

Moldova News

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



A new reason for living (p.3)

Lonely and in constant pain, she saw no sense in her life, but a visiting team gave her a hope she had never known.

God is still in control (p.7)

When COVID-19 stopped our training courses, God still had ways to inspire and equip His children.



editorial

This year has been one of the most challenging that Moldova has seen in a long time. Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the country starting from mid-March, forcing thousands of Moldovans to come back from abroad and others that live here to lose their jobs, also low spring temperatures and a summer drought severely affected the agricultural business. As this country is heavily dependent on agriculture, people already feel the results of this crisis, whether it is the farmers who have a much smaller harvest than in previous years or no harvest at all, or the rest of the people who need to pay more for their food.

In this difficult situation, when people are seized by fear and despair, as OM in Moldova we seek to help those in need and bring hope to the hopeless. Despite the fact that we could not run our usual Love Moldova outreaches this summer, God opened other doors so we could continue to bring hope to the people in our country. Our team went to over 100 villages in the country's least-reached areas and, together with local pastors, brought food parcels to families in need along with the Word of God. We could see God's mighty hand at work in every village we went to and heard many stories (some of which you find in this edition) that confirm again and again God's exceptional love for the lost and His great provision for the needy. As we move forward with fulfilling our mission to see Jesus followers among the least reached, both in Moldova and to the end of the world, we appreciate your prayers and support, so that, even during these challenging times, God's kingdom will continue to expand.



Eugen Ciumac
Field Leader, Moldova



Hope and food

We were forced to change our plans many times these past months. After Moldova entered into a lockdown in March, we had to cancel our training courses and events for spring, and then also our "Love Moldova" summer outreaches. Meanwhile the country was hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis, with infection numbers steadily rising and not reaching a peak even after six months, while people were also increasingly desperate for the financial means to survive. Many had stayed without work and salary for months, without any savings to fall back on, while the poor, elderly or sick, who had already been struggling even before the crisis, were even more desperate now. We were grateful for early opportunities of visiting people in need. Seeing that food and hope continued to be the most urgent needs for many people, we then went on to distribute food packages and Bibles in about 100 communities throughout the summer. Not everyone we visited was open to the gospel or responded immediately, but we trust that God will work where we do not yet see it. At the same time, we were encouraged and deeply grateful for encounters with people whose hearts God had already prepared, or others who became open because we came exactly at the moment of their greatest need.

Diana, a single mother raising three children without a husband, had for years spent a major part of her small income on doctors' visits concerning her four-year-old daughter with developmental issues. During the corona-lockdown, her work as a day labourer was not much solicited, making their financial situation desperate. One day she ran out of food, not having any money left either, and knowing her next chance of paid work was still five days away. Later on that exact same day, one of our small teams for distributing food packages came to her door, without knowing she had just used up her last items of food. Diana immediately testified this was God providing for her; then she listened as the team talked more about God - His love for her and her own need of Him - and she gladly accepted a Bible along with the food package.



With tears in their eyes Maria and Gheorghe expressed their gratitude for the food package they received. This elderly couple welcomed the visiting team warmly and with great joy talked about their family: children, grandchildren and already one great-grandchild. However, life also holds challenges for them, as both are now in their 70s and suffer from various health issues; their small pensions are not really sufficient to buy their necessary medications as well as enough food. When the conversation turned to God, they were both very open. Maria shared that she had once been visited by a young woman from the capital who had told her about God and the Good News, and who continues to regularly call her on the phone. Finding out that they didn't have a Bible, the team offered them one - a gift the couple enthusiastically received, declaring that they would read it together. After the team had prayed for this family, they saw that old Gheorghe had tears in his eyes. It was encouraging to see how God touched this couple and had already prepared them by sending someone to share about Him. We pray that our visit was another step in their journey of faith and that they will both come to truly know God.



A new reason for living

She no longer had any desire to live. Then she received a hope she had never known.

"Death does not want to take me, but I don't want to live!" These were the words old Ana said to the team visiting her with a food package. Lonely, in constant pain and unable to look after herself anymore, she saw no sense in her life and several times had attempted to end it. Ana's physical and mental low state originated in an accident at the end of last year: Going into the forest to gather some firewood to heat her home, she had taken a fall that dislocated her bones. A medical intervention had not restored her health, and from then on she was mostly bound to her bed, not even able to use a toilet, utterly dependent on others and feeling that nobody cared about how she is. Through the team's visit she understood that there is a God who loves her and wants to save her, and for the first time in many long months she started to feel that there is hope and that she is not alone. She responded to the gospel message the team explained to her, asking Jesus into her heart through prayer. Her tears of despair changed to tears of joy and hope and a smile appeared on her face. "This is why death did not take me - so I could receive the hope of something better!" she concluded.

