

Dear Sisters,



Many greetings to you from the new Committee. We are very enthusiastic to serve our Lord in this new way. We would like to serve you, to do our best for you and – most of all – with you!

Each of us has a great opportunity to live a different life than the people usually live. We are redeemed through our Saviour Jesus Christ. He is present in our life every day, we can do everything with Him. This knowledge gives us hope and love in our heart through which we can care for other people. In this season of the year nearly everybody in the Christian World tries to look for the family members, for friends and show somehow the love to them. My wish for you that you might give and share your love every day through the year, not just right in the Advent. Our greatest gift is forever with us, never turns wrong, never runs out: this gift is himself the LOVE.

„This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him” 1John 4:9

In this issue we would like to share with you some Christmas thoughts, greetings from the former and the recent presidents of EBWU, some testimonies, reports from our European family members, it means Baptist women's unions, prayer requests and a special tour guide through Bulgaria. This report shows a great vitality and willing to serving our Lord. Would you like us to know more about your country, please send such reports and share the life in your country, and tell us, how the Baptist women live there! We are ready to learn more about you!

We are looking forward to receiving your testimonies, messages, prayer requests! God bless you all! With love

Aniko Ujvari

Christmas 2003.

This is the wonderful time of the season. Christmas is coming, Christmas is here, Christmas is in our life forever. The news of joy, love and life – all are in this holiday.

„For us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the goverment shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” (Isa 9:6)

Jesus is in truth the Prince of Peace. We experience how the sin separates. It puts a barrier between man and God. Sin is the great disturber, the constant troubler of the heart. It is the sorce of all disorder, strife, jealousy, envy, covetousness, hate, war and killing. Jesus came to restore order to your heart. He came to redress and redeem. The Angel told to Joseph „Call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.



Have peace at this Christmas in your heart!

The peace of God. „And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:7)

Christ had God's peace. It gave him calm in the minds of a midnight storm when all others were afraid. It was the poise of mind that brought his tormentors to naught when they should to trap him in his words. It was the love that caused him to say on the cross, „Father, forgive them.” This is the peace of God.

Have God's peace in your heart!

How can I find this peace? „My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth.” The peace of God is a gift. You must accept it in humility and thanksgiving. „You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” (Isa 26:3)

The last phrase is the important one – because he trust in you. These words contain the secret to the possession of his peace. The person who trusts his life to God through Jesus Christ has this peace. It is God's gift in response to repentance and faith.

This is the most wonderful Christmas gift – a really peaceful time in your spirit, family and country. God bless you, my dear sisters.



I will keep you in my prayers...

It is hard to realise that the conference in Croatia took place over four months ago. For me the memory will remain very precious, as I was able to greet so many of you, and be reminded of times when God's plan enabled me to visit your countries. It was also encouraging to see that so many of your unions have appointed new and young leaders with a vision for the future, and a tremendous contribution to the work of the Kingdom. One of my (few) regrets is the inability to follow through with all your new developments. But I will keep you in my prayers, and any special requests you may have will be included.



I have been thankful to God in these last few months that He has enabled me to keep looking forward; I honestly can say that the sense of happiness which was a totally unexpected feature of the days immediately after Croatia has remained with me. Part of this is due to the sense that God was at work in the elections for the new committee. I know that with me you will continue to pray for Ewa and the others, as she, and they, take up the responsibilities of EBWU. We know that the God Who is the same yesterday and for ever will continue to lead the committee and EBWU in the days ahead.

Another reason for my happiness arose out of the sense of returning to home and David after five years of travel abroad, mainly without him. Some of you know already that he is retiring from the pastorate in Saundersfoot on October 5th (as I write we have one more Sunday!), and at the end of the month we hope to move to Broad-haven. There is a real sense that for both of us this year has seen endings; we are grateful for the prospect

of a few months „off” while we settle in to new surroundings, but we are already aware that God has plans for the future. We look forward to greater understanding of these plans, and to the new song which we will sing to Him.

The „old song” (for me) of EBWU will always be a precious one; I am grateful for the love I have been shown in so many places, and for the lessons I have learned from all of you. The two words which have become most important to me in my ongoing discipleship are „love” and „pray”. They will continue to be my attitude to EBWU, and I commend them to each of you in the spheres in which you live and serve.

God bless you all.

Yona

2004 IS COMING! HAPPY NEW YEAR!

*„I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again
Where all our mistakes and all of our heartaches
And all of our poor, selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby coat at the door,
And never put on again.” (Parkington)*

It is a part of our nature as humans and a part of our desire as children of God to do better in the future than we have in the past. The new year presents us with the opportunity of finding a „Land of Beginning Again”. We will be using a new calendar. We will be facing new challenges and new responsibilities.

Our Heavenly Father opens a gate for us, a great door, as we can read in 1 Chor 16:9. „a great door for effective work has opened to me...”

Take your opportunities from the hand of God, and serve Him through them in the coming year.

Best wishes for the New Year in his service!

Dependence on God



When I was looking at the map of Europe a question arose in my mind: how to learn all of it, how to understand... even if we only want to limit it to the level of contacts with women? About 50 unions and more or less the same number of countries... I was feeling then as a small pawn on the big chessboard of Europe. I don't hide that it was one of factors that was constraining me in taking the final decision in becoming a candidate to this honourable but first of all responsible post. However when I looked at our continent from God and not human's perspective I immediately felt better. Conquering Europe for Jesus, that is God's deed, but we are His tools. And if we are devoted to Him, obedient and ready to fulfil His not our will then we will be useful. It is the truth well known to all of us, but it seems to me that there are certain problems with its application.

Absolutely conscious of this dependence on God „You can do nothing without me” I took this challenge. However in reply to my prayers I didn't get any special vision of performing this service. In the past term of the Committee there had been worked out project for the new millennium. It has its source in the statement expressed by Alice Moore, the missionary from SBC, who had great influence on creating EBWU.

Equipping new leaders for national and international leadership
Building a Europe-wide fellowship of women through their leaders
Working with individual and community needs
Uniting women in mission and ministry

Direction and aim of the service has been precisely described. The way of its realisation may be a little bit different depending on conditions and possibilities ... We still want to keep close relation with the leaders of particular unions or women organisations via e-mail letters and also via personal contacts, visits. The idea of smaller, regional conferences was also well perceived. In this way it is easier to make contacts than at a big conference and it is easier to get to know better. All of us need inspiration, encouragement, strengthening, support and sometimes very real help with no difference whether we are from the East, West, North or South.

But this towards what God draws my attention, are activities towards unity. Europe gets united, the boundaries are slowly disappearing, soon easier and easier it will be possible to move, to communicate, to exchange experiences... but these are however only seeming signs of unity, because under the surface of this, there are still divisions connected with rivalry or ruthless economic competition. Such is the world and such are its laws. Unfortunately its influence is reflected also in the relationships among Christians. We still have Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Julia Gero, the first President from the country behind the iron curtain, in her ministry was building bridges of contacts, communication between women of the West and the East. Thanks God this process is still continued, even more we wander over those bridges more freely. However we are still very far from the spiritual unity, for which Jesus was praying in Getsemane: „I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me.” (J.17:21). That is why my hearty desire is encouraging my European sisters to prayer. I understand that it is nothing new, but in our Christian life it sometimes happens so, that apparent cases become so common that they are done mechanically, they lose their freshness and power.

I believe and I am deeply convinced, that only prayer until drops of blood appear on your forehead may be the start of changes in Europe that will be as intense as revolution which was happening in the New Testament times. Awakening then will become something real not only a dream about it.

Ewa Gutkowska



RABAC, CROATIA

May 23-25 2003 EBWU

Dear Sisters,

Do you have nice memories, if you had got an opportunity to attend at this conference? Or are you interested in what happened if it was not possible for you to participate? We had a great time together sharing, prayer, learning through the testimonies, Bible studies.

It was the time,
when we elected
the new
leadership for the
EBWU. We would
like to share some
pictures. First of
all you can see the
Committee who
worked in the past
5 years with Yona
Pusey as the
president.



Ordination
of Ewa Gutkowska,
as the new president
of EBWU.

Now we try to give you a snapshot how women live in Europe. You can read about ten countries, these are quotations from the countries' reports. In the next issue we'll continue, it helps us to think about our sisters and pray for each other. God bless your work in your areas.



You can see the new committee of EBWU.

European Baptist Convention

During the past five years the Lord has truly blessed our women's ministries. The EBC Women committee has a vision of enabling women to reach their full potential in Christ. We want to challenge and equip women to understand and to be involved in the mission of God, through, but not limited to prayer, personal evangelism, missions awareness, mission education, mission action, mentoring, and spiritual development.

„Christmas in Summer” has been a favorite project of our convention. This is where we collect gifts for the students and their families of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. Many nice gifts of toys, clothing and personal items were donated by EBC churches.

Croatia – Facing the new challenge

Looking at new challenges women face in the post-modern world, we have tried to re-examine our work and give it new turns. „Women only” meetings have become unattractive to the bigger part of the new generation while meetings with them showed that the new generation of women still needs the encouragement and nurture of a women's group.

There are strengths of women that need to be woven into the church: their immense creative power, the ability of working with limited resources, their sacrificial engagement and natural tendency to nurture. And these we need to point out constantly. But we will also much more try to appreciate women whose gifts are not as typically „female” – women who have been gifted with unexpected gifts for a new generation: professional, strong women even politicians and managers. Organizing the conference of the EBWU this year has shown us how valuable all sorts of gifts are for effective ministry.

Our goals for the future thus need to involve focused training of leaders, a great deal of attention for young professional women

and their ideas, and not least, we need to start creating space for the many women students of theology who'd like to serve the Lord.

