



Latvia Mission Trip



The first time that I went to Latvia in October 1997 it was to me a very foreign country and it seemed as if I had gone to another planet. The way of life, culture and history were so different from anything that I had known, but since that time the differences have diminished somewhat and the brethren and Latvia have become near to my heart. God blessed me with the opportunity to travel to Latvia for the 10th time on October 20 in order to work with the congregation in Riga in an evangelistic preaching and teaching campaign. Going with me to Latvia for their first time were Robyn Miller from Mabelvale and Loyda Avila from Mexico. Robyn and Loyda proved to be a great help and encouragement to the work and brethren in Riga. We are thankful that we were blessed us with safe travel to and from Latvia.

We were met at the Riga airport by brother Victor Barviks who is the Latvian-American evangelist in Riga. Victor's parents escaped from Latvia in the 1940's during some of the Russian and German invasions and arrived in California where he was born.



Robyn, Victor, Loyda
Arriving at the Latvia Airport

Although two decades have now passed since the fall of the Soviet Union (1991) one can still see the effects that decades of dominance and control by Communism had in the people's lives. The Latvian people suffer because the former government removed all references to God and Christianity from the lives of people, and today the Latvian culture and society is a place where children, young people, adults, families and elderly live without the concept of God in their minds or the Bible's influence. It is very difficult for the church to exist and the church as a whole, and individual Christians, struggle to preach the gospel and keep God before the people.



Wayne, Robyn, Valentina,
Anna, Svetlana, Loyda,
Rolanda & Vija

The Christians in Riga also confront many struggles because of the poor economic conditions that exist in Latvia. Unemployment is much higher there than in the United States, many brethren must support themselves on as little as \$600 a month, and some of the widow and widowers far less. Gasoline is about \$7 per gallon and their expenses for food and clothing are equivalent to prices in the United States. For those who take the public transportation: before one could travel for about 20 cents per ride, but this year the price had risen to 75 cents.

The theme for the Bible study series in Riga was "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5,6,7). The lessons were primarily designed for Christians in order to encourage them in their lives and to press on in faithfulness to God, and efforts were also made to reach those that were not yet Christians.



There were a total of 8 visitors present during the Bible study series. Those visiting were: Antra and her daughter Katrina, Igor, Ilze (granddaughter of one of the members: Ivars), Elmars (a former English student of Victor), Juris and two other visitors (names unknown). We were thankful for the visitors that came and it was wonderful to see those who had been baptized on the previous trips present and previous trips inviting their friends and neighbors to the Bible studies.



Loyda and Robyn had the opportunity to teach some ladies Bible classes on several occasions and to spend time with the ladies after the worship each evening as well in order to have more personal Bible study time and answer some questions that the sisters of the congregation had. The ladies and visitors appreciated very much the efforts of Robyn and Loyda. There are two or three of the sisters in Christ who spoke English so this allowed them to spend teach and talk with the Latvian sisters. There were Christian women and visitors from four different cultures and languages studying the Bible together. Latvian, Russian, Mexican and English. Those in the photos are Loyda and Antra (upper) and Robyn, Loyda, Agra and Svetlana (lower).

Up until this year our translators had been Maksim Yousin and Gunars Putenis, but because Maksim died in 2008 and Gunars earlier this years we depended on other brethren to translate for us. Victor who preaches at Riga translated the messages into Latvia and Roman Ledevy translated into Russian.



Wayne & Victor



Wayne & Roman

The Bible studies and worship were held in the same place as they had been in the past and that was in the third floor auditorium of the Riga Night School. The school is ideally located in the central part of Riga near the central market, bus and train stations. On the next day after our arrival to Riga and over the next few days we spent much of our time distributing the announcements about the Bible studies to people in the parks, along the street as they walked, near the Latvia University and wherever there was a crowd. About 500 announcements were mailed to the brethren for distribution before our arrival, which they did, and then we took about 1,500 more with us to Latvia. The people of Latvia respond in a variety of ways. Some politely took the flyers, many rejected them somewhat politely and some firmly rejected them by saying “nyet” (Russian) or “ne paldies” (Latvian) very strongly. One lady immediately tore it up into several pieces upon receiving and reading it. We just remember that they are neither accepting nor rejecting us personally, but it is God and his Word. (Photo: Robyn, Loyda and Victor)



On Tuesday we went to visit two orphanages, “Zīļuks” and “Dzeguzīte”, out in country in eastern Latvia about an hour and a half from Riga. The directors welcomed us in a friendly manner and we were permitted to have a Bible class with the children, ages 3 to 16 years old. Robyn and Loyda had made some Bible material for them and Agra, a member of the church in Riga, had made up a Bible crossword puzzle for them. They children were very eager to study from God’s word, were well behaved and as could be seen in need of much love. They could not speak English, but understood our hearts. It made you want to bring them back with you.



In addition to our evangelistic outreach we were able to encourage the brethren by spending time with them at the school, in their apartments and by just being out and about with them. There is only one congregation of the church of Christ in Latvia and so they long for the opportunity to be with us and talk about things that are important to them.

After going to Riga Robyn said, “I didn’t realize how hard the people have it in Latvia and it especially difficult for the church. I’m very touched that we were able to go.”

Loyda observed, “My opinion of the trip is that many times we don’t value what we have before us because it is part of our life and we never see it as a privilege, but by going to Riga I could see that we are really blessed by the love and support of our brethren. For them it is very difficult, life in general and I never thought that to not see the people smile would be so hard for me. For me it was a blessing, but above all I hope that I was useful in the work and I would like to return and support them some more.”

I am thankful that they were able to go in order to interact and help the ladies of the congregation, help with the work in general and be of help to me also.



Robyn, Loyda, Svetlana



Robyn & Anna

Although the Christians in Latvia speak a different language and have different customs and culture they are just like us in that they respect the Bible as the Word of God and want to do His will. They care about one another and their families. They have to work to make a living and trust in God every day. Pray for them.

Thank you for your interest in the Lord's work in Latvia as well as the prayers offered. I would like to especially thank the brethren that provided financial support and funds for the trip, for advertizing in Riga and for the rental of the hall at the school. They need for someone to go and help them and encourage them every year and we are thankful to God that we had the opportunity to be there this year and look forward to the next opportunity.