was abandoned at birth,” it read. “She looked like a little frog, with knock-knees and disjointed hands. But this disease aroused the interest of a doctor, who decided to use Nina as the subject of his dissertation. His task was to put Nina on her feet... This young girl underwent 11 operations. Some may say she was used as a guinea-pig, but eventually she was able to walk!



Nina is a resident at the home for disabled people on the outskirts of Minsk [photo: Bible Society of the Republic of Belarus WR414/8 BYE07DJ-21]

“Nina has always strived to lead an active life – she even did a parachute jump from 2500 metres! By her own efforts, she received a good education, learned practical skills and found work. She is keen on sport, and has taken part in wheelchair races and table-tennis competitions. Also, as a member of a wheelchair fencing team, she took part in the World Championships in Poland.”

Nina was grateful for the Gospel given to her by the visitors, and promised to read every page.



[Photo: Bible Society of the Republic of Belarus WR414/8 BYE07DJ-19]

Natalya Vladimirovna was born disabled and has been wheelchair-bound all her life. Her mother caught flu during pregnancy and baby Natalya suffered the consequences.

She is bright and has a keen interest in spiritual topics. She gratefully accepted the Bible given to her by the Bible Society visitors, holding it in her weak hands.

Where the need is great, the love is greater

BELARUS – Only 70kms separate the Belarussian town of Mozyr from the tragic city of Chernobyl in Ukraine. Set in picturesque surroundings, the children’s home in Mozyr is comfortable and well equipped, but the levels of radioactive contamination are high.

As many as 85 children aged between two and seven years live at the home, although this number varies depending on how many are in foster care at any one time, according to Irina Ivanauna, the home’s Director.

Abandoned

Children from troubled families and those abandoned by their parents are sent to a care home in another part of town, but those who have serious physical or psychological problems come to the Mozyr Children’s Home.

Ms Ivanauna tells of one family with 13 children whose

parents are unemployed and are chronic alcoholics. All 13 children now live in care homes and boarding schools. One three-year-old boy from this family weighed just nine kilograms when he arrived at the children’s home. He has since put on weight and is developing into a healthy child.

Afflicted

The children are afflicted with a wide variety of illnesses, from deafness and defective speech to visual impairment and cardio-vascular disease. They often undergo surgery, and this year alone, 37 operations were carried out, Ms Ivanauna told



Irina Ivanauna, Director of the children’s home, receives Scriptures from Igor Mikhailov, Executive Director of the Bible Society [photo: BS Rep Belarus WR414/9 BYE07DJ-3]

the Bible Society visitors.

The children’s poor health is largely the result of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Children who live in institutions often suffer from ‘boarding school syndrome’, which means they grow up unable to run their own lives. At the home they have no responsibilities and no decisions to make, so they remain immature. They lack self-confidence, are nervous and easily frightened.

As well as medical, psychological and educational help, they need spiritual guidance. It is hoped that the Christian literature supplied by the Bible Society to this home will enable the teachers and nurses to convey God’s love to the young ones in their care.

This story refers to projects 73218 and 73202. (WR 414/9 - 08/09.07)

[2 photos]



The garden of the Mozyr children’s home [photo: BS Rep Belarus WR414/9 BYE07DJ-1]

Children's centre responds to special needs

BELARUS — The Mozyr rehabilitation centre was founded in 2001 to help children with special needs. Patients at the centre include 25 children of school age, eight pre-school children, and 50 children with serious speech disorders.

The therapy received by the last of these groups improves their speech considerably, bringing the level of their clearly spoken words from 20 per cent up to 80 per cent.

Develop

Natalya, one of the teachers at the centre, was grateful to receive literature from the Bible Society. “The colouring books and Christian ABCs will help the children develop their mental abilities and tell them about God and his love,” she said.



‘Lidiya’ who was born blind [photo: Bible Society of the Republic of Belarus WR414/10 BYE07DJ-13]

Lidiya* was born blind and is weak in intellect. The nurses read the Scriptures aloud to her, believing that God will work in her heart.

Arntol* is 13 and suffers from Downs syndrome. His grandmother cares for him, as his mother left him and started a new family. At the centre he is taught to speak and communicate with others.

This story refers to projects 73218 and 73202.

(WR 414/10 - 08/09.07) [2 photos]

[* Names have been changed to protect identity.]

No-one too sick to experience God's love

BELARUS – In the village of Navinki, on the outskirts of Minsk, is a boarding school for children with severe illnesses and learning difficulties. Of the 212 children who live there, 24 are under seven years old, 117 are aged from seven to 18, and 70 are over 18. Their conditions include cerebral palsy, Downs syndrome and hydrocephalus.

Deputy Director Galina Vladzimiravna knows each child's story. “Many,” she says, “are unable to speak, they are forgetful and easily frightened. But at the same time they are amazingly inventive in some ways.”

Alexander* is 14 but he looks much younger. He doesn't speak and is continually seized by epileptic fits. “Maybe it has something to do with the heat,” says Galina. “These days the weather is extremely hot in



‘Alexander’, a patient at the centre [photo: Bible Society of the Republic of Belarus WR414/11 BYE07DJ-6]



Pasha and Roma, both 20 years old, are friends and patients at the rehabilitation centre. Although they can hardly speak, they are clever boys, who enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles [photo: Bible Society of the Republic of Belarus WR414/11 BYE07DJ-10]

Minsk, with temperatures over 30°C.”

Outdoors, Mr Greben and his team meet Mary Jakob, a volunteer from Germany. She is playing on the swing with a boy called Inga*, who suffers from autism. Afraid of everyone, he is withdrawn and lives in his own isolated world.

Feels safe

Mary is a kind-hearted Christian, whose love breaks down these barriers so that the boy feels safe with her. She is a member of the Lutheran Church in Germany, and had visited Belarus in the past. This time she has come to stay for a year. Mary was delighted to hear about the books provided by the Bible Society, namely the Christian ABCs and Scripture colouring books, which will be helpful in her work with the children.

Visiting the hospital ward for children with cerebral palsy is particularly painful for the Bible Society team. They see one girl with hydrocephalus, who is unable to get out of bed. She has a large swelling resulting from haematoma, and has to be fed through a tube.

Hardly speak

On a more optimistic note, they meet Pasha and Roma, both 20, who are good friends. “Even though they can hardly speak, they are clever boys who love jigsaw puzzles,” says Galina. “It would be great to provide them with Christian puzzle-books.”

The second floor is occupied by the older boys. There are many of them, tightly packed into a limited space. Their nurse, Natalya Arkadyevna from the nearby Orthodox parish, reads Christian books to

them and teaches them to pray. She is glad to hear that the library now has more Christian literature.

Dedicated

“As we left this children’s home,” says Mr Greben, “I thought about how difficult it is to convey the Christian message to the minds and hearts of such a variety of children. But God knows each one of them, and works through the dedicated staff at the centre. I met such people: Galina Vladzimiravna, Mary Jakob, and Natalya Arkadyevna; through them, God will touch the hearts of many.”

[* names changed to protect identity]

This story refers to project 73202 (WR 414/11 - 08/09.07) [4 photos]

In the second of two articles, the Chuvash writer and Bible translator Eva Lisina describes the spiritual restoration that a visit to the places of the Bible brought her

The balm I found in the Holy Land

*“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.” (Psalm 137: 5-6 RSV)*

CHUVASHIA — I spent 15 years translating the Old Testament into Chuvash and in that time I used to dream about the day when we would begin to translate the New Testament. It seemed to me that this would be the happiest experience of all. But everything turned out so much more complicated; it was really a time of trial.

What happened was that my brother died. He was a quite outstanding poet. In fact, since

his death, he has even been called a genius. He and I were very close, not just in family terms but spiritually, too.

Serious setback

After he died, I suddenly felt reproachful and angry towards people who, by my reckoning, should have taken better care of him. This caught me off guard and was quite a serious setback: even while working at my desk I was conscious of a constant nagging voice. I can say in all

honesty that in 15 years of working on translation of the Old Testament I had never entertained thoughts of anger or reproach while at my desk. And if I had had thoughts like that, then it certainly wasn't while I was working. I always thought that I was a pretty ordinary person – ready to forgive, and just as ready to accept forgiveness. I can't recall ever nursing an evil thought against anyone.