God reached out His hand

When we visited Elena and her husband, they told us how Elena had fallen ill with COVID-19 in the spring. She had to stay isolated in hospital and later was taken into intensive care and connected to oxygen as she couldn't breathe on her own anymore. After some time she fell into a coma. During our visit she told us about a vision she had during her unconscious state at the hospital: She seemed to see a dark well without bottom, full of smoke and dust, and felt herself falling into this black hole. While she was falling, she looked back and saw her husband, who held a Bible in one hand and with the other hand reached out to catch her, asking "Where are you going?" "Down there!" she replied, but her husband opposed her, "No, no, you're coming back with me!" and pulled her up. When Elena woke from her coma, she felt much better and was convinced that God had spoken to her through this vision, saving her life and giving her another chance to be reconciled to Him. Her husband had come to faith some years before and is part of the church that is being planted in their village. He said that during Elena's illness he had prayed a lot for her and believes this was God's answer to his prayer. During our visit Elena prayed a prayer of repentance and we prayed for her to truly know God and live for Him.

A child's curiosity

"Where does God come from?" - My son asks me this and many other questions about God and the Bible, but I simply don't know how to answer him." This mother we visited was not only grateful for the food package she received, but also for the possibility to get some help in satisfying her son's curiosity. The boy himself was too timid to ask the visitors questions then and there, or even to come out and see them, but being offered a Children's Bible by the team, his mother took it inside for him, and said that the boy immediately started looking through it as soon as he held it in his hands. The team had been accompanied by a church worker responsible for reaching this region, who could also point the mother to some church programmes where her son could find out more about God. The mother immediately gave her permission for the boy to go and showed herself relieved at the prospect of no longer having all her son's questions directed at herself. She may not have actively stimulated her son to seek God, but it is encouraging to see that she supports his search for answers. May God use this boy's curiosity to reveal Himself to this child as well as his mother!

snapshots

from our food parcel visits

“Just this night I was praying for help,” Iulia said. The 26-year-old mother and her four children moved in with Iulia’s mother when Iulia could no longer bear the abuse of her husband, who frequently beat her. Now all six of them live in a tiny old house that has just one single room. Iulia tries to make ends meet but often feels alone and helpless in her struggles. When Iulia heard a knock on the door, she was afraid to open, fearing it might be her husband - but her surprise was great when she was met by a team offering her a food package. Her joy and relief were obvious; tears streamed down her face as she expressed her gratitude and told in amazement how this visit was God’s response to her prayer that night.

It was obvious that there was a lot of bitterness in Anatol’s heart, and tears choked him many times as he told us his story. Eleven years ago, an unsuccessful surgery had destroyed his ability to walk, and since then he has only been moving around on his knees. To make his despair complete, just four months before our visit, Anatol’s wife had had a stroke and had died right in his arms. When talking to us, Anatol expressed his desire to follow his wife and go to heaven - but had no answer when we asked him if he knows how to get to heaven. This enabled us to clearly share the gospel, and Anatol responded, inviting Jesus into his life. He declared that he wants to change the way he is living and received a Bible to help him know how to do this.

Ana is a young widow with three small children aged four, three and one. This family needs financial help just as much as encouragement and comfort; therefore Ana was very happy and thankful for the food package she received as well as for the Bible. The children miss their father and don’t yet understand what it means that he is dead. When the family received the food and other items, the children asked if their father had sent it. The visitors told them that this gift comes from their true heavenly Father, who will also continue to take care of them.

Serghei was very happy about receiving a Bible. He is 62 and became bedridden after his wife’s death last year. Having neither TV nor books, he gets very bored of simply lying in bed and staring at the ceiling all day long. Even though his joy was more about the fact that the Bible will give him something to do, God’s Word is active, and we pray it will become alive to Serghei and bear fruit.

As the team was standing in the yard during one visit, OM worker Gabriela started talking to a Teenage girl with a baby. She told the girl that Jesus offers forgiveness and died for all sins, and though He does not want us to misuse His grace, when we’ve received forgiveness we do not need to feel guilty about our past or focus on it. “I don’t recall everything I said, but I really felt that God gave me these thoughts to be shared at that moment,” Gabriela remembers. However, the girl showed no reaction and Gabriela was not sure if her words had had any impact. As they left the place, though, the church worker who accompanied them shared what she had seen: Unnoticed by Gabriela herself, the girl’s mother had been standing just within the front door, behind a curtain, where she had been attentively listening to everything - and it had brought tears to her eyes. God had given Gabriela words for someone she had not even known was listening.



