

We want to see vibrant communities of Jesus followers among the least reached.

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- God brings people to a small church plant

Fish like the salmon are born in freshwater streams, then migrate to the ocean to live and grow, but return to the stream of their birth to spawn. To accomplish this, they must swim upstream against the current, but also encounter other difficulties along the way - not an easy task for them!

In my mind, this is the picture describing so many pastors, church ministers and missionaries in this country. Because of the political and economic crisis, a bad wave of emigration is hitting the country right now, as there are not enough jobs or decent salaries for people to be able to stay. This very much affects the church, too, as many Christians seek work abroad (mainly in western Europe), either moving with their whole family or leaving them for a longer period while they themselves are gone. Almost every week I hear about a Christian family I know, who has moved to Germany, Austria or England to find work.

Still, despite this situation, many choose to stay and go against the flow, because they see 'fresh water' ahead. I see many pastors struggling financially, for whom it is not easy to stay here, when there are so many needs in their families, but because of their calling they strive to go against the common mentality of leaving and instead stay and live their lives for expanding God's Kingdom in Moldova.

Often our team members from abroad are asked by people in Moldova, "How come you serve here, when everybody here is looking for work in your countries?" It is a huge shock for Moldovans, but it's a good time for our team members to share the Gospel and explain they're here for them.

I'm so glad to see those who swim against the stream, to see how the Lord blesses their ministry and people come to know the love of Christ through them. We would love to have more people join us and swim upstream to bring the Good News to the least reached here in Moldova.

Come and reflect God; take people to the fresh waters!



Eugen Ciumac

Field Leader
OM Moldova



Surprised sceptics & secret seekers

As the church in Lozova has started using their new building, they also see how God brings them the people.

Christmas celebrations at church, a three-day winter day-camp for children, distributing firewood or giving out food parcels during evangelistic meetings, where people heard that God offers them much more than just a food parcel - the Christmas period was busy for Spiridon and Stefanie and their small church in Lozova. But they could already see fruit coming from their efforts: Many who received physical help through the winter projects accepted the invitation to the Christmas service, where about 60 adults and 60 children attended. When the believers went carolling through the village, they were received at about 15 houses of people who had never been in contact with the church before, some having even been quite outspoken against the evangelicals - but many of them enjoyed the visit so much that they invited the group to also come next year.



It's a huge blessing for the ministry that, though the construction is not finished, the church building is at a stage where the believers can already use two rooms to meet in, even in winter. "We enjoy the space and the fact that it is neutral ground - not in somebody's garden or house," Stefanie says. Unlike the small private home they used for church meetings before, this neutrality reduces mental barriers, while the space allows them to host bigger events, like they did this Christmas period.

And God brings them the people.

In October, when they invited people to their Thanksgiving celebration, they wondered if anybody would come, because most said they were too busy with harvesting. But on that Sunday it rained the whole day, so working on the fields was impossible - and around 80 people came to the church.

The believers see people slowly changing their opinion about the church - even if not all would openly admit this. "If we come to church on Sunday afternoon, everyone can see us and we will get lots of comments and problems," some elderly women said. But they started coming to the mid-week evening Bible studies, explaining that "to these meetings we can come, because it is already dark when it starts and so no one sees us."



May these ladies - and many others from the village - find their way not only to church but to God, and also find the courage to openly stand for the truth!



As they sang, lights went on and doors opened...

Our new team in Moldova's least reached area looks back on their first few months living in Cobîlea and an extremely blessed Christmas season.

Our new Local Ministry Team in Cobîlea is enthusiastic about the start of their ministry: "It is a pleasure for us to collaborate with the church in Şoldăneşti, where we have felt instantly welcomed and at home," team member Amanda shares. "We enjoy being involved with teenager and youth nights at the church each week. Several of the youth are eager to get involved, and we are excited to see how God will continue to grow them and work through their lives. Also in Cobîlea itself God has placed people in our path, who have helped us get involved in the community, one of them being the mayor of this village. She is an extraordinary example as a leader; we could instantly see her love and care for the people and children; and she has been a great connector for us in reaching out to vulnerable children and families."