But now I suddenly found myself unable to forgive. Per-



A view over Jerusalem showing the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock [photo: UBS/Maurice Harvey WR414/12 ISR91T-1213]

haps someone in this state of mind could translate a piece of secular literature, but when you are working on the New Testament you need a different kind of outlook. After all, how could I translate the Sermon on the Mount when I lacked love and felt unable to forgive my neighbour? It would be blasphemy! In that condition, I shouldn't even *touch* the Gospel!

But then I came to understand what I had to do – though it's one thing to understand the nature of the remedy, and quite another to take it and restore your state of health.

Persistence

Previously I had wanted to visit the Holy Land simply as a way of preparing to translate the New Testament, but in the circumstances following the death of my brother the visit became a compelling need. I didn't tell anyone the reasons – about the unexpected obstacles which had arisen; I just badgered Simon Crisp, the UBS Europe-Middle East Translation Coordinator, about the possibility of a trip. He was probably baffled by my persistence, but I reasoned that if you really need what you ask for, it will be given to you.

The resources to finance the trip were found – and the very fact that they were provided from Northern Ireland contributed a good deal to melting the anger in me that the circumstances surrounding my brother's death had caused.

Bethlehem... Jerusalem... Zion... the Mount of Olives... Gethsemane... the Way of the Cross... our Lord's tomb... Mount Tabor... the Mount of the Temptation...the monasteries – these places where heaven came

down to earth fill a pilgrim with so much emotion, and send him away so much richer! Each person has their own special secret, but one thing is sure: such a journey is an experience of salvation.

Deep confession

On the day after my arrival in the Holy Land I went to confession with a monastic priest in Jericho. It was a deep confession, but the priest was full of sympathy and tenderness. It was just as well that by the time we returned to the hotel in Bethlehem that night it was dark in the bus, and no-one could see my face. My soul was so full of love and forgiveness that the tears poured silently down my face. I felt that a weak person like me could hardly contain such love, but that even a little spark helped to purify me. It was one of the happiest moments of my life.

To my surprise, I met the same monk again the next morning. "Eva," he said, "I have been praying for you. Do you remember what I said to you?"

Do you remember?

"Yes, I remember," I replied. And I shall remember it forever.

A couple of days later we were due to climb Mount Sinai. Who has not dreamt of climbing the mountain from whose summit the Israelites were given God's Law?

"And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. And the Lord came down

How could I translate the Sermon on the Mount when I lacked love and felt unable to forgive my neighbour? It would be blasphemy! In that condition, I shouldn't even touch the Gospel!

upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up." (Exodus 19: 18-20 RSV)

It was on Sinai that the great prophet Elijah hid; Sinai was a place of refuge for the first Christians, a favourite location for monks.

Revelation

After we had made the ascent, a lady who was one of the other pilgrims in our party said, "It's good that we climbed it at night – if it had been daytime, with all the mountains clearly visible, I would have been too frightened to go up." Of course she would have climbed really, but all the same, the sight of all those majestic mountains does make you tremble. And just imagine: the people who were to receive the revelation of God wandered around that region for 40 years...

Those 2,285 metres were hard for me to climb. Even the Bedouin and their camels went in single file, and some of them probably thought that it would be better to sit this old woman on a camel, too. But I wanted to make the ascent on my own two feet. The last part was especially difficult. But it's good when things are difficult, because it's then that we turn to God. ☞

As I struggled upwards, I prayed a sincere prayer: “Help me, Lord! Let me glorify your name on the summit of this mountain!” And I finally reached the top! Now, as I write these lines, my eyes are brimming with tears of love and gratitude. There is a small wound on my finger from a Burning Bush on Mount Sinai and it’s a shame that it is going to heal...

I had two more deeply personal wishes: to pray at the place in Bethlehem where St Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, had worked, and to pray at the tomb of Simeon the Godly, one of the translators of the Septuagint. Both these wishes were fulfilled as well.

At the end of the trip, on the very last day, I was walking in the garden of the monastery in

Ein Karem where the Virgin Mary is thought to have spent three months. I looked down at Jerusalem and said aloud to myself, “You have been blessed with too much happiness. You don’t deserve it; it’s time to go back to Cheboksary and sit down at your desk.”