The French Baptist Women's Union

The French Baptist Women's union has existed for over 40 years. Every year we have a national retreat, but sadly not all of our Baptist churches participate. It is hard to get a large number of women to come together but little by little we have got up to 100 women for this event with more and more younger women attending. For 15 years we have also organised regional retreats in the North and the West of France. We try to encourage the women's groups to participate in the Women's World Day of Prayer which is a wonderful link between all the different counties. Two prayer items:

- Pray for our women to be bolder in their commitment to the church and that they may have a greater liberty to do so.
- Pray that more women will participate in the retreats and other activities of our union so that we may extend our limits and enlarge our horizons and so give birth to new projects.

Swedish-speaking Baptist Women of Finland (SBFK)

The Swedish-speaking population of Finland is a minority, we are only 6 % of the total population. This causes difficulties as well as gives opportunities, being a minority unites us. One of our difficulties as well as in other countries is that many young and middle-aged women have a demanding work-life and busy with taking care of their children and engaged with the children's different activities so that they do not find strength and time to engage in women's work.

We keep good contact with the Women's Union in the other Nordic countries. Every year we get the Day of Prayer-program translated by Ragni Lantz from Sweden. Every fourth or fifth year there is arranged some days for Nordic fellowship in one of

the four Nordic countries. In year 2001 the Danish sisters invited women from each Nordic country to their days for women. Women from both the Finish-and Swedish-speaking Unions were invited to take part in the fellowship of the Women's union in Estonia in September of 1999. Yona Pusey, President of EBWU, visited our both Unions In September of 2000. That was very inspiring to meet her and to listen to her stones about her work among European Baptist women. We felt that we are part of the vast women's work in Europe, and we can contribute with our gifts and prayers. May God bless that work!

Hungary

Many greetings to you all from the Hungarian Baptist Women's Department it is a privilege for us to belong to the EBWU as we are part of the big Baptist Family. We always put together a yearly schedule, the main events are frequently repeated around the same time of the year. Mostly at springtime we have our regional conferences at the Missions Districts. About 200 women come together in every region. These are very meaningful experiences, the ladies have deep Bible studies, share testimonies, and have conversations about their lives.

In 2000 we had a special conference in one of our beautiful Hungarian cities, Pécs. It was a meeting for the Baptist women from the Balkan region. Among the guests were the members of the EBWU's Committee and women from Croatia, Serbia, including Kosovo, Romania, Albania and Hungary. This conference became a really nice memory for each of us who were present. We are happy to have it in Hungary.

Latvia

In Latvia are 83 Baptist congregations and more than 6500 members. Our Latvian Baptist Women's Union unites more than 55 woman's groups. The work is organized by the Council of

Women's Union, which consists of 9 elected members. The Union has experienced God's blessing in several ways in the past five years. Membership has grown from 44 women's groups in 1998 to 55 in 2003.

The activities of women's groups are directed by needs and possibilities of each church. A lot of time and energy women use in social work, because in our country it is not good organized by states. Some groups are active preparing and distributing soup („soup kitchen”) for needy people in the church and outside the church every week-end. There are many women's groups which have celebrated their 10th anniversary last year. The Baptist Women's Association celebrated 10 years in October 2002. The Baptist Women's Union has organized camp for 3 days every summer with a rich program to help the spiritual growth and developing the fellowship among sisters from all parts of Latvia. This year will be Camp for all Baptist Union.

„Frauenwerk” (German Baptist Women's Union)

Motto of the „Frauenwerk”: 2.Cor.5: 14 The love of Christ sets us in motion. Because of this motto nearly 2.000 leaders are working in about 800 groups. Every month we reach circa 12.000-13.000 women, 8-10% of them are not members of our Baptist Churches. Beyond we reach many young women in mother-child-groups. Most of them are not registered, but we appraise we'll reach weekly 6000-7000 women with their children aged 1 week -3 years. In these groups only 10% are members of our Baptist Churches. We are happy for the possibility to tell them about the love of Jesus Christ

We also have 6-8 retreats a year for women or mother-and-child (8-14 days) and many weekend retreats. A new form Is mother-daughter-weekends. Mothers and their grown-up daughters enjoy the days together and enter into conversation. It's a chance for healing and forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ.

Since 2002 we have a new partnership to Belgium. In the world mission we support projects in North- and South Cameroun, South Africa and Argentina.

In October 2001 we had to retire Irene Haase after 10 years service in the countries of the Baptist World Alliance. In May 2002 she suddenly died. We thank our Lord for her life.

Jordan

Our union come together once a year for our annual conference, we leave our families for a short time, praying and studying the Bible and sharing testimonies aiming to spend time with God. Every year we choose a new theme to our conference such as „How should we change to become to the image of Jesus.

- In our personal life,
- In our way of worship,
- In our church life,
- In our way of ministry.”

So we change our theme every year to our need.

Prayer requests:

- We need more workers in the Lords field as Jesus said "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few".
- Our desire to win many people to Christ in this year by the grace of God.
- We need your prayers that our women will grow to the image of our Lord Jesus day by day.
- We want the Lord to carry our families on to a greater heights.

Bulgaria

The Bulgarian Baptist Union currently has about 4600 members, it consists of about 70 churches and small congregations. Nearly 70% of the members are women. Most churches have regular women's meetings. Women get together to pray and

study God's word. However, we are missing materials for the studies. Recently, we have been able to translate one of the books of KYB (Know Your Bible) studies and soon we will be able to put it in use.

