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Prayer Letter March 2009

BMS Action Team in Rouen

Gap year students Beckie, Catrin, Matt and Katherine arrived in Rouen in October to spend six months working alongside BMS church-planting couple Reuben and Katie Martin.



They have been decorating the church buildings and helping with various activities aimed at reaching out to the unchurched families on the estate where the church meets: a Saturday children's club, an 'arts café', English classes, a Sunday lunch, etc.

You can see more of what is going on in Rouen thanks to a sort of 'reality TV' series available to view and download on the BMS website. "L'Eglise" is a two-year series following the life of Reuben and Katie Martin and the first four episodes, made over the past year, are all available at: www.bmsworldmission.org/eglise

While on the subject of the BMS website, let us remind you that if you would like to get more regular (short) updates of our news you can read our 'blog' on the website. If you would like to sign up to receive an e-mail alert, you can do so at: www.bmsworldmission.org/29295

Bulgaria

Philip was in Sofia in January. Bulgaria's transition from communism to democracy and a market economy has not been a smooth one. Despite some progress, incomes and living standards have remained low and human rights organisations have criticised the lack of care provision for the disabled and mentally ill, for the homeless, for children and for minorities such as the Roma (who account for around 14 per cent). It would seem that Bulgaria is without a 'middle class'. One section of the population is very rich



(including the mafia, engaged in such activities as drug dealing and prostitution) and the remainder continues to be poor.

Christian leaders in Bulgaria are agreed that evangelical faith advanced more in the 1990s than during the previous five decades put together and this reality is reflected in the way that the Baptist family in Bulgaria has grown. The Baptist Union now counts 95 churches and around 5,000 members whereas there were reportedly just 14 churches and around 650 members in 1989. This growth brings its own challenges, however, in terms of training sufficient leaders and providing adequate buildings. It is in this context, then, that the Bulgarian Baptist Union is grateful for its partnership with BMS and for the financial help that is being provided for ministerial training, lay training, church planting, and work among the Roma.

BMS workers Mark and Penny O'Sullivan (left) have been serving in Bulgaria since 2002. Very concerned about the condition of the children in Bulgaria's 137 orphanages, they managed to draw together expatriate business leaders in Sofia with young professional Bulgarians in order to bring about change.



In February of last year, Mark and Penny signed a 'memorandum of understanding' with the Bulgarian government ministries responsible for child care and social

services outlining a plan to demonstrate an alternative model of care for the orphans. They asked the government to identify the worst orphanage and offered to start there.

Accordingly, the first project is to build 'small group homes' in readiness for the 'de-institutionalisation' of the Gorna Kosnitsa orphanage (situated at about a 70-minute drive south west of Sofia) which currently houses 58 disabled children and young people. If all goes well, the first homes should be built by the end of 2009 and, if this first project goes well, it is hoped that other orphanages will be 'de-institutionalised' in a similar manner.

News in brief

Eileen McNeill, a special needs teacher from Girvan in Scotland, has recently been accepted by BMS for service in Kosovo. Eileen has already spent a number of months there, in fact, but has now made a longer-term commitment – which is great news.

Vicky Toole is a third-year language student from Bath University. Her course requires her to spend some time in the country where her language (French) is spoken and so we have organised for her to work for six months in Compiègne Baptist Church, about a 45-minute drive from Paris. Vicky is one of an ongoing number of UK language students who serve continental European churches in this way.

Family news

We were delighted that Lydia was baptised in December. About 20 of her friends from school came – most of them unchurched or Muslim – and then stayed for lunch at our place. It was a great occasion.



The children need to keep their heads down in their school books since all three will be sitting public exams in June: Lydia, the first part of her 'bac', and Luke and Charis the final part. Luke and Charis are currently exploring options for next year in both France and Scotland.

The news from Philip's brother Mark is mixed, as always. Before Christmas there was concern over his kidneys but further tests were more reassuring. In the same

period an 'old' tumour which had been dealt with by chemotherapy came back quickly in an alarming manner. However, it shrunk away again over the space of a week leaving no trace. Mark's senior consultant confirmed that this is indeed very rare (that a tumour disappear without chemotherapy). As he said, "Difficult to explain, but we're not complaining." Do keep on praying! At the time of writing, Mark is battling against an infection.

Prayer points

- Beckie, Catrin, Matt and Katherine: working alongside Reuben and Katie Martin in Rouen.
- Mark and Penny O'Sullivan: assisting with the 'de-institutionalisation' of a Bulgarian orphanage.
- Eileen McNeill: doing Albanian language study in readiness for her service in Kosova.
- Vicky Toole: arriving in Compiègne, France.
- Luke, Charis and Lydia: in an important school year and exploring plans for the future.
- Philip's brother Mark.

With our love and best wishes,

*Philip & Rosemary
Luke, Charis & Lydia*

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