Two things helped me to get myself back into the right state for translating the New Testament. The first was that I remembered that the Chuvash churches were full of people waiting to receive the Bible in their mother tongue.

Special gratitude

The second was that the Bible Society of Northern Ireland supported my trip. When people you don’t know help you, you feel a special kind of gratitude towards them, because help

*As I struggled upwards,
I prayed a sincere prayer:
“Help me, Lord! Let me
glorify your name on the
summit of this mountain!”
And I finally reached
the top!*

like that warms your soul, the wide world comes closer and you feel that you have brothers and sisters everywhere. And I can say with full assurance: this help will be to the benefit of our common work. May everything good done on this earth be to the Lord’s glory!

The previous article by Eva Lisina appeared in World Report 413/9. This story refers to project 85225.

(WR414/12 - 08/09.07) [1 photo]

‘I’m filled with light and peace’: Lectio Divina in Switzerland

SWITZERLAND — “Hearing God’s Word is a privilege for everyone. During an evening of Bible reading, interspersed with music, song and silence, the body and the soul relax and come to rest. The heart opens up to listen to God. Reading the same text four times, as we do, is like a chisel in a sculptor’s hands: all its riches are gradually revealed.”

For the last 13 years, Christians of all backgrounds in French-speaking Switzerland have been gaining new insights into the Scriptures through a carefully structured approach

combining reading, explanation, prayer, reflection and sharing. One of the leading players in this initiative has been the Swiss Bible Society.

New insights

At the end of the 1980s, young Christians were responding very positively to techniques developed by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, former Archbishop of Milan, to help them learn a Bible-centred approach to prayer. These techniques, based on the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* (‘spiritual reading’) (see *World Report* 405/7), attracted the attention of both



The front cover of the booklet based on John’s Gospel [photo: Swiss Bible Society WR414/13 SWI07DJ-2]



Members of the *Ecole de la Parole* (*Lectio Divina*) committee in French-speaking Switzerland [photo: Swiss Bible Society WR414/13 SWI07DJ-1]

Roman Catholic and Protestant young people in Switzerland. In 1993, a group of them went to Milan to take part in a celebration of *Lectio Divina* and to meet Cardinal Martini. They were accompanied by the Rev Martin Hoegger, who was then General Secretary of the Swiss Bible Society.

Spiritual journey

By the beginning of the following year, the Bible Society had linked with church groups of all denominations to launch *Lectio Divina* in French-speaking Switzerland. And since then, *L'école de la Parole* ('The School of the Word'), as it is known locally, has been helping people on their spiritual journey. The Society's main role as a member of the *L'école de la Parole* committee is publishing: every year, seven Bible texts, along with prayers, are published in a booklet which

can be used to guide study sessions.

"I enjoy this approach," says another person from the Vaud region who has participated in *L'école de la Parole* sessions. "As they are read and re-read, the words run through my mind and penetrate it more deeply. A single word can grab my attention and carry me along. I become very closely connected to the text. Once all the stages have been completed, I feel that I have gained new understanding. Without really knowing why, I'm moved to give thanks. At that moment, I'm filled with light and peace."

Significant role

L'école de la Parole is also playing a significant role in preparations in Switzerland for the Third European Ecumenical Assembly which will take place in September in Sibiu, Romania.

More than 1,000 people gathered in Lausanne Cathedral in March to attend a celebration organised by the *L'école de la Parole* committee and the Vaud Christian Council at which prayers were said for the delegates who will travel to Romania. Each delegate also received a candle, a reflection of the Assembly's theme: 'The light of Christ shines upon all: Hope for renewal and unity in Europe'.

Special booklet

To guide the celebrations, the Bible Society and its partners produced a special booklet based on texts from John's Gospel.

Preparing this event was a truly ecumenical venture, according to the Bible Society. And the celebration itself reflected this. "For two hours, we were a Church united in all its diversity," says Mr Hoegger. (WR 414/13 - 08/09.07) [2 photos]

Americas

Peru's mountain pastors welcome audio Scriptures

PERU — The launch last year of The Proclaimer, a digital device which can play the Scriptures many times over, was a significant landmark in the efforts of audio Scripture ministry Hosanna/Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH), a partner of the United Bible Societies, to bring God's Word in a user-friendly format to people who are unable to access it in written form. While audio cassettes are relatively fragile and cassette players require expensive batteries, The Proclaimer can play for 15 hours at a time and can be recharged – enough to play the entire New Testament 600 times – by a built-in solar panel.