Women in Bulgaria have very hard lives and their faith is the one that keeps them strong and able to survive. The economic situation of Bulgaria has not improved very much. Many women have to work very hard, sometimes they have to take two or three jobs at the same time, not mentioning their housework, in order to help their families survive.

The BBWO has developed some new ministries especially in the last few years. So far, we have tried to have a National Conference for all the churches every year. This has been a wonderful time of fellowship for the ladies able to come. It gives them time off rest and spiritual enrichment. They are able to share, encourage and lift up one another.

Lebanese

We can say with Samuel: „Then Samuel took a stone, set it up... and said: The Lord has helped us all the way – and he named it ‘Stone of Help’” I Sam. 7:12

The events which took place during the last years were the following:

- Gathering of the pastor's wives for prayer, from time to time.
- Visits to different churches for encouragement.
- Visits to 60 homeless children.
- Conference for the leaders and pastor's wives.
- Gifts for the prison ministry. Giving bed sheets and other stuff. in the name of the LBWU
- Good News Clubs in Druze Orphanages. 70 children attend this gathering. besides the leaders and the staff. Distribution of Bibles and sharing with them the spiritual program and Christmas songs. It was a blessing too.
- Happy Mother Orphanage. It Is a Maronite Orphanage

where 40 girls heard the word of God and the message of salvation. Gifts were distributed among them too.

- Sweaters are in the process of distributing them to three orphanages.

Now things to pray for:

- Preparing for a Leadership conference in March 2003.
- Breakfast and coffee for non-believers with special speakers to discuss family problems.
- Holding leadership conferences throughout the year.
- Raising new leaders to continue what we initiated.
- Preparation for Good News Club.
- Having a private office for the LBWU as a committee.





Prayer Requests

Uzbekistan

1. To keep peace in Uzbekistan
2. That God will give wisdom to the Government, President, Ministry, Parliament and other leaders.
3. For improving the economy of the country and for creating new jobs.
4. For the possibility to preach the Gospel freely
5. For awakening the peoples of the country
6. To strengthen faith of Christians, especially of the local population, to be strong in difficulties and temptations, to endure outer pressures and for God's protection of His children
7. The God will give us the desire to serve sacrificially for Him

Moldova

1. For the Government of the country and awakening of the people
2. For the poor: low-income families and elderly people
3. For children and the youth involved in drug-addiction and women traffic
4. For spiritual growth of Christian churches
5. That the Lord turned the grave economic situation of the country into the good of the people's souls

Azerbaijan

1. To pray about all the leaders of the churches in the country
2. About awakening of Christians
3. That God have heart-burning desire in sisters of all the ages to serve our Lord Jesus Christ

4. About the authorities of the country
5. About the people of Azerbaijan who do not know the Savior and are under the influence of the Muslim religion.

Tadjikistan

1. Growth of churches in all those regions and villages of Tadjikistan that are difficult to reach
2. Construction of a spiritual and educational center in Dushanbe
3. About funds to organize children camps in the Republic
4. About ministers and missionaries for newly planted churches
5. About unity of brothers and sisters in the country
6. For awakening of the people of the local nationality – the Tadjiks

Belarus

1. We ask to pray that the Lord will take all the obstacles in teaching Buelorussian sisters the program „Women Service”
2. That the Lord put men, young men onto the way of salvation, so that there were ministers-brothers
3. That Christian women will have wisdom in educating children
4. That the Lord will protect our children from the evil of this world and give them spiritual birth

Ukraine

1. Pray that the Lord will keep the freedom of faith as there are many powers wishing to change the religious situation in the country
2. We ask to pray that the Lord will give wisdom to sisters to use the favored time properly.
3. Pray that the Lord will bless those who learnt for the first time about His forgiveness in children's camps and in women Christian camps

Armenia

1. About the spiritual growth of new Christians and their wish to study the Word of God
2. About evangelization of children
3. About developing counseling service
4. Many women in Armenia are engaged in augury and bewitchment. Pray about special power for Christian women to be able to counteract this evil and evangelize such categories of people
5. For Christian youth to remain faithful to God especially in choosing spouses

FOR NEWS AND VIEWS

Swedish Baptist mobilize against trafficking in women

Experts estimate that the global traffic in women and children involves between 700 000 and one million victims every year. Most end up as prostitutes or are sexually abused. Everything that is done to provide an alternative for women and children, through education and economic development, helps prevent the sex trade, but in our own Europe trafficking has now become a major problem, especially after the break-up of the Soviet Union. According to the United Nations, some 500 000 women are trafficked annually in Europe, mostly from nations in Eastern and Central Europe.

In Sweden, the movie „Lilja 4-ever” – based on a true story of a girl prostitute from a Baltic country – gave trafficking a face last year and made many people aware of the problem. The response from the Baptist Union of Sweden and the Women's Union, SBKF, was to arrange a seminar on trafficking, held in August 2003. As Baptists we are part of a unique European network that might be used to prevent trafficking in countries of origin, help victims in receiving countries, and assist in their

rehabilitation. As Christians, we also need to help change attitudes and values that permit persons to be treated as sex objects and merchandise.

Speaker at the seminar was Lauran Bethell, missionary with American Baptist Churches, now based in Prague. She was previously stationed in Thailand, where she helped establish „New Life Center” for hill-tribe girls in danger of becoming prostitutes. She spoke with great inspiration and enthusiasm both at a one-day public seminar in Stockholm on August 22 and at a follow-up retreat for a smaller group of national and local church leaders, both women and men. Among the special guests were Ewa Gutkowska, Poland, and Livija Lame, Latvia, president and vice president of EBWU, respectively. They were deeply moved by what they heard and saw – „Lilja 4-ever” was shown at the retreat – and promised to place the issue of trafficking on the agenda of EBWU.

As a result of the seminar, the Swedish Baptist Union has appealed to the European Baptist Federation to establish a network for Baptists interested in the issue of trafficking and how to stop it. As women we have a natural place in such a network and our hope in SBKF is that many of our sisters all over Europe will become involved. And all of us can do at least one thing: PRAY! We have also been in touch with our sisters in Finland who will be hosting a Nordic women's conference in August 2004. We asked them to, please, include the issue of trafficking on the program, and they have given a positive response. Probably, there will be a showing of the movie „Lilja 4-ever”, with a discussion afterwards.

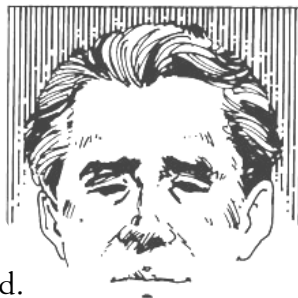
Ragni Lantz
General Secretary, SBKF, Sweden



The eternal God is our refuge...

It is Friday morning, 19th of July 2002, on the silent, long, cool corridor of the hospital.

A couple of retired teachers, husband and wife, are waiting together with us for the last part of the medical examination. Their daughter is trying to encourage the anxious, ill father. They are all worried.



After some formal questions, we begin to talk about more important matters. We tell them that we also do not know what the results will be, but we know in whom we do believe. My husband, with a deep conviction explains them what it means to follow Christ, to expect eternal life. The daughter of the ill father, also a young teacher, listens very attentively and sighs: „How happy you may be, that you have a sure faith”. We encourage them, that the way to Jesus is open also for them. As the doctor calls her in, we pray with her parents.

After a few minutes the doctor calls us and we hear the diagnosis: my husband has malignant tumour on the colon, that is cancer. It has to be urgently operated. The corridor is already empty. We walk silently to the car, and stop in a quiet car park. We pray. The words from the last prayer of Moses come to my mind: „And underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut 33:27)

On the 3 hour long way driving home we were talking very little. How should we tell it to our children? Benni (our 19 years old son, to some degree disabled) is just applying for University. Our daughter, Blanka (23) is deaf-and-dumb, she loves her father very much. And to the brothers and sisters from the church? Should we still wait?

We were always sharing our matters with the brothers and sisters. „We need their prayers” , said my husband. Our children must also face the truth that we shall not always be with them. Hot days came to our life, especially the two weeks, we were preparing for the surgery. We spent the nights partly in prayers and talking. It happened that what I was thinking of during the day, my husband was praying for in the night, without knowing what I was thinking of.

In this period some things became specially precious for me:

– I said it many times: „Lord, I thank you that you are with me, I don't know what would I do without your presence” .

– I was thanking God for my precious Bible. That every word of it is true, that He is speaking through it to me.

– I thanked the fellowship of brothers and sisters, that we may pray, for each other. Our brothers and sisters were warm-heartedly encouraging us.

– We were specially thanking God that our children loved the Lord, so we could openly talk to them, how it will be when their beloved father will no longer be with them. We had not easy, but blessed talks, praying times together.

Looking back to our lives we thankfully remembered the many blessed occasions He gave us in His service. But as pearls remained in my heart the devotion times with the family. What was so natural until that time - that my husband had been praying with me in the mornings however early in the morning had I left to work –, now I was valuing it differently. Even more precious is when husband, wife and children present their hearts together before their Lord.

I was also thinking about the fact that we are preparing to go to the Lord, that is the goal of our faith. Though how difficult is to let each other go. My husband often said: „You know, our task is to help each other to Heaven.”

During the chemotherapy, we had many occasions to witness about our Lord. We did not have too seek the opportunities, they

were given. We were praying in the hospital rooms, corridors. How good is that our Lord is present not only in a church building!

More than a year has passed since then. God gave us that we have been walking together for 25 years, step by step experiencing his taking care of us, always at the right time. „He does not owe us anything”, we often say among us in the family. And he loves us, because the LORD loved us. (Deut 7:7-8)

During the last time I often say to the Lord: „Help me live not in the shadow of cancer, but live, work and rest in the shadow of the Almighty”.

„He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1).

I know that many of my dear sisters have similar experiences. What I was sharing I wanted to write with a heart, that only His name be glorified for everything.