Music connects

Offering relief to the needy is a great instrument for the team to meet people and build relationships, but they also find other good ways of connecting. In Moldova it is a tradition to go carol-singing on 7 January, so the team, together with a group of young people from the church in Şoldăneşti, used that day to go from house to house in Cobîlea, equipped with musical instruments and a repertoire of Christmas songs. At some houses people at first were reluctant to receive them, but when they started singing, lights went on and doors opened. It was tiring for the group, as they were on their feet from early afternoon to late at night, but all agreed it was worth it. Those visited were really impressed; people were filming them on their phones and thanked them for coming. When Vasile, the team leader, was in town a bit later, he was addressed by a lady who looked familiar but whom he did not really recognise. "You were at my home carolling," she told him - and pulled out her phone to show him the video she had made of them.

The gospel on TV

Carolling was just one of many opportunities the Christmas season brought for spreading the Good News throughout the region. A Christmas puppet show, accompanied by songs, a message and Christmas shoebox gifts, enabled the team to reach out to 1,200 children and 500 parents, as they could visit five villages in the area, found open doors in schools and were part of the first Christmas programme at the Fire and Police Department in Şoldăneşti, organised for the workers and their children. At this event a local TV station was present and afterwards posted a 20-minute-videoclip of the entire puppet show on their website and youtube channel - a clear gospel presentation on a TV station's homepage. For many children it was the first time they had seen a puppet show and they were really happy - while the team was happy knowing for many it was the first time they had heard the gospel.



Open doors with authorities

It was encouraging to see the openness of local authorities throughout the region, whether the team asked permission to visit schools with the Christmas programme or distribute food parcels to needy families. In one place where the team visited with food parcels, the mayor - having been told more about the team's activities and purpose in Cobîlea - said he would very much like to have a similar team in his village. He did not know that this is actually a place OM had long considered a strategically good location for a possible future local team, being right within the unreached area and close to the villages OM Moldova has been visiting with the River outreaches each summer over the past few years.

With the end of the holiday season, the team is gearing up to begin regular activities in Cobîlea - including English lessons for children and adults, children's programmes, game nights, youth events, house Bible studies etc. - and also have the opportunity to visit many more families with firewood and food, extending their reach into more unreached villages in this north-eastern region of Moldova.

Please pray that strong relationships with local people will form in these villages and that God will continue to open doors and guide the team in creating ministry opportunities.



Challenged to make a difference

"When I first did this training, God gave me a calling for my life; now He confirmed this calling." This was the conclusion of one Moldovan girl on the last day of our most recent "Challenge into Missions" (CiM) course, where she had been participating in the second level. *"Through this programme I discovered my passion for working with people who are at the margins of society,"* another participant said. It is always encouraging for us to witness the growth happening in the young Moldovans throughout the ten weeks they spend at CiM, as they grow in skills, character and confidence and understand that God has a place in His work for each of them, as they experience Him using simple people like them to change the lives of those He puts in their path.



Whenever the CiM teams returned from the various outreaches, each person had a story to tell: a situation had impacted them, someone had touched their heart, they had seen God at work - stories as varied as the group of participants. But after one outreach, uncommonly many talked about the same thing; one place, that had left none of them unmoved:

The team had visited a temporary children's home, where children could be placed for a period of up to six months. At least that was the theory - in reality many of the children had been there already several years. The home is insufficiently funded by the state and the children were obviously lacking basic things like food or clothes. Deeply touched by the needs they saw, the CiM team decided to put together some of the little personal money they had with them. It amounted to just enough to buy each child a pair of socks. Though this did not seem much, they still went to the market to buy what they could - and were very encouraged when several of the

salespeople gave them additional clothes or hygiene articles for free.

The team was equally moved by the hunger for care and affection these children showed - but also by the obvious joy they drew from this short visit and the love and message the team shared with them. "I will miss you very much and I will pray for you," 15-year-old Pavel, the oldest boy at the home, said as the team left. Earlier this boy had shared that he would like to become a doctor - but doesn't think this is possible for him. Soon he will be thrown into adult life so very unprepared and unhelped, with no example to follow, no one to offer love and tell him, "I believe in you; I believe in your dreams."

One of the girls on the CiM team talked to 13-year-old Vitalina, whose mother had brought her to this home seven years ago with the promise to soon come back and get her, but had never turned up again, not even to visit. In all those years Vitalina never saw her and feels forgotten. But who knows the truth? Is it another case of

alcoholism destroying a family (which happens all too often in Moldova)? Did her mother abandon her in search of a better life? Or maybe was she really planning to take back her girl after a few months working abroad, but (as often this work is not legal) found travel too risky, or worse, fell victim to traffickers? These children don't know; they only know that nobody is coming for them. When the team led a programme for the children, Vitalina was very attentive and truly touched by the message. "But the most overwhelming moment for me was at the end," the CiM student who had spent some time with Vitalina said, "when she told me 'You are my mother!'" It was a powerful expression of how much this short time had meant to this girl, but also of the depth of her pain and loneliness.