Ambitious target

Eager to bring the benefits of digital technology to as many people as possible, Hosanna/FCBH set an ambitious target of using The Proclaimer in the majority of its programs in 2006. The first country where it was introduced was Peru, where Rogerio Garcia, FCBH field coordinator in Latin America, saw at first hand how warmly it was received by pastors from rural areas around Ayacucho, capital city of the northern province of Huamanga.

“The pastors were excited

and wanted to see the devices as soon as they arrived, but first they needed to learn what the FCBH program is about and how to use The Proclaimer. I told them that they are the first group in the whole world to have the privilege of using The Proclaimer! Their smiling faces told what they were thinking: ‘Is this blessing really for us? Finally, God is giving us something that no-one else in the world has. I want a Proclaimer’.

Strong hands

“The pastors have strong hands with thick fingers that are only used to cultivating and planting. It was a great moment

**Faith Comes
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when they picked up The Proclaimer very gently to learn how to use it. They all shouted ‘Alleluia’ when it began playing in their language – Quechua Ayacucho. You can really feel their love for you and it is a special experience to embrace these old and young pastors from the mountains. I would not change this experience for anything, because when they embrace me, I feel like they are saying, ‘Thanks to God for your love, for your Word, for The



A woman at the launch of The Proclaimer, the digital Scripture player developed by Faith Comes By Hearing in Peru [photo: Hosanna WR414/14 PER07DJ-1]



'I want a Proclaimer:' a man at the launch of the digital Scripture player developed by Hosanna/Faith Comes By Hearing in Peru [photo: Hosanna WR414/14 PER07DJ-5]

'Is this blessing really for us? Finally, God is giving us something that no one else in the world has. I want a Proclaimer'

Proclaimer'. All the pastors are happy with The Proclaimer and, most important, they are happy with God. Eighty-one Proclaimers were distributed on the first day, eighty-two on the second day."

Many Bible Societies around the world are very active in promoting the *FCBH* program. Among them is the Peruvian Bible Society, which this year is targeting the country's two official languages: Quechua Cuzco, spoken by some 1.5 million people, and Spanish. The program is changing the

lives of people in varied circumstances.

Felix, a taxi driver in Lima, came to faith seven years ago. At a meeting of the Association of Christian Taxi Drivers, an organisation formed by the Bible Society in 1998 (see *Special Report 23/04*), Felix found out about the Scriptures on cassette available from the Bible Society. Each taxi driver was given a cassette containing the Gospel of Mark.

Talk about Jesus

Felix has since carried this cassette in his taxi ever since. When people get into his taxi, he immediately puts in a cassette. People ask, "What is that?", and this creates an opening for him to begin talking about the Bible and about Jesus.

One day a couple flagged down Felix's taxi. The male

passenger asked Felix about the cassette he was playing and then said, "What are you?" Felix replied, "I am a Christian." The passenger then asked, "Are you happy? I have a lot of money and I am not happy." Felix answered, "Yes, I am very happy with my Lord."

The man asked for an explanation, so Felix presented the Gospel to him. As they were talking, the man confessed, "We took this taxi because we wanted to rob you, but now I've changed my mind. We will do nothing to harm you."

After telling this story, Felix remarked with gratitude, "God saved me again."

For earlier reports on The Proclaimer, see World Report 400/04 and 400/05.

This report refers to project 84313. (WR 414/14 - 08/09.07) [4 photos]

Women unite to support the needy in Guyana

GUYANA — Each year on the first Friday in March, women from more than 170 countries and regions observe a common day of prayer under the banner of the Women’s World Day of Prayer (WWDP). Through special worship services held on a rolling basis on this day, and through ongoing prayer and service throughout the year, women from many different social and religious backgrounds affirm that “prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence in the world”.

The WWDP worship service has a different theme each year, centred on a particular country, and national WWDP committees across the world donate funds to

organisations, including Bible Societies, which are involved in Scripture-based projects to help the disadvantaged of that country, especially women, children and young people. National committees may also choose to support Bible work in general.