Elisabeth Vekas,

Satu Mare, Hungarian Baptist Women of Romania



Lack of love...

A reporter questioned the old people in Retired Home about how they get on, and the answer was; „Thank you, we are well provided with everything including medical care, except that we are not loved. Our family have forgotten us and the nurses here are lack of love, they do the work for money.” How sad, that so many people around us could say the same.

We say that Christmas is the festival of love since God manifested his love when He gave his only Son to save the world. The question is how do we respond to this sacrificial love. Jesus gave us but one commandment: „Love each other just as much as I

love you. Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

Do we put this commandment into practice or are we like those nurses mentioned above lack of love? I remember when once a man of our church who lost his wife came to my husband asking him to celebrate the funeral service. As far as we knew they were a nice couple who lived in harmony. Talking about this the man said with a deep sigh; „I only regret that I never told her how much I loved her.”

Thinking about this I want to quote a verse from the Sound of Music:

*„A bell is no bell, till you ring it,
A song is no song till you sing it.
Love in your heart was not put there to stay,
Love is not love till you give it away.”*



Sometime we forget that our relationship with Christ is based on faith, hope and love. Faith views all in Christ, hope expects all from Christ, but love obeys and gives up all for Christ.

Let us put love into action and so prove that we are Jesus' disciples.

Júlia Gerő

Post President of EBWU



BULGARIA 2003

SUCCESS!

*440 Km in 6 days,
and what a way
to see the Country!*

- Warm sultry days followed by cool evenings with balmy breezes.
- Straggling herds of goats and cows tended by young lads and elderly folk. Whole families harvesting in the fields, loading up donkey carts, and returning home at dusk, causing obstructions to main-road traffic.
- An amazing variety of wild flowers with lots of butterflies and other insects,— some rather large!
- Vast fields of sweetcorn, sun-flowers (for cooking oil), walnuts, wheat, peaches, apricots, raspberries, vegetables, apples, and much more.
- Thickly forested mountains springing suddenly out of the plains, rising to 2,500 m (over 8,000 ft) with fantastic views over deciduous woodlands and rocky outcrops.
- Excellent downhill runs, one 12 Km long where we reached speeds of 40-50 Km per hour without pedalling, and achieved 62 Km/hr (38mph.) for a short while before having to brake for the next bend! Seriously good fun, but probably not insurable on pot-hole roads with sharp blind bends!



Of course, cycling up hill is somewhat less fun, but uphill were invariably followed by a cooling, fun-time downhill sprint. Even as a rarely-cycling middle-ager, I cycled non-stop up a 4 Km, 6 Km and other hills within one (hot) day. I felt a great sense of achievement and I know it was extremely good for my health.

To my surprise I found the limiting factors were not stamina or the heat as I expected, but the wind. In the Balkans (which means mountains) the wind can change direction often, and they say the inhabitants can change their minds just as quickly!

Three of us were cycling, our Bulgarian host Teddi Oprenov, (President of the Good Samaritan Foundation for which we are raising funds, and Gen. Secretary of the BU of Bulgaria), my son John, and myself. We cycled for about 5 hours each day, which left time for visiting amazing churches, monasteries, communist monuments, and even a full-size replica Thracian tomb. The original nearby dates from the fourth century BC and is a world heritage site, only opened by special arrangement. Visitors can enter the tiny tomb just one at a time, guarded to ensure no damage is done to the priceless mural paintings!

The Thracians were not the last to invade Bulgaria. In the 14th century the Ottomans arrived from Turkey, and much of their subsequent 500 year rule was pretty harsh and despicable.

Eventually the „April Uprisings” of 1876 started (prematurely) at a town called Koprivititsa, where we stayed for two nights. The Turks duly massacred 30,000 Bulgarians and destroyed 58 villages. One village is said to have been saved by a daring clerk moving a comma in an official order, turning 'burn the town, not save it' into 'burn the town not, save it'. The massacre was reported in the British press and elsewhere, causing general outrage in Europe and leading to the eventual ejection of the Turks by the Russians.

Ironically, from 1945 it was then Soviet-style communism that ruled until its demise in 1989. Large numbers of grey concrete buildings from that era can be seen everywhere, especially high rise blocks of flats and drab municipal buildings.

The most beautiful historic buildings date from the 19th century „Bulgarian Renaissance” period. We saw many decorated timber houses with elegant carved ceilings, painted murals, and ornate furnishings. Some are now hotels, others are museums open to the public for a very modest fee, and all are well worth visiting.



Eccentricities

- Drivers of Mercedes with blacked out windows who can't wait in traffic-light queues but pull out into oncoming traffic and push to the front of the queue.
- Feral dogs and unchained guard-dogs who can't distinguish cyclists from real food. Our Bulgarian host carried a 'dog deterrent' (length of flexible hose) on his bicycle, but fortunately never had to use it.
- Large potholes and missing drain covers. We joked that we should carry a short ladder in our cycle kits to enable us to get out of a sewer if we failed to spot a missing cover!
- Hotel plumbing that would sometimes hiss air when turned on and eventually explode water, blasting the shower fitting off the wall. The shower head would then snake around the cubicle amongst much mirth, making shower-time a real experience!
- The occasional Turkish Toilet. No comment.

