



Christian Outreach Centre, Shumen.
Evangelical Pentecostal Church "Life Through Christ"
PO Box 39, Shumen 9700, Bulgaria.
Tel/Fax: 00359 54 830 337 GSM: 00359 98 505 740
Email: coc_shumen@variant6.bg



Rodney & Nina Johnson
Pastors COC Shumen.

SHUMEN NEWSLETTER

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HELP PLEASE

Dear friends,

To those who do not know me, may I quickly introduce myself. My name is Rodney Johnson and my wife, Nina ex electronics engineer and nurse, respectively. In the year 2000 we responded to what we believed was a call for us to go to Bulgaria as missionaries. This we did, leaving England on the 29th May 2001. Now four years later, we pastor the Christian Outreach Centre Church in Shumen, Northern Bulgaria. We are an Evangelical Pentecostal based church.

Before leaving England I was an electronics design engineer, having worked in several companies in various skills and disciplines and I am now reaching out to old colleagues, contacts, companies – in fact anyone that I have had dealings with in the past. Also to friends, companies, institutions, managers, personnel departments and managers, those involved with charities, but my reach is very limited, and I ask that if anyone who reads this newsletter is touched, please, where you can, pass this one to a person or body who might be interested.

A lady came knocking.....

We would like to share with you a circumstance that occurred only a week ago that I believe is God inspired and hence demands an answer.

In Bulgaria the official religion is the Eastern Orthodox Church, in communist times this was the only allowed religion and it was under tight state control. Since the fall of communism, many different religions were initially tolerated but unfortunately some sects managed to get into the country. This has created almost a paranoia that any church that is not official Orthodox must be a sect, resulting in an official clamp-down to regulate the churches or denominations that would be tolerated. When we came to Bulgaria in 2001 all churches had to be registered with the civil authorities, but now, they have to be registered in the law courts.

By law, no church was allowed to be situated within 400 metres of a school, so as to protect the Bulgarian children. So with the religious

background of Bulgaria it is no wonder that any church that is not Orthodox is automatically classified as being a sect and to be avoided at all costs. Hopefully this has set the scene for what happened.....

As said, one week ago, a lady was walking past our church who, having read the writing on our church minibus, found that she couldn't proceed farther. In her own words she was standing outside, and found herself unable to proceed for some fifteen minutes, all this time sensing a prompting to go inside. It turned out that this lady is the *director* of a school in a small village some 25 kilometres (15 miles) away.

To be honest, she didn't know what to talk about but with encouragement started talking about the school, the teachers, the work, their hopes and would we like to come and see them.

To say that I was amazed is an understatement.



The school at Kamenjak

Well, on the 17th May we did visit the school and as we walked into the staff room, we began to see something utterly beautiful about this school.

They have next to nothing regarding teaching aids, but they weren't asking for help. They do not have a telephone or hot water, and again they didn't ask for help. The 55 children



The toilet block for children and staff.

(Bulgarian, Turkish and Gypsy aged 7-14 years) and 7 teachers have two outside toilets, one for each. This was a hole in the ground in a



concrete 'shed'. There were no complaints, no wishing for something better or for a light inside, just a cheerful acceptance of what they had. Shewn left is one of the two childrens toilets, one



The sink with running tap..with the school bell...

The school sports equipment is one ball, some iron climbing frames in the playground and a basketball court. school's audio visual equipment is one old mono portable cassette recorder which enjoys enormous popularity.



The climbing frames



Another climbing frame



The basket ball court

The staff...

I think that what so touched me so profoundly was the dedication of the teachers, two of whom had been pupils themselves at the school and had chosen to return to repay what had been given to them. The love and dedication for the



The seven teachers, with the director on the right.

children shewed in every word and deed of the staff. The school is situated in the village of Kamenjak, in a very poor area of Bulgaria where there is very little employment, and this all being low paid. Often the teachers, who mostly live in Shumen, take items of clothing for the children when they have none. Each child has a pair of shoes of some kind, they are not barefooted, and because of this, no help was asked for.