God’s wisdom

This year, the WWDP movement focused on Paraguay (see *World Report* 405/6). Its chosen country for next year is Guyana. Under the theme ‘God’s Wisdom Provides New Understanding’, women across the world will pray and raise funds for projects in this country of just 751,000 people which is one of the poorest in the Americas. Guyana shares borders with Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname, and Bible work there is overseen



by the Suriname Bible Society. But with average incomes very low and many people’s lives having been severely disrupted by devastating floods in 2005 (see *Latest News* #328), few people can afford to buy Bibles.

An information sheet about Guyana is available from smort@ubs-wsc.org. Alternatively, look on the UBS Intranet under Fundraising/Resources/Country Information/Guyana.

Further information about the WWDP movement (in English) can be found at www.wwdp-natcomm.org (WR 414/15 - 08/09.07)

UBS Intranet

Have you registered for the UBS Intranet yet?

It is available in both English and French, and the Spanish version is being developed as *World Report* 414 goes to print.

Contact comms@ubs-wsc.org to register and gain access to all the Fellowship news and to the photo library.

Africa

Audio Scriptures bring God's Word into the heart of the community

In many countries across the world, audio Scriptures supplied by organisations such as Talking Bibles International are playing a vital role in bringing God's Word to people who, for reasons including disability and poor literacy, cannot read the Bible for themselves. It is often Bible Societies that, in partnership with these organisations, are at the forefront of distributing audio Scriptures in remote communities where even church leaders have a very limited knowledge of the Bible. The following testimonies gathered by Talking Bibles International in Vilanculos, a town on the Indian Ocean in southern Mozambique, give an insight into how positively both individuals and communities are responding to receiving God's Word in such an accessible format.

MOZAMBIQUE — Unlike many people in rural Mozambique, Rico Masingi (22) is able to read. When it comes to reading the Bible, however, he sees this skill as a burden rather than a blessing.

"I find it very hard to read the written Bible," he confesses. "I get tired very quickly and can only read a small amount. But the Talking Bible is much easier. I can listen to whole books!"

From an early age, Mr Masingi wanted to respond to the command of Jesus to "Go and preach the good news to everyone in the world" (Mark 16: 15, CEV). He was not sure how to proceed, however, in a community with high illiteracy levels and where the views of younger people are not always respected. Everything changed when he received a Talking Bible as part of a distribution at his church in 2005.



Rico Masingi (22) uses the Talking Bible in his work as an evangelist in Vilanculos [photo: Talking Bibles International/Ed Compean WR414/16 MOZ07DJ-54]

Without fear

"I received an understanding of God's Word that I could never have got from only reading it. I have used this to share my faith without fear."

He soon set to work using his Talking Bible to reach out to his community.

"I started by listening by myself for around an hour every day," he says. "I found that I couldn't wait to have more time to listen!"

Listening regularly to the Word of God increased his desire to share it with others so much that he

formed Bible listening groups with members of his family. Before long, many other people were asking to hear the Scriptures in Xitshwa (which is spoken by around 700,000 people in Mozambique) and he began lending the Talking Bible to other groups.

“People may not always listen to an ordinary man, but they will listen to the power of the Bible,” he reflects.

Since the arrival of the Talking Bible, he has seen a clear change in people’s attitudes.

“The Talking Bible is how we hear God’s Word now. I think people wanted to hear more than they were hearing on Sundays, but they were not able to.

“We need more Talking Bibles! More people are now coming to church, and there is nothing more important than that.”

My favourite time is 4am

Sonja Mangasi, a 36-year-old mother, agrees.

“Hearing God’s Word only once a week was not enough,” she says. “I tried to learn more, but it was hard for me because I cannot read.” (*It is estimated that illiteracy levels in rural Mozambique are higher than 70 per cent.*)

Mrs Mangasi spends long days carrying out all her domestic duties, often carrying her 12-month-old son on her back. She doesn’t have time to listen to her Talking Bible during the day, so she gets up early.



Sonja Mangasi enjoys listening to the Talking Bible, especially at 4am! [photo: Talking Bibles International/Ed Compean WR414/16 MOZ07DJ-63]

“My favourite time is 4am: it helps me to prepare for the day’s work. Since the Talking Bibles came here in 2005 I have been listening daily. I have listened to the whole of the New Testament several times and I really feel that I am getting to know God’s Word.”



