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August 2018 - ITALY

For over a year now we've been sending lots of *Bible Basics* and *NEV Bibles* to various African contacts in a mountainous area of Italy. They eventually responded and we were able to spend a wonderful time with them recently. They are a typical collection of Africans in Italy, some long settled there with their documents in order and established employment, others in the camps or now on the street as their camps have closed, having gone through rape and all manner of abuse in Libya and the Sahara desert, followed by the horror of seeing people drowning around them on the sea crossing. These stories can too easily become "the same old". They are awful, these people went through awful things, things which no human being should go through, and they struggle with the temptations which arise from trying to live in an alien environment with no employment and no help from the Government for the most part. They can't be deported, but they aren't welcome. It's little wonder that the true Gospel has such an appeal.

Sixteen of these folk were baptised during our visit. They took their baptisms very seriously and wanted them done in the open air, but the sea was far away and there were quite some logistic issues in gathering together the group and taking them to a suitable river. A minibus was rented which took us to a shallow river which we forded to get to a deeper river for the baptisms. We then forded the river back to shore with them singing loudly and very happy. We then prayed with each of them individually, as well as collectively. Who could doubt from those private chats and prayers that these were men and women who through much suffering had come to the Lord Jesus in spirit and truth? All this was the fruit of lots of phone calls, messages, their browsing of websites and reading the Bible with the commentary and *Bible Basics*, emails, answering questions ... and an old man on his knees in a South London suburb wrapping up endless parcels of literature to send to them.

Our baptism talk about crossing the Red Sea as a type of baptism, crossing the desert sustained by God, and finally reaching the real promised land - which they all now know is not Italy or Europe - had so much meaning for those who had crossed the Sahara, seeing people falling off the trucks or crushed beneath the bodies packed on, or randomly thrown off and left to die in the desert if a tyre got flat and the traffickers wanted less weight.

August 2018 – MAYOTTE

The tiny island of Mayotte is essentially an outcrop of rock in the ocean between Madagascar and Mozambique, governed by France. A group of Congolese refugees

who had lost their families in the terrible violence gripping eastern Congo fled to Tanzania, where they learned about the Bible, God's plan and the saving work of Jesus in a refugee camp. They were given the French language version of *Bible Basics* and got a good grasp of the gospel message. Like many Congolese, they were then ejected from the camp and told to return to Congo. They had a genuine fear for their lives if they returned, so they made their way to the coast of Tanzania and stowed away on a cargo ship bound for the Comoros Islands. Persecuted there by the local islanders, they then travelled by pirogue (a dug-out canoe) over the ocean to Mayotte. They witnessed the drowning of many on the terrible journey, with testimony of their seeing children and pregnant women drowning before their eyes. They arrived with nothing at all.

Once in Mayotte, they found that they had no support from the French government and met with considerable aggression from locals. at all; and in Mayotte they are also not welcome. Although the island is technically governed by France, there is little law and order and the local islanders are very aggressive toward the Africans. The French have installed a network of cameras throughout the island to try to Police it but they are ineffective. They are given no assistance by the French government there and have little food and no health care.

We supported a group of these people by renting a room – in reality a shack where they all slept on the floor - in which they could live, albeit very simply, and managed to meet them and baptise a number of them. They were delighted and explained that they had been saved from death in the sea so that they might be baptized and truly give their lives to God in spirit and truth.

We are glad to say that some – but not all – of these folk have eventually been given residency permits by the French government and have managed to make their way to mainland France where their lives are still tough, but not as bad as they were in Mayotte.

August 2018 – LATVIA

We run an annual summer camp for women and children at a property in northern Latvia which Carelinks supports. Over the years, this camp has been instrumental in bringing a number of secular younger women to Christ. All have children, and also have friends with whom they in turn are sharing the Gospel.

January 2018 – UKRAINE

We have run an annual Winter Bible School in Ukraine for many years. The 2018 school had a very good attendance of more than 60 brothers and sisters, including some from Russia, Belarus and Moldova. These schools are the only way that many of these dear brothers and sisters get any fellowship with each other. They are not luxurious! The heating was very low in the accommodation we stayed in, with many wearing fur coats both in bed and at the talks; and there was no hot water for most of the time. With temperatures down to -16 this made things most uncomfortable. Some of those who came had very tough journeys, as the continuing war in the east makes transport between the east and the rest of Ukraine very difficult. One sister in her seventies, who lives in the Russian-occupied zone, had to travel for nearly two days through Russia to avoid the border area. She was made to stand for five hours

in the freezing cold waiting to be fingerprinted by the Russian side. She told us of the awful situation in her home area, with the economy in the hands of the Russian mafia, a mass exodus of professionals to Russia or the west, hospitals with no doctors, young people leaving in droves, many homes just abandoned. Pensions remain very low in Ukraine, although prices have shot up with the collapse of the currency, and health care now has to be paid for even if you have paid your health contributions for decades. We were glad to be able to give help for operations and medical issues to several.