The Children...

I have seen the children in the UK, and I have seen the children here in Bulgaria, and for us it is such a pleasure to see these children. They have so little in material things, but they are the most polite, sweet, gentle lovely children that one could imagine. They are precious little souls.



The 4th class.



The 5th class (the girl on the left is the teacher!)

Whilst we were talking with the staff as to their subjects, what their teaching aids were, we were trying to grasp what the curriculum of this little school was, what they could teach with little or no teaching aids. The subjects taught are these: Bulgarian, Russian, Geography, Mathematics, History, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Music, Art, Domestic & Home Science, Woodworking, Basic electrics, Games and PT.



The 3rd class shewing their work.

A few of the children have some sort of school bag, but most have ordinary plastic bags, which get holed very easily, and pens are lost as a result. It sounds silly but losing a pen can turn out to be quite a problem.



A typical classrom (with wood stove on left, the only form of heating)

One of the teachers who taught games and recreation said that she would love to see toys, chess and other games, skipping ropes, hula hoops, medicine balls. The geography teacher would love to have some maps so that she can do a better job. She has one old wall map of Bulgaria at the moment. The head mistress said that she would love to see a computer in the school, not many – but a computer would be wonderful!! They don't even have a calculator let alone a computer. The reason? So that the children might have a little bit of experience of how the modern world works, how things work outside of village life.



The teachers call this “The Art Gallery”

I know that in the scheme of want, of world needs, this little school must rank quite a way down on the importance list, a little statistic in a

far country, but my prayer is that you might catch the desire to help – as much as you can!!.



The school main entrance, director on right.

Are you able to help us??

I really would ask that if any organisation, company or person who are or would like to be involved in assisting this school, your help would be so much appreciated. Do not worry about giving too much, there are so many school just like this one, if too much aid is sent for this one school, it would be such a joy to me to go to others and give your donations. Would I be asking for too much if I suggested sponsorship? Or a regular commitment? We shall be in regular contact with the school and we will provide a channel for those who desire to be involved, you will see the results of your help.

With hard cash, school books, pens, a first aid box, telephone, repairs can be made – a kettle for the teachers – I cannot put the need in a list – would be immediately possible. If old unused teaching appliances such as audio visual, tape recorders, video, TV, overhead projectors – again the list could go on and on - please consider donating these unwanted items. Don't limit your imagination.

We can have transport arranged to Bulgaria where needed, all we ask is that you please advise us by email so that I can arrange what is necessary. Regarding the immediate sending of financial aid if this is desired, there are three ways possible at the moment (our church does not yet have a bank account but will probably have to now).

1. For the UK, usually gifts are sent via my personal UK account that I can access here very easily. This is my preferred method, however the following may be more acceptable.
2. Through my parent church Christian Outreach Centre, in Brighton who are a registered charity.
3. And via such services as Western Union for direct fund transfer.

Whichever method you prefer, all I ask is that you advise me by email of how you would like to help and I will then know exactly what I have to account for.

and finally, said the preacher....

It is so easy to try to apportion blame for the lack of resources here in Bulgaria, when the Berlin Wall fell, when the self sustaining communist regime crashed, so did everything else. The whole financial structure imploded and there was, and there is nothing to replace it, at least not yet.

The going rate for a day's work is only about \$2.50 - if one has a job - this is existence level. One can just live on this, but that is all.

Don't look for recriminations, don't apportion blame, just let your heart be generous and bless these little ones who really have no other hope.

Thank you so much for reading this far, and on the children and staff's behalf, I thank you.

Rod Johnson

Pastor, Christian Outreach Centre Shumen,
EPC "Life through Christ" Church,
PO Box 39, Shumen 9700, Bulgaria.

Tel/fax: +359 54830337. GSM +359 898505740
email: coc_shumen@variant6.bg

Note: Should you like to have high resolution copies of these and other pictures of the school, please ask, and they will be sent by separate email.