

February 2025 Latvia, UK

LATVIA

A wonderful few days distributing firewood in Latvia with the Bloxham family from UK, and also the baptisms of GUNTAR and SERGEJ in a frozen river at -12 C. Couldn't use the lake as the ice was too thick to break. We were providentially led to a frozen river, we found part of the river that wasn't frozen, but that was because sewage was discharging into it at that point- you could smell it. Went a bit further and found a little waterfall where the disturbed water wasn't frozen at the bottom of it. Two very brave brothers baptized that night... especially as one was struggling with health issues and not young. That's what could be called a serious attitude to baptism.

Video at <https://youtu.be/sNg-UWRmxt4>

One sister had been gathering sticks to burn to keep warm, quite the contrast with the bags of dry firewood we were able to give her. Such an honour to be part of the Lord's outreach to His people, materially and spiritually. Video of firewood distribution

at <https://youtu.be/R7YVLHIPqdo>

Brother Saul Bloxham has done a write up of his family's experiences- hopefully it might resonate with some out there and you'll come and get involved too, either on the ground or supporting from a distance.

Reflection on Latvia, February 2025

Our Bude Ecclesia had financially supported the work of *Carelinks* and taken a close interest in the preaching and welfare support that it offered to marginalized communities. We'd been sharing the *Bible Companion App* to contacts in the UK for some years and had used the *Bible Basics* publication to support our preaching efforts in Mozambique earlier in the year.

The Bloxham family met Duncan for the first time late in December 2024 when he needed a place to sleep on a long overnight journey to baptize a young brother in Falmouth. Duncan shared his adventures during brief fellowship and a few days later invited our whole family to support his upcoming February trip to Latvia.

After some searching family prayer, we decided to join Duncan and his daughter Evia to support the work in the Lord, and we made preparations. What became clear from an early stage was the years of work required to bring some of the most deprived people in Riga together. The hope of the gospel, preached through the soup kitchen led by *Carelinks*, had been so powerful that years after it had finished, those same brothers and sisters came from all over the city. *Carelinks* funded a hearty meal for the 20+ people that braved the snow and ice. In ones and twos the cafe began to fill, each embracing Duncan and his daughter Evia, who had communicated to everyone about the breaking of bread service he had arranged for them in the cafe.

Each had welfare requests that were earnestly prayed for, but in all honesty, the needs of each person were impossible to meet, such was the deprivation we witnessed both here and during the following days of our visit. Despite the size of the natural needs of our brothers and sisters, we were able to pay for medical procedures that were otherwise financially unreachable, and at the very least fill their stomachs with a good meal. Spiritually, the fellowship was able to lift the spirits of all that attended.

The grip of the bitter winter cold was even more severe as we travelled deep into the Latvian countryside where the night temperatures had been down to -25 C. Arriving after dark, later that same day we delivered a carload of firewood to Sandra and her husband Aigars. After a troubling

past, Sandra had been saved by the gospel preached by Duncan. Determined to establish her own ecclesia, Sandra was preaching to all those that would listen and she had brought two men, Guntar and Sergei, to her house who also wanted to be baptised.



The depth of the winter had gripped the country and the ice on the lake was now too thick to cut into. With no bath in the dilapidated flat, options to hold the baptisms looked precarious. Our accommodation was only a short drive away, but it had no bath either and the hot tub was frozen over. Initially unknown to us there was a small but deep accessible river, so once discovered we transported the brothers who were willing to brave the -12C temperature. Neither the darkness of night nor the icy waters could prevent these brothers' motivation to enter the waters of baptism.



The next morning, we visited Svetlana, a sister in need and her daughter. It was sobering to see the level of deprivation and her living conditions, the crumbling state of the wooden house, the social isolation and the futile attempts to stave off the biting cold, with an array of old blankets across doors and rotting windows. We were able to gift food, groceries and a financial contribution to ease the suffering during the winter months. The fellowship was short but powerful and we shared prayers and tears of hope for the Lord's return amongst the despair.

Our next stop was to visit Aija, a sister who needed help with her plumbing. Her circumstances were much better, we were warmly welcomed with coffee and cake. Aija's excellent command of spoken English ensured we were all able to freely share stories. I was pleased to set to work on successfully fixing the under-sink plumbing and we shared uplifting fellowship and prayers.



Our last visit of the day was to a remote farm close to the Russian border. By now we had restocked the cars with firewood and as the snow began to fall, I was grateful for the grip of the winter tires as they cut through the fresh falling snow that was covering the rural roads and tracks.



The sister we visited had a transformation in circumstances since Duncan's last visit several years earlier. Despite the crumbling exterior of the building, the interior and particularly the kitchen had been modernized. God had blessed her in her new life in the Lord, and since finding a hardworking husband, she was now living more comfortably.

On our final morning of the trip, we visited sister Judite. Her circumstances were dire in a very deprived area of Riga. The smoke-filled room caused by the burning of a few wet sticks in the dilapidated boiler was very sad. We were able to deliver fresh dry and seasoned wood and a good supply of groceries to ease the suffering. Although this was obviously hopelessly inadequate, the visit at least provided something positive as Duncan led a prayer of reassurance that we shared a hope far greater than anything this world can offer.



It had been an eventful trip, certainly blessed by God. What was common across all our visits was the thirst for the hope that God has promised us all through the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For our family, the trip was a sobering reminder of Jesus' words in Mathew chapter 25:31-36 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came and visited me"

As I re-enter my affluent western lifestyle my question burns stronger than ever. How can I help? How should I balance my responsibility to preach the gospel and meet the natural and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters both in the UK, Latvia and beyond?

Brother Saul and family Bloxham

UK

A reminder of our Carelinks retreat weekend with Croydon *Church in a Pub*, March 21-23 Lord willing, at Carrotty Wood Centre, Tonbridge, Kent. Do come along and spread the news. We are open to your donations to meet the shortfall there will be- we urge all our contacts to come and put what they can in the collection box, but there will be a shortfall of up to £2000.

This week was half term in the UK and we were able to get back out on the streets of central Croydon offering New Testaments with commentary, and invitations to our meetings. This is just such a great place for the Gospel. A lot of social need and folk from every nation under heaven. The books go so quickly. And the youngsters have truly great fun doing it- engaging with all kinds of people, learning how to cope with both refusal and acceptance of the Gospel, point scoring with each other for how many women with head scarves they persuaded to accept a New Testament... and McDonald's afterwards. Of course. Do let us know if you'd like to come along and be involved, these are truly faith strengthening sessions, taking the Gospel out on the streets, truly front-line work for the Lord's cause, getting God's word into the hands of all kinds of people.



PRAYER POINTS

- For those recently baptized
- For those enduring the misery of being cold much of the time
- That neither wealth nor poverty will distract us from the Lord Jesus

- For a number of contacts in Croydon and the UK who are on the brink of being baptized but feel unworthy

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks