



Reaching and Serving the Persecuted Church

IN TOUCH MONTHLY

1 February 2007

The latter verses of Acts chapter 2 (42-27) record not only the infancy of the early Christian church, but the era of its greatest *innocence*. There was a holy joy about their fellowship. *They sold their possessions and goods [and] they gave to everyone as he had need.* This was not to denounce private property, but to destroy selfishness. Their transparent sincerity gave them *favor with all the people and the Lord added daily those who were being saved.*

Romania: meeting needs in melting marriages

Romania

Close your eyes with me for a moment and imagine you are a young Romanian girl, on the verge of becoming a woman. You live with your family in a cold, cramped flat. The grey cement walls are drab and bare. Your father and mother have been exhausted for years, working their fingers to the bone to survive. There is little change in their routine lives and each morning they bury their hopelessness and face another day of grueling work.

You know you are one of the fortunate few whose father doesn't come home drunk each night, but still he is frequently angry, gruff and defensive. Sometimes you feel like a stranger to your parents. Your family simply exists together without sharing their hopes, dreams, interests, likes or dislikes with one another. Long ago you abandoned such thoughts because they seemed useless in fact.

Every Sunday you trudge to church with your family. No one is really sure why, and no one dares to ask. It's tradition and you don't question tradition. You remember the mulish matron with furrowed eyebrows and thin lips who was in charge of the children when you were a kid. She sat on a stool in the small, dark room and snapped orders for the children to obey. Every week, she made you memorize some rules or facts and mindlessly

repeat them back. You learned quickly that church is a place where it was important not to show vulnerability or struggles. Not much has changed since then, except that now you sit with the adults. The room is larger, but still dark, and the furrowed brows and thin lips have multiplied.

And then you fall in love. You enjoy his company during courtship and he offers an escape from the hostility of your own family. You begin to entertain the idea of hoping for a better life. Soon you marry him, thinking the family you'll form together won't be like your current home life.

But it isn't long before you have your first disagreement and, without sharing with each other honestly, things go from cool to frigid between you and after awhile they turn hostile. You have no where to turn: you can't follow your parents' example, and you wouldn't think about letting your pastor or anyone at church know you are struggling in your marriage. Their response would most likely be filled with stern reprimands and rules. The loneliness you feel is acute and your hopelessness is overwhelming. On the other hand, on the television, you constantly see Americans, laughing, looking happy and confident, joking about intimacy and immorality, and you begin to believe the lie; maybe that is the way to be happy...



ITMI's **Adrian and Ema Ban** began the Young Couples Fellowship (YCF) several years ago when they saw the need for young couples to build their

marriages on Biblical principles. Disturbed by the number of Christian marriages they saw ripped apart by infidelity or crippled by staunch tradition, they formed the fellowship as a safe place for young couples to experience Biblical community and receive Biblical marriage counseling before it is needed.

The first YCF was such a great success that Adrian and Ema began a second fellowship. Now they meet twice per month with each of the groups and have seen the Spirit of God do great things in the lives of future Romanian families. This is attributed to the meetings' emphasis on prayer and discipleship.



A young Romanian family from the first YCF group.

Acts 2 gives us an amazing example for groups of believers to follow, "...they gave to anyone as he had need." (verse 45) Needs were expressed and met through the early church's devotion to fellowship. This rich fellowship is difficult to achieve because it requires sacrifice: the early church sold their own possessions to meet others' needs.

One young man that regularly

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Are You Ready?

Many serious Christians have been praying earnestly for God to do a great work among the Muslims around the world and bring them to faith in Christ. When (not if) God answers and multitudes are saved, are we ready for such a harvest? Is your Church prepared to assimilate these new converts into its conventional congregation and accept the social and cultural changes that will bring?

“What changes?” you may ask. “Won’t they all be just like us and we’ll all live happily ever after without those nasty car bombs and unsociable suicide-killers?”

Well, not exactly. As increasing numbers of Muslims repent of their sins and come to faith in Jesus Christ they will put *some* contemporary Christians to shame. They are pro-life and repulsed by the West’s concept of abortion on demand. They have certain moral standards that the Bible endorses – especially in the area of female modesty and sexual purity – to which many of them already adhere. Sadly, too many Christians have long since abandoned those standards as ‘old fashioned’ or ‘being legalistic.’ Absorbing significant numbers of moral ex-Muslims into our midst might make lukewarm backslidden Christians chronically uncomfortable.