“I don’t have words to thank you. Every time I cook a meal, I will pray with my girls and thank God for all those who took part in getting this food to us at this time which is so difficult for us.”

Maria (29), mother of four small daughters



Seeds that help churches to grow

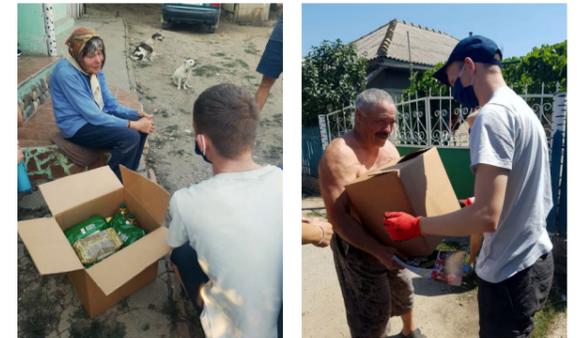
What does it take to plant a church? One of the most important first steps is getting acquainted with the people you want to reach and gaining their trust. However, this is not always easy, especially if you are going to places where there is not even one single believer who could help you build a bridge to the community, and when there is a widespread suspicion and prejudice against any faith outside the traditional Orthodox Church. This is the case in many places in Moldova - and this is the reason our relief projects play a big role in our vision to see churches planted in the little reached places of Moldova. These projects can be that bridge, opening doors into the community. Maybe not every person in a community is needy, but every community in Moldova has people in desperate need. This has become even more true during the current time of crisis.

As we were able to visit 100 different communities with food packages and Bibles over the summer, we believe that besides bringing food and hope to many people in need, this ministry has also helped towards longer-term goals of building God’s Church: Many of these places are locations of church planting initiatives, often having none or just one single believer. Church planters we partnered with told us how this project opened doors for them and helped them build relationships with the community and local authorities. We ourselves were also encouraged by seeing the openness of many local social workers, or even mayors, who accompanied us on visits and themselves asked questions about faith and requested Bibles.

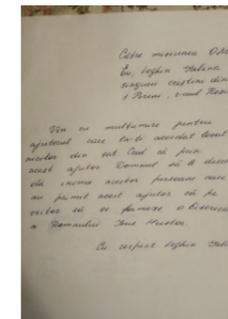
In the village Petrunia, which has no evangelical church, this project was the very first interaction which Igor, the pastor of a church in the nearest town, had with the people of that village. Igor wants to start ministry in Petrunia and these visits with physical help were the perfect opportunity for a first step. It also provided an occasion for him to talk to the local mayor, who showed himself open to allowing Igor to start holding church meetings in the village.

In other places these COVID-19 food parcels supported already ongoing ministries. Pastor Dan from Leova took us to two other locations in the region, where he has already been working for two years, with the purpose of starting local churches. “Those who received food packages to relieve their state of need expressed their gratitude, confirming the significant impact these gifts had on their situation,” Dan shared, and himself expressed his joy that through these visits

people had clearly heard the gospel and responded well: “They were encouraged through these visits. The following Sunday five of the people we had visited in the surrounding villages even came to town to attend our church, again expressing their gratitude for what has been done for them.” In this place, like many others, the local authorities openly stated their support and appreciation for the churches’ involvement in supporting those in need. Following the example of Jesus in practical care for the needs of the people around them remains the best way to overcome prejudice and suspicion. “This is a good testimony for us as believers,” pastor Dan confirmed, “and it opens doors and opportunities for us to enter these places more easily with the gospel as well.”



The church in Cneazevca thanked us for the parcels they could bring to two other villages in their region - places that have no local church and no believers except one person taking their very first steps in the way of faith.



A note of thanks from Galina, the only believer in her village, Pereni, expressing her gratitude for the help brought to her community and her belief that this ministry has opened hearts to the gospel and will contribute to a church being started there.

Planting churches in Moldova is often slow and tiring work. Please pray for the ongoing ministries in the places we visited and for the church planters who follow up on the people who received food packages, work to earn the trust of authorities and share their faith and lives in the community.

Among our most impactful long-term projects are the Elderly Care and Children's Day Centres that are being run by local churches we partner with. Through these churches we provided food packages for these children and elderly throughout the time of corona-restrictions, when the regular activities were not possible. Still, the elderly and children sorely missed the usual close personal interaction, while the children also need the activities, help with schoolwork and safe place, which these centres usually provide. Though still restricted, we have restarted some activities and support the local workers in using whatever possibilities the current situation allows.