What is life like for the majority?

In the cities and towns most of the fundamentals of life are in place including mobile phones, and multi-channel TV. The towns look scruffy but busy, and people look generally healthy. There

are cars on the roads, many old Ladas and Trabants from the communist era, but newer European cars too, although roads are nothing like as busy as in UK.

But despite an appearance of normality, one soon glimpses underlying problems.

Cycling through town and countryside I was horrified to see the number of closed factories. No longer supported by state subsidy and captive markets, many relatively inefficient businesses could not compete in the post-communist markets and closed. Unable to find investors/buyers, the buildings rot with broken windows and trees growing through roofs.

Often nearby are the huge high-rise apartment blocks which housed the workers.

So, what are their occupants doing now?

Here are a few statistics, mostly from the National Statistical Inst. of Bulg, as reported in the national newspapers: (Current exchange rate 2.5 used to convert from Levs to L; 1.7BGL per 1USD)

- Unemployment is officially around 23%, but is nearer 90% in some communities.
- Unemployment benefit is available, but is very low.
- Average total monthly household income with 2 people working is L 154 \(\$245\). (May 03)
- The total average monthly cost of all basics is L150 \(\$240\)
- Of this 40.4 % is spent on food.
- Winter heating costs at least L40 \(\$63\ per month per house hold.

Clearly a household must have two incomes to survive; not easy in a country of high unemployment.

Things are particularly hard in the invariably cold winter, and even worse if you are ill, elderly or handicapped.

Of course low incomes means low spending. There are goods in the shops, but demand is low as most people have little cash in their pockets which, again, deters investment. Although the rampant inflation of a few years ago has been halted by pegging the Lev to the Deutchesmark, the economy remains depressed.

This is why the educational, social and medical support provided by the proposed Centre in Sofia is needed by the poorest now, and will be for years to come.

A more comprehensive solution will eventually be provided by Bulgaria's membership of the EEC. The latest predicted joining date is 2008, but it has already been postponed once, and may be again.

I was pleased to see EEC Development money going into infrastructure, and Bulgaria is being monitored closely as it strives to achieve EEC targets. Indeed, whilst we were there, The Good Samaritan Foundation fielded a fact-finding visit from a MEP to one of the orphanages they support.

Is Bulgaria suitable for a holiday?

If you like peaceful friendly people, majestic mountain scenery, vast cultivated plains, historic buildings, traditional crafts, or miles of golden sands with crystal-clear seas, reliable weather (not too hot in spring and autumn), excellent food, then you should visit Bulgaria. Access from UK is easy, but the language and Cyrillic alphabet will be unfamiliar, so travel on a package.

If its sand and sea you seek, the range of Black Sea resorts provide facilities and interest as good as anywhere on the Mediterranean.

For skiing there are several mountain resorts, centred on Borovets in the picturesque Rila Mountains, which also host Bulgaria's most famous monastery.

So, why not pick up a few brochures, put your feet up, and plan next year's holiday. You will be helping a struggling economy and could have yourself an excellent good-value holiday with a difference!

Yes, I did get fit, and no, I didn't lose weight... but the food was delicious!

Geoff Wallis



News:

Some news from our president. This letter went around our European countries as each of us had our Baptist Women's Day of Prayer. In this message we can read some really important news about our European Women's leaders programs. Please, pray for Ewa, Livija, Janny and Elizabeth as they do their responsible work for us. And please pray for us, the rest of the committee to do our best in this service.

Bialystok 2003-11-03

Dear Sisters,

I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ. May His grace and peace be yours.

After Rabac you all are in my heart and in my prayer. There are not only words but true in spite of huge members of our body (about 50 Women's Unions). God is reminding me your faces and names. It is wonderful to belong into this same big Christian family and in Jesus Christ be ONE. I am grateful to God for all of you and for your ministry for women in your own countries. This is big privilege to me to serve you as the president of EBWU committee, but as I mentioned in Rabac we can do nothing without Lord. Let me add that I could do nothing without the committee. I am grateful to Lord for everyone my sister from the committee. They are so gifted and godly women. This is big encouragement for me to be together as the team.

In the end of September in Warsaw – Radosc we had EBF Executive and General Council meeting. We combined this event with our EBWU committee meeting. It was the first committee meeting as the whole, also Margun Waren from Norway arrived to Poland. We spent some times for prayer and talked about vision of our ministry for Europe and worked out some plans. Let me share with you some of them.

In the end of August together with Livija we took part at the seminar in Sweden about trafficking of women. Through preparation to this seminar and during the seminar God opened my eyes for this huge and very complicated problem existing in many of our countries, especially in Central and in Eastern Europe. God showed us this problem as a big mission field. We talked about it and prepared the statement introduced during EBF-general council meeting. Below is this statement.

We make a commitment to open the eyes of the sisters within our Union concerning this problem and will encourage them to co-operate with other brothers and sisters in a Christian network against this abuse and support those who need help in doing so. The question is: are you willing to involve in this special ministry – Christian network and to help abused women?