It’s also doubtful that they will change their dress habits overnight. Their styles have altered little since the 7th Century AD, so don’t expect them to rush out and buy a whole new wardrobe before coming to Church on Sunday. We must be ready to receive them gladly, thankfully and joyfully when they come at the invitation of “Just as I am” – burkas, veils, scarves, fez caps and jalabas.

“The desert tribes will bow before Him and His enemies will lick the dust.”

Psalm 72:9

Annually over 20,000 Muslims turn to Christ in the US. In his book *Epicenter*, Joel C. Rosenberg quotes a live TV interview with a leading Saudi cleric Sheikh Ahmad Al Qataani, lamenting the fact that “Every year, 6 million Muslims convert to Christianity” – that’s 16,000 every day.

ITMI works in restricted-access countries – communist and Islamic. We have seen the Berlin Wall come down and Eastern Europe open its doors. We believe that we are on the threshold of a tremendous awakening among the Muslim nations, and it’s already underway, especially in Africa, from north to south.

Are we really ready for God to answer our prayers?

Early Christians, meeting in the home of John Mark, were praying for Peter’s release from prison. The situation was desperate. He was scheduled to die the next day. God heard and answered prayer: chains fell off, the iron gates yielded and Peter walked out a free man. (Acts 12:1-10) He went straight to the prayer meeting to encourage them with the reality of God’s answer, but the door was shut and locked. They couldn’t believe that the Lord had actually answered their prayers. If they’d been ready, they would have had a cup of tea waiting for Peter when he arrived.

Muslims will soon be coming to Christ in even greater numbers for *every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the glory of God.*

The question is: Are we ready?

Bill Bathman – Cape Town, South Africa

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Future Romanian Families.

attends the YCF with his wife was suffering from Parkinson’s disease, which causes him to shake uncontrollably. No one in Oradea would diagnose his condition as Parkinson’s disease and therefore he was not able to receive government treatment.

During the prayer time at one YCF meeting last November, someone suggested they bring the situation before the Lord, even though the couple wasn’t in attendance. After the prayer, Adrian left the room and was followed by a young man who presented Adrian with some cash, saying he and his wife felt led to anonymously help provide for the needs of the suffering young man. Adrian confessed that the Spirit

was leading him to do the same. Before the night was over, they took a collection for the afflicted young man. Many of the young couples, though struggling themselves to eke out a living in a failing economy, gave sacrificially.

Because the Ban’s ministry is helping Christians be free of family issues to serve others, the group provided some of the funding necessary for the young man to go to Bucharest. There he was diagnosed by a well-known doctor. Now he receives the proper treatment he was previously denied from the government. Adrian sees a marked difference in his life.



Prayer and worship at Christmas dinner.

Adrian and Ema pray that their

ministry will equip and encourage young families to end the downward spiral that so many Romanian families are facing by offering Godly counseling, discipleship, true community and prayer to young couples. But they want to reach more than just the couples in their group, and they want those already in the group to have a part in helping others. One way they’ve done this is by traveling with some of the couples to other towns and sharing with churches there how they too could begin such a ministry.

They also encourage the couples to involve their friends in the fellowship. Before their recent Christmas party, Adrian suggested that each of the couples pay for the dinner of another couple outside the fellowship in addition to their own and invite the couple to come and experience the YCF community. Ema and the young ladies cooked for days in preparation. Forty-four couples attended the party and experienced the joy of true, Acts

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Dear Team,

Last month's Teen Camp at Moreson Children's Haven was blessed of the Lord in many ways. We started with 111 pagan kids from some of the roughest urban ghettos and preached an uncompromising Gospel to them. Within 3 days the number was cut in half as some 50 renegades left in a rage. We were sorry to see them go, but it was a blessed subtraction. Those who remained were serious about doing business with God and He did a work of grace in their hearts. Changed lives will change neighborhoods when they return home.



Bill preaches at MCH youth camp.

Recently I had lunch with **Kelly** and **Cherise Smith**, ITMI missionaries in southern Natal, near Durban. They were in Cape Town visiting relatives. I'd planned to see them when Harriett and I were in Natal in early December, but Harriett's fractured leg prevented that pleasure.



Bill with Cherise and Kelly Smith

They are settling in to their new surroundings on the farm and busy building relationships. Kelly uses his tractor to plow for his neighbor and along with Cherise they teach adult literacy classes. I asked about their needs; there are two major ones. They need a multi-purpose building in order to provide the service to HIV/AIDS patients that God has put on their hearts, plus to meet the requirements of South African Red Cross Air Mercy Service they need to construct a grass landing strip on the farm. Both are attainable goals. They have the man-power for construction; they could just do with some designated financial gifts for the projects. When I asked them how they felt about the mission, both replied, "ITMI feels like family!" We're glad!