We were also encouraged by hearing some testimonies of the impact these centres have had on people's lives:

A courageous witness

The children who come to our Day Centres have difficult home situations - marked by poverty, often combined with neglect, alcoholism or violence. Mihaela is one such child from the Day Centre in Glodeni, but despite her circumstances, there is joy on her face and a light in her eyes: She really loves God. Because Mihaela openly declares her faith, she was challenged at school by her teacher to acknowledge that there is no God. The teacher tried to argue in front of the children that God can't exist, because Yurii Gagarin didn't see Him when he was in space. To this statement Mihaela replied very confidently, "It is obvious that he didn't see Him, because in the Bible, in Matthew 5:8, it is written that only those pure in heart will see God." This answer angered the teacher so much that she took the girl to the headmaster's office to be rebuked. Hearing what had happened, the headmaster asked her who taught her these things. "Mr. Igor from the Day Centre," was the girl's reply, and consequently she was told to come to school with Mr. Igor the next day. So Igor, the pastor of the local church and worker in the Day Centre, accompanied Mihaela to school the next day for a discussion with the school principal. The headmaster was impressed by this encounter and especially reacted to one Bible verse Igor quoted to him: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" These words had such a strong impact on the headmaster that he went to Mihaela's classroom and there told the children and the teacher that God exists!



Although from March onwards the regular activities of our Day Centres were made impossible, we were encouraged to see that the Day Centre workers were eager to still get involved and even during the strictest time of lockdown made every effort to deliver food packages to the children's homes, to make up for the warm meals at the centres, which would usually be the main source of nutrition for these children.

"You saw Jesus!"

For years the church in Vişineovca has been bringing food to the elderly in need in their village, and later also started to wash clothes and bed linen for these elderly, who don't have access to running water. Among those elderly was a lady who had been blind for years. One day suddenly she had a vision - so clear that she insisted that for a few minutes she could see with her own physical eyes - and what she saw were four donkey feet. As she strained to see more, she saw two human feet, as if someone was riding on the donkey. The feet had scars on them. As she looked higher, she saw that whoever owned these feet was dressed in

dazzling white. She didn't understand what her vision meant, and she was scared to tell anyone - not even her own daughter - for fear she would be declared insane. However, when she saw exactly the same thing again a few days later, she could no longer rest and decided to confide in Maria, the pastor's wife, who was visiting her so faithfully. With great joy Maria was able to explain that she had seen the feet of Jesus. This blind old lady, who could not see anything in the world, saw Jesus and welcomed Him, accepting the gospel Maria had shared with her. Only a short time later she unexpectedly died. Just imagine how clearly she can see Jesus now!



God is still in control

"MDTe³ has challenged me to see the importance of trusting God and of prayer in every situation, because you never know when God is working and where He is working. So, I will pray and trust that God is in control!"

This was part of the feedback from a participant of this year's MDTe³ Mission Discipleship Training - a training that truly required trust that God is in control, not only during the first weeks of teaching and outreach, but especially when the programme very unexpectedly ended after only one-and-a-half of the planned five months. When the corona-crisis hit in mid-March, the continuation of activities was neither safe, nor possible while respecting new restrictions, and with a very heavy heart we had to send our MDTe³ students home.

Still, we are thankful for the time we had with them and could invest in them, and for the people that were reached by them even in this short time: When they were called back, they were in the midst of a rural outreach in Romania, and they could already look back on a completed snowboard outreach, in which they reached over 100 people with prayer, testimonies, gospel presentations and surveys in just over two days.

At the same time we had to stop our spring "Challenge into Missions" training, which had only been running for two weeks at that moment - not at all how we had envisioned our "jubilee programme", 20 years after this training was first developed by OM for equipping Moldovan believers! The young Moldovan participants, who had just been getting ready for their first outreach period, were disappointed that they had to return home instead, but it was encouraging to see how they continued to stay in touch - for a long time hoping to be able to return - and went on to do studies virtually with one of our course leaders.



We are preparing for the 2021 MDTe³ programme and are praying it will be possible to run it. If you are interested in joining, please contact us at MDTe3.md@om.org

"I did not realise how easy discipleship is: I don't need to first have theological studies or to know everything about the Bible, but as I read and discover the Bible myself, I can just share my discoveries with others."

This whole situation also drove us to exploring new possibilities, especially developing online training opportunities which we can offer to Moldovan churches. We were excited to be able to translate a training for discipleship and soon after already run it for the first time with a group of participants - mainly from Moldova, but also including some international ones e.g. from among the former MDT students. While doing an internal trial run before offering it publicly, even our own team members were impacted deeply by the course. "I did not realise how easy discipleship is," one of them said, "I don't need to first have theological studies or to know everything about the Bible, but as I read and discover the Bible myself, I can just share my discoveries with others." Insecure about his own ability, discipleship had seemed a task to high for him, but now he showed a confidence and passion both to make disciples himself and to teach others to do it. He went on to lead one of the small groups in the following first official course.