Next, like in the past we decided to work through various areas. In spite of different experiences (good and difficult) some of us in the last committee, for the time being we are going to continue in the old way. We divide all countries of Europe among 5 sisters of the committee. Me and Janny we keep in touch with all of you, but the rest of the committee will keep relation with some countries. Through in this way it is easier to keep closer relation and to know more and to pray more. So don't be surprised if you will receive the letter from sisters of our committee.

I would like to know you that the new editor of new N&V is Anniko Ujvari. She is very enthusiastic about this new work. Together with Elisabeth they are going to prepare website for

EBWU and put the N&V there as well. So now any material, articles, testimonies please send to Aniko.

We have also special proposition for you. As the committee we decided to spend every Monday on prayer. If you like to join this prayer, please do it. First of all pray for yourselves to have closer and closer relation with God, next for women's ministry in your own church, Union, Europe and for all over the world. I deeply believe that God through our prayer can change everything. Let me add yet some reflections concerning my travels and visits.

In the beginning of July I have taken part at the BWA-General Council meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was my first but wonderful experience. I could see amazing God's work in the different parts of the world. Very often he uses in this ministry ordinary but devoted to Him people. Brazil, is poor country, where God works through His children. Brazilian brothers every year send about 500 missionaries into different countries of the world, also of Europe.

During the Women's Department meeting I could see very clearly how God use in this work just women. We talked also about Women's leadership Conference in Birmingham, July 22-26, 2005. The theme of this conference will be „Seeing with new eyes". There are some issues, considered during workshops, that face the women of the world. There are: unemployment, changing views of families, prostitution, immigration, cultism, violence against women at work, poverty of single mothers, ordained women (non acceptance), arranged marriages (dowry), proof of virginity in marriage and superwomen expectation. If you have a sister who has professional preparation and experience in this matter please let me know. We can ask them for leading the workshop.

In August as I mentioned together with Livija we were in Sweden. It was for me big experience to take part in this seminar and big challenge, too. We could meet also some women from

Swedish Baptist women's committee and talk. I spent wonderful time in Ragni's home and to heard more about women's wonderful mission ministry in Sweden.

One week later I took part at the conference „Baptist in Worship” in Kiev organized by BWA. Together with Wendy Rayan and Luba Nesteruk (from Ukraine) I led the workshop: „The congregation in prayer”. I could talk to sisters from CIS countries, who had taken part at this conference. It was for me like refreshment after the seminar in Sweden.

The last one was trip to Armenia. Together with Olga Mogan we took part at the Women's conference in Erevan. About 200 women participated at this meeting.

The theme was based on the Book of Ruth 2:12. Olga Mogan prepared the seminar based on this book. So all of us could learn again a lot from Naomi and Ruth. Through the lecture „The joy and enthusiasm in Christian life” I tried to encourage women to life full of joy in the Lord independently on circumstance.

We could hear some testimonies how God works in personal life and in the women's ministry. On Saturday afternoon a new committee was appointed. The president of Baptist Women's Union is Nadia Avanesyan. Please remember in prayer this new committee and Nadia, who lost her husband – 55 years old man this year, very devoted to ministry in Armenia as the president of the Armenian Baptist Union.

On Sunday service we were in Gyumri and later had taken place wonderful meeting with women. If you remember Gyumri experienced a very strong earthquake. All the city was destroyed and many people died. But thanks to God's grace none of Baptist believers was killed.

Dear Sisters before me another travels: to Moldova, Tajikistan, Russia... I have also invitation from Swiss sisters in 2005. I am ready to go everywhere where you want me and where God wants me. I am ready to share with you God's Word, some news how Lord works in all

over the Europe, some testimonies... I am ready to pray together for your ministry... that God use each of us in special and unusual way.

Let me add that next year in March we have our committee meeting in Spain.

Coming to the end I would like to ask you for prayer. Please pray for us, as the committee – for God's guidance, wisdom, love and unity in this ministry.

„May the LORD bless you! We bless you in the name of the LORD.” Ps.129:8

Love and prayers,

Ewa Gutkowska

AND WE SHARE WITH YOU THE AREAS AND RESPONSIBLE SISTERS.

Livija Lame	Olga Mokań	Margun Wareń	Aniko Ujvari	Elizabeth Vakaś
Albania	Armenia	Croatia	Bos.&Herzegov.	Austria
Denmark	Azerbaijan	Czech Republic	France	Belgium
Egypt	Belarus	England	Hungary	Bulgaria
Estonia	Chechnya	EBC	Italy	Germany
Israel	Kazakstan	Finland (2x)	Kosovo	the Netherlands
Jordan	Kirgistan	Georgia	Macedonia	Poland
Latvia	Moldova	Norway	Montenegro	Romania (2x)
Lebanon	Russia	Slovak Republic	Portugal	Switzerland
Lithuania	Tajikistan	Scotland	Serbia	
Malta	Turkmenia		Spain	
Wales	Ukraine		Turky	
	Uzbekistan			





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