This month marks the 10th anniversary of the **Excellence Christian Academy** in Kabwe, Zambia. This is one of our most successful projects. Under the leadership of Rev. **Eugene Kalunga** the school has grown from 50 children being taught in his own home (when we first met him) to over 200 in the present facilities provided by ITMI. **Steve Evers** is working with **Tim Keller** to get some computers ready for their class rooms when Tim goes up there this month.



Some ECA students.

The 1st of this month marks the 10th anniversary of the legalization of abortion on demand in South Africa. Since this kind of slaughter became legal in 1997 over 600,000 babies have been killed. Each year we join with other concerned Christians, local churches and mission groups to mark the occasion with an organized funeral procession and march to the Houses of Parliament for a prayer service. Cape Town is the legislative capital of South Africa.

As I write this page it's been over 6-weeks since **Harriett** fractured her leg. The surgeon here in Cape Town is not pleased with the plate that was put on her ankle. Some of the screws are displaced. The incision has not healed properly. He is concerned about infection and has put her on a hi-powered antibiotic. She has an appointment later this week (after we go to press) and we'll discover whether or not she faces further surgery. Please pray!

Yours in His grip,

Bill Bathman

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Chapter 2-quality community, some for the first time ever.

In addition to pre-emptively offering counseling to young couples before they need it, the Bans are involved with the children's ministry of the church. They minister to teachers who impact approximately 500 children, hoping to reach them before they become convinced that Christianity is about rules rather than about a relationship with Jesus. Adrian and Ema disciple teachers who want to see children grow in knowledge of Jesus Christ, with a quality curriculum that is grounded in Scripture. They have personally invested in and equipped the teachers to provide a safe, nurturing environment for children at church. Their goal is that the children's lives will be touched by the joy of knowing Jesus, and that this will carry them into a life of healthy relationships and Christian

service.

Another facet of the Ban's ministry is the opportunity Adrian has a couple times a year to travel to Eastern Romania and teach a group made up mostly of Pentecostal pastors how to care for their flocks through counseling, approachability, and loving responses to hurting people. It is unusual in Romania for Pentecostals to be interested in hearing from a Baptist, but Adrian's willingness to cross denominational lines and his commitment to training leaders Biblically have won him their highest respect. Through this avenue, Adrian hopes that more young couples will have access to the emotional and spiritual support they need.

and then prays about them.

By the end of the evening you know there is something different about these Christians. You don't know what it is, but you begin to hope that the joy these people know might be yours too. Your hope grows when Ema gives you a warm hug and invites you to attend the next meeting of the Young Couples Fellowship.



Adrian and Ema Ban make a great ministry team.

Note: Adrian will be available for speaking in the U.S. during March 2007. If the Lord has shown you that this is a worthy ministry, will you serve Romanian families by asking your church, small group, home Bible study or Sunday school class to have Adrian share with them what Jesus is doing through his ministry?

Compiled and written by Summer Kelley



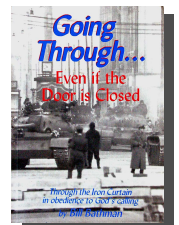
Christmas dinner fellowship.

...and then, not a moment too soon, a friend invites you to a Christmas dinner to be held at their church. The meal is free and your friends seem excited about it, so you agree to go. You meet Adrian and Ema. You notice there is something different about them. You can tell they are still in love after years of marriage and you are instantly intrigued. You experience true community unlike anything you've ever seen before when the group openly shares their needs with one another

Going Through...Even if the Door is Closed by: Bill Bathman

Going Through contains incredible true stories of missionary exploits in Europe, East and West, during the dramatic events of the Cold War. Spanning the time of the Berlin Wall, Going Through includes many never-before-published stories of Christian courage under Communist persecution.

"To travel with Bill Bathman was an experience, an adventure, danger, intrigue and spiritual ministry all tied into one... You're in for a great adventure in reading this book." Rev. Guy Davidson



\$10 + S&H

For Praise . . .

1. The LeRoux family's recovery from hepatitis A.
2. Changed lives through the Youth Camp at Moreson Children's Haven.
3. God's blessings on Mitruits in Romania during a financial crisis.

For Prayer . . .

1. Sufficient funding for new & rebuilt computers for ECA.
2. Dr. Adrian Ban, ITMI's Romanian Director, begins US itinerary next month.
3. God's intervention in the complex setbacks in the healing of Harriett's left ankle.
4. Wisdom for Kelly and Cherise Smith to correctly assess the needs in their area.

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