It was exactly this combination of being exposed to utter need and experiencing how little it takes to make an impact, which awakened in the CiM students the desire to do more.



A double answer to prayer

The pastor began to cry when he saw the team. For two years he had prayed that the Bus4Life would come to his village - a tiny location with about 90 inhabitants, where there is a group of believers but not yet a registered church. Besides being a huge encouragement to these believers, the team that had now come with the Bus4Life helped them share the gospel with the rest of the village, who were very open and happy about the children's programmes, bouncy castle, books and conversations the team could offer at this special venue - the Bus4Life is a very curious sight, especially in small and remote villages. As the team visited needy people in the village with food parcels, the pastor also took them to an elderly lady he goes to see regularly. 80-year-old Nina had asked him for a Bible in Russian, her native language, every time he had visited her, but he had had no possibility to get one for her, though he had prayed for this need. Now, as the Bus4Life had brought much literature, including many Bibles, he could finally respond to Nina's request. It was a great joy for the old lady, who immediately got her glasses in order to take a closer look at her precious gift, as well as for the pastor, who thus saw two of his often-repeated prayers answered through the visit of the Bus4Life.

In the late autumn the Bus4Life visited 12 villages in central and southern Moldova, focusing on locations where no or only very small evangelical churches exist. In one such village the local church consists of only three members - yet when the Bus4Life came to this place, over a hundred children and about 50 adults and youth visited the bus. About 70 New Testaments were given out to people of this village.

In another place the bus was parked next to the local library and the team decided to offer some selected books as a gift to be used there. The librarian was very happy and posted a picture of the new books on their social media, together with words of thanks and appreciation for the ministry of the Bus4Life.

Everywhere the bus went the team found open doors and hearts, brought joy to the children and help to the needy, and led many good conversations with all kinds of people - from mayors and local council members to the simple old man who did not believe God could forgive his many sins, but was assured Jesus had come exactly for needy people like him - like us.



"Challenge into Missions" students involved with the Bus4Life (photos by Ion Manoli)



For many years we have seen a huge exodus of Moldovan adults leaving the country to seek work abroad, among them a big number of young people who seek a better life. However, at the moment there appears to be an even bigger wave of emigration, and hardly any young people seem to see a future for themselves in Moldova or are motivated to remain and try to make a difference. This affects churches, who lack workers and generally young members, and we also feel it in our ministry, as it is increasingly difficult to find participants for the CiM training. Those who come do not regret it; we are encouraged by the results and also receive positive feedback from the churches that have sent participants who now bless their local work, but it is becoming very hard to mobilise young people to come and join in the first place. Please pray with us for the situation in Moldova, as well as for wisdom for us to adapt and remain relevant and know how to best support and mobilise young believers!

Another challenge for our CiM training is covering the financial needs: To keep it affordable for Moldovans, we only charge very low participation fees. However, this means we need quite a lot of outside funding to cover all our actual expenses. Would you consider contributing with a financial gift? Donations should be made to your local OM office, designating the gift for "Moldova, Challenge into Missions".





Winter Relief Projects



Thankful

Stefanie and Spiridon, who are church planters in Lozova, share about one of the elderly they visited, bringing firewood for the winter:

"This lady is 93 years old; she was never married, has no children and all other relatives have already died. Her parents did not consider it necessary for girls to go to school, so to this day she cannot read or write. Every time we visit her she is glad to see us, because not many people come to her home. Besides occasional visits by the social worker, only her neighbours sometimes pop in to see if she is still alive - she says they are just waiting for her to die, so they can take her house and land. She was truly grateful when we brought her some firewood and, with the help of some young people from the church,

also chopped the wood, so it would be easier for her to make a fire and heat her house. Whenever we visit, we talk to her about the Lord and His care. She told us she prays the Lord's Prayer every day when she wakes up, and that she feels He is present. Looking at the situation of this lady, you would not expect her to be very optimistic, but despite the fact that she is alone, suffers cold, has health problems, no longer has strength to cook and has neighbours who would rather see her dead, she always finds something to be thankful for: She is grateful that she still can walk around a bit, that there are people who think of her and visit, and she is thankful that God is with her. Knowing this lady truly challenges me to think about what we are thankful for in our lives!"