Women at a church service in Vilanculos [photo: Talking Bibles International/Ed Compean WR414/16 MOZ07DJ-66]



“Sometimes I cannot wait for the sun to come up so that I can use the solar panel!”

Mateus Tangoni (14) was severely burned by his family and neighbours for being a thief. He believes that the Word of God has changed his life [photo: Talking Bibles International/Ed Compean WR414/16 MOZ07DJ-59]

And it is not only the adults of Vilanculos whose lives are being touched by God’s Word in audio format. Last year, at the age of only 14, Mateus Tangoni experienced a very adult form of justice. “I was a thief and a liar,” he admits. “I was involved in all sorts of bad things.”

Lost his fingers

Finally the adults in his community lost patience with him and administered their own form of justice. They beat him severely and held his hands in a fire until he lost his fingers. He received hospital treatment, but it will be a long time before his wounds heal. His family cannot care for him, so he has been taken into the home of a local evangelist. This is where he received a Talking Bible and where, hearing God’s Word for the first time, he came to faith.

“Every time I listen I hear something new,” he says. “I know now that I should not lie, kill or steal. I’ve heard how to live for the first time in my life.”

Listening to his Talking Bible fills the long days of gradual healing. This, along with looking forward to going to church on Sunday, helps him to forget the loneliness and the pain.

“I listen to the Talking Bible every morning,” he says. “Sometimes I cannot wait for the sun to come up so that I can use the solar panel!”

God’s Word has had such a strong impact on him that he can now even talk of forgiving the people who burned him. “I can now love my neighbour as myself as I learn to turn my cheek to what has been done to me.”

Simion Tsenane (42) is an evangelist in Vilanculos. As the main Talking Bible worker in Mozambique, however, he is also keen to develop the use of audio Scriptures in many other places.

“There was very little study or understanding of God’s Word before the Talking Bible came to the areas where it has been distributed,” he says. “Now people in these places are being helped to understand the Scriptures, but there are still many places where God’s Word is not being heard at all.”

Better understanding

He has identified many places where he would like to distribute more Talking Bibles. He knows that a better understanding of the Scriptures will strengthen local churches. In turn, the churches will begin sharing God’s Word through their evangelists and the Talking Bible will reach even more



Simion Tsenane is an evangelist in Vilanculos. He is a key member of the Talking Bibles International team in Mozambique [photo: Talking Bibles International/Ed Compean WR414/16 MOZ07DJ-51]

remote communities. He often hears of places where one Talking Bible is used by several different listening groups and where churches are growing as non-literate people hear God's Word.

"The Talking Bible is a great ministry tool for our country," he declares. "Many people have not attended school, so they cannot read God's Word. In rural areas, it is not unusual for there to be no Bibles at all. And many pastors cannot read in any case, so audio Scriptures nurture pastors as well as the people." (WR 414/16 - 08/09.07)[9 photos]

What is the Talking Bible?

"This is designed to last a lifetime!" says Paul Hoekstra, Vice-President of Talking Bibles International, of the piece of equipment that was born out of his brother's determination to construct something to overcome the problems associated with using traditional cassette tapes. A number of Bible Societies around the world are involved in various aspects of producing and distributing the Talking Bible, a pre-programmed, sealed unit which is both easy to use (each button performs only one function, which is particularly helpful for visually impaired people) and robust, even in harsh climates. Talking Bibles, based in California, also has its own resource centre in India.

Although it can run on solar power or be hand-cranked, the Talking Bible is mainly intended to be operated by standard batteries that are available almost everywhere. "Using batteries actually enhances people's listening experience," explains Mr Hoekstra. "Research undertaken by UBS shows that, with a battery-powered unit, people tend to gather together to listen and they really concentrate. It's a shared, focused experience."

Mr Hoekstra sees the Talking Bible as complementary to other types of audio Scripture device, but he also points to its unique feature. "The fact that it *looks* like a Bible gives extra credibility to the message it contains," he explains. "This is important in cultures which place great emphasis on symbolism."

For more news of Bible Societies' work, please go to: www.biblesociety.org and click on *Latest News*

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