Other team members, too, were excited about the new tools this course offered to them: Still during the trial run, one of them immediately applied each session by passing it on to the group of students from the "Challenge into Missions" course that was cancelled in March; another one made plans how to run it with groups in his home region, where he was returning soon; and through yet another, the course material even ended up being used by the youth group of a small tribal church community in the Philippines...

As we offer this online discipleship training more broadly in Moldova, please pray for wisdom in running it and for an impact among the churches. We found that local participants struggle to schedule and set aside time for weekly meetings and required homework, but when they do, the results are great. It is beautiful to see people move from knowing the command to make disciples, to being excited about how they personally can do this.



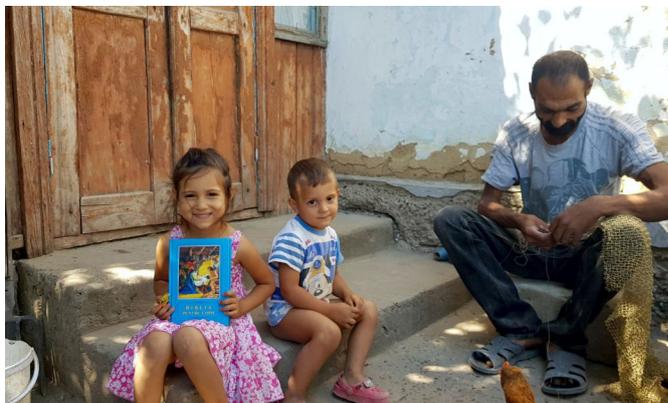
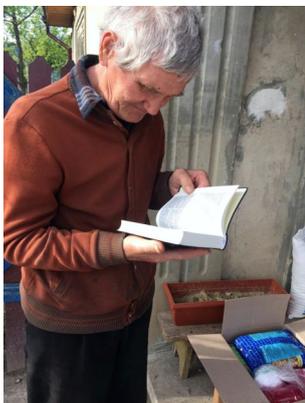


Forgiven!

"I feel so sinful. I am afraid God will not forgive me." These were the words of Raia, a lady one team visited as part of our food parcel project. Raia lives in Copanca, a big village with more than 4.000 inhabitants, but only a handful of believers and no evangelical church. Most people the team visited there claimed to believe in Jesus and affirmed that Jesus is God and that He died on a cross - but they could not say why He died and had no understanding of grace or forgiveness that does not depend on merit. Unlike others, Raia acknowledged her own lack of merit. Galina, one of the team members, shared the story of the criminal who was crucified next to Jesus and was forgiven although he could no longer do anything to deserve it. Then Galina went on to share her own story - and found that it was precisely what this lady needed to hear: "That's exactly how I feel, too!" Raia exclaimed several times as she listened to Galina, and in the end she decided to pray a prayer of repentance to ask for God's forgiveness. "I feel much lighter now!" she concluded at the end of the prayer; then she exchanged phone numbers with Maria, the local believer who had accompanied the team. It was a big encouragement for Maria, who already for five years had been continually praying for a church to be planted in this village, and now for the first time saw someone in her own village come to faith, who she can follow up on and help to grow. Galina, too, felt encouraged, and although she was saddened by the empty religiosity they encountered throughout the village, she concluded that even if it was just for this one lady, it had been worth coming there.

Moldova is traditionally Orthodox, but for most people this is simply part of their national identity - in practice an empty religion, filled with many traditions and rules, but bringing no true knowledge of God and showing a complete absence of the gospel.

The Bibles we are offering along with physical relief are generally very well received. Most people respect the Bible and accept it as authoritative truth, but don't know what is truly written in it and have never themselves owned a Bible or even held one. Pray with us that the Bibles we gave away will be truly read and that God's Word will transform these people and this nation!



Since the situation for many people is still very difficult, due to the ongoing pandemic as well as a period of serious drought, we will continue this project of distributing food packages and Bibles in cooperation with local churches.

If you are able and willing to contribute financially, you can donate through your national OM office or online (om.org/en/give). Please specify the purpose as "COVID-19 food for the poor in Moldova".

Get involved:

- PRAY for our ministries
or
- GIVE towards a project
or
- GO - join a programme:
Love Moldova (2 weeks)
MDTe³ (5 months)

We are also constantly looking for people to join us mid- & long-term.

Please contact us for more information about current needs and opportunities!

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