Joy in the midst of hardship

"I don't have words to thank you enough for the care you show us!" This was just one of many expressions of thanks by those who received warm clothes for their children - in this case a single mother of three children (two more died at a very young age), who divorced after years of severe abuse by her alcohol-addicted husband and now finds it hard to provide for her family through her low-paid job.

Another example is the family of Lilea (16), Mihail (13) and Victor (2): three siblings who live with their parents in a very small house, all in one dark room with three small windows that are only covered with plastic foil instead of glass. The father has no work and is drunk most of the time, the mother works on other people's fields all day long to make some money. Lilea hardly ever goes to school because she needs to stay with little Victor, but also Mihail often misses school because he has no suitable shoes and clothes. They were very happy to receive the gift of boots and winter clothes and the first thing they said was that now they would have something to go to school with.

"I often saw this little boy playing on the road beside his house, and many times he was not wearing any shoes, so when we received the possibility to bless people through the clothes project, I decided to enter this boy's home." This is what a local church worker shared about little Sergiu, who is being taken care of by his two elder sisters. Their father drinks a lot, the mother sees no other option to provide for them than going to Russia for prolonged periods of time to earn some money. The house is tiny: one single room - divided into two parts by the fireplace - serves as kitchen and bedroom at once; the three children all share one single bed. With the coming of the cold season, they hardly ever went outside because of a lack of warm clothes. When the church worker visited, the mother had recently returned from a trip to Russia, but with tears in her eyes explained that she had not received her full pay. "She had worried that she would not be able to buy shoes for her children," the church worker shared. "When she saw the gifts we brought - winter boots and some warm clothes - she started to cry for joy."



Compassion - paving the way for the gospel

Galina joined OM Moldova in early 2014 and since then has been involved in our relief work. Recently she became leader of our Relief department. Her husband, Ion, works with our Training team; they have two sons, Gabriel (14) and Bogdan (11).

In 2014 you had a family and a good job; a stable life - what made you join OM?

My husband and I had previously understood clearly that God was calling both of us into ministry, but at that time we did not know what, where or when this would be. Later Ion was asked if he could imagine joining OM Moldova's B4T ministry. We thought this might be what God had in mind, though we still prayed and waited. When OM suggested that we both should join, to be in ministry as a family, I was sure this was God's call.

Was it difficult to leave your job and start depending on others' financial support?

I had worked as a teacher for 10 years and later at a shop - a good and well-paid job. When the practice of support raising was explained to us at OM, I knew this would be hard; I worried and was not sure if we would manage. But I also knew that God is the One who provides - who had provided also in my job: my salary depended on my sales, and I was blessed and did very well. But I knew that if I stayed on now, refusing to follow God's call, it would not be blessed and I would regret it. But it is still an area we work on, as it is not easy to raise support in Moldova.

What do you like about your work; what motivates you?

It is very encouraging when pastors tell us, "This project is such a blessing; God really works through this! There is such a huge need, but people truly open up because they see God respond to their needs." I myself very much like working with children: our Day Centres, the camps and conferences we organise for them - this ministry is really close to my heart. I like it when I can help people, get close to them and be involved in their lives.

What is challenging about this ministry?

It is very hard when people come with needs you cannot respond to. I also think of the vulnerable girls we work with: When you invest so much in them, but in the end they choose a bad path - this can really make me feel it's not worth it all. But we also see good results, and we won't have a 100% success rate - even Jesus saw one of his 12 disciples choose the wrong way.

How do you cope with seeing so many desperate and heart-breaking situations?

Of course it is difficult. When I see these people in need I try to find solutions, encourage them, pray for them. But it does also affect me on a personal level, occupy my mind and emotions, but again I pray, I share these things with my husband, who encourages me and helps me get over them; we also talk and pray about them within our relief-team.

How do you see OM Moldova's relief ministry fit into the focus on the least reached?

Relief projects are an amazing tool for going to new places where there are no believers. People are rather sceptical when someone comes whom they don't know, especially if you bring what they call a "new religion", but they are much more open when you bring physical help. They *have* a need - if you meet that need and they see you don't do it for a profit but truly want to help, this really opens doors and hearts.

We are already directing our relief projects towards the least reached areas of Moldova, giving priority to places where there are church plants or where ministry is only just starting.

Do you think there might be a conflict between focusing on the least reached versus the most needy?

I don't see this problem. We're blessed with projects which we can focus on little reached villages and yet cover urgent needs. And every place in Moldova has people in desperate need - actually I've observed that villages with believers are generally better off. As a rule, where you have no church or only just the first beginnings, there you also have much need and poverty.

How is it for your boys to be part of a missionary family?

In general they like it. It is a great experience for them to go on "Love Moldova" outreaches, and I think it is good for them to see the needs and have occasions to share the gospel.

Looking ahead, what are you excited or worried about?

My role as department leader is a challenge, as it is still new, there is a lot to do and much is still unclear to me. I try to learn and hope that with God's help I will understand and succeed. I am excited about possibilities to develop our work - improving internal structures, growing in our outward collaboration with pastors, or dreaming up new ideas for our projects.

How can we pray for you?

Pray that God will help me to cope and succeed in my new role. Pray for my children to truly know God personally, that the faith they already have will be alive, not only based on their parents. Pray that we manage to raise our necessary financial support.



Galina at one of our conferences for vulnerable girls - a ministry she is especially passionate about



“They just have Jesus...”



In November we received a team from the USA for a mission trip in Moldova. After returning home, one of them, Roxanne, shared about her experience in a blog post for the “Freedom Challenge”. This is part of what she wrote:

... The other extremely touching moment was a prayer meeting we attended in a village home. Nothing fancy, very basic. No food, no music, no fanfare of any kind. Our team sat in the tiny home packed wall-to-wall with Moldovan Christians. The prayer meeting was in Romanian but that didn't seem to make a difference to our team. The presence of the Holy Spirit was powerful as the people sang, wept, bowed down on their knees and cried out to the Lord. I don't remember there being a dry eye on our team. During this prayer meeting that I could not understand, I felt utterly poor. Here I am, an American. I have so much! Everything and anything to take care of my every need. A spa day if I had a rough month, weekly pedicures if I so desire to pamper myself, binge watching Netflix just to escape a hectic week. A warm home, nice cars, amazing health care and as you can imagine, the list went on and on in my head.

These people just have JESUS when they are sad, JESUS when they are lonely, JESUS when they have a bad day, JESUS when life is hard. I had HOLY JEALOUSY if there is such a thing. I felt utterly poor in my relationship with the Lord. These Christians were rich in Jesus because it's all they have.

Coming home from a trip like this is always hard. You really have to take some time to process and articulate all you saw and learned. Again, I come home broken and beyond blessed by people who have so little but are so rich. I want what they have! What will I turn to when I have a rough day? What will I long for when I'm feeling sad? I will forever take myself back to that most blessed village home and remember the richness of God's presence and the beautiful and authentic relationship those people have with Jesus because He is all they have and He is all they need. And that needs to be the same for all who claim to know Christ. Jesus first in everything is all we need.

I challenge those reading this to go on a mission's trip. Be prepared to have your soul rocked and stretched. Yes, we are able to bring help and blessing to so many in this world, but see for yourself how much Jesus is alive and well in some of the darkest areas of this earth. His light shines brighter in the darkness and it is something all believers should see for themselves if they have the opportunity.

(The full blog entry can be found here: <https://goo.gl/1JCKnJ>)

Would you also like to experience a fresh encounter with God, as you step out into unfamiliar circumstances with Him and serve alongside believers from another culture to bring the Good News to the least reached villages of Moldova?

Set aside two weeks this summer and join us in a “Love Moldova” outreach!



options 2018:

- Love Moldova A:** 10-23 June: Village, Construction, Trekking
- Love Moldova B:** 30 June - 13 July: Village, Construction, River, Camps (Girls/Boys)
- Love Moldova C:** 16-29 July: Village, Construction, River, Cycling, Mission by Faith
- Love Moldova D:** 5-18 Aug: Village, Construction, Trekking, River, Go4Adventure

More information on: www.om.org/md/ministry/training-and-outreach/lm

Please contact your local OM office for further details or to sign up!

Get involved:



Pray for our ministries
OR



Give towards a project
OR



Go - join a programme:

- Love Moldova (2 weeks)
- MDTe³ (5 months)
- Global Action (2 years)

We're looking for people to join us mid- & long-term! Current needs include:

- a married couple to provide **Pastoral Care** for our team
- a **Training Facilitator** for our 'Missions Discipleship Training' and 'Challenge into Missions' course
- **Local Ministry Team** workers serving within a village community to set up ministry in unreached areas

[Contact us for more information!](#)

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