

Moldova News

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



A different kind of missionary (p.7)

Maria had no opportunities to do traditional mission work - but she allowed God to use her where she was.

"Today God has come to me!" (p.3)

A lady experienced great joy at finally being able to meet God in the pages of His Word.



editorial

I think many of us are familiar with the expression “walk your talk”, meaning that we have to act upon what we are saying or preaching. I am thrilled to be able as a team to come alongside the Church in Moldova and do exactly this. I am so humbled by so many pastors and missionaries that we partner with, as well as my teammates - by the sacrificial way they live and serve, in order to see the gospel changing lives and transforming communities.

In Matthew 5, Jesus told us that we are “the salt and the light of the world”, therefore “walking our talk” is so essential. First of all, everything starts with following Christ: He is the light of the world and calls us to be the same for people. He lived what He preached and called us to imitate Him. So, if we as His followers are not walking with Him more than anything else, then our projects or good deeds won't have the same transformational effect in the lives of the lost and needy.

So, my exhortation to each one of us is to walk with Him and be the salt and the light of the world, then the fruit will follow according to John 15:5.

As we push forward, bringing the Good News to people in different ways, let us walk with God and the fruit will come out of this.



Eugen Ciumac
Field Leader, Moldova



Help & comfort

recent widower Gheorghe with two of his children

Throughout autumn we continued offering food parcels to people in need.

“We see that God is the one who is helping us through you!” Olga understood that the aid she had received was more than human kindness: it was a sign that God was looking after her family. After she had been visited with a food parcel, this mother of four children wrote to thank us for the much-needed gift: “This help has truly come at a time of need, as our food was just running out,” she explained. “Now we will have enough to last us until my husband again has the chance to earn some money.”

Throughout autumn we were able to continue our project offering food parcels to people in need - whether those who had already been struggling for years, or others who had suffered unexpected losses of income through the pandemic.

Lena is an example of the first group. Taking care of her 36-year-old permanently ill daughter causes many expenses, while also preventing Lena from being able to get a job herself. When she saw the box of food they were given as a gift, she broke into tears of gratitude and relief.

In a similar way, old Anastasia - though she herself has problems walking - is the constant caretaker for her husband, who is bound to a wheelchair and can't even eat without help. But the pandemic added to her grief, as it meant that her two children - both of them living abroad - could not visit her, as they usually would. Feeling very lonely, she was extremely grateful for the team's visit, and eagerly listened to them as they told her about heaven, where there will be no more tears or pain. They could see how much hope their words brought to this old lady.

For Gheorghe's family, the pandemic had hit at the worst possible time: Over the course of about one year, Gheorghe had sold almost all their possessions, in order to afford the medications prescribed for his wife, who had been diagnosed with cirrhosis. In August she died - and the remaining family had to deal not only with their grief, but also the question of survival, as by then they were in the midst of a pandemic and drought. Gheorghe's income usually comes from working the soil, but crops had failed because of the drought and what little he did harvest, he could not sell because of the pandemic. For Gheorghe, too, the visiting team not only brought essential help in the form of the food parcel, but were also a source of comfort to this recent widower in his grief and worries.

The situations and griefs of the many recipients differ, but for all of them the visits with food parcels brought greatly needed support - and the chance to meet God.



Because of the pandemic, Maria's husband lost his work abroad and could neither send money home to his family, who financially depend on him, nor travel to be with them.



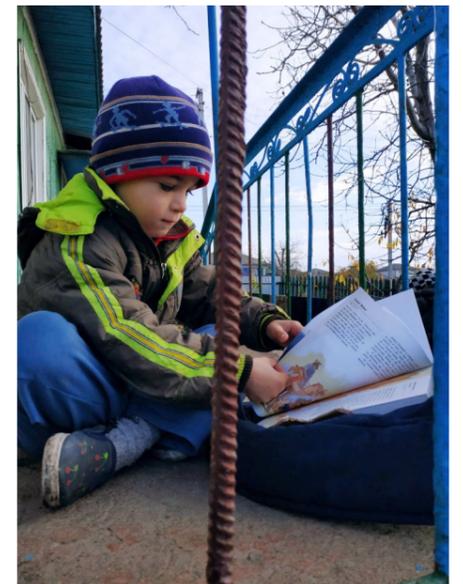
“Today God has come to me!”

One lady's joy about finally being able to meet God in the pages of His Word

“Today, God has come to me!” This was Maria's exclamation when she started reading the Bible for the very first time. As we continued the food parcel project throughout autumn, Maria was one of the people who were offered a Bible along with a food package. Since her husband's death five years before, she had carried a lot of pain and loneliness in her soul. During the team's visit, she was very interested to hear about heaven, but said she had never owned a Bible to allow her to find out more about God. When this much-desired gift was placed in her hands, she cried tears of joy and repeatedly asked the team if she could really keep it. Then she opened it and started to read, leading to expressions of even greater joy. “I've never seen anybody so happy about receiving a Bible,” one of the team members said afterwards.

A most precious gift

Five-year-old Cristi was one of the people who remained most strongly on Catea's heart, as she was part of many visits with food parcels this autumn. While Cristi's mother was rejoicing about the gift of food, which was a true blessing to this family with three small children, the boy was hugely excited about something else: a Children's Bible that was offered to him. He was eager to look at it immediately, but you could see he put some thought into how to best go about this, as obviously he considered it a very special book. Sitting down on the plain concrete floor himself, he arranged a coat next to him and carefully placed the Bible on it, so he could open it without risking any damage to it. When his mother told him to bring the Bible into the house, he returned shortly after to ask her where he should best put it to make sure his younger brothers would not somehow tear it. Catea was very much touched to see the care and love this young boy displayed for his Bible.



Do you understand what you read?

We are thankful that we meet many people who are eager to receive a Bible, and occasionally also people like Valentina, who explained that she had bought a Bible when she had been to Russia, but had not understood what she read. When a team visited her, she asked them many questions about the Bible and listened attentively as they explained the gospel.

Praise God for these people who are hungry for His Word, and pray they will understand it and it will bear fruit in their lives! Please also pray for the process of having more Bibles printed for us in Romania, so we can continue to freely provide these.

On top of the difficulties resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation became increasingly desperate for many people in Moldova as winter approached: Due to a serious drought in summer and resulting poor harvests, people had not been able to store up food for winter as usually, and food prices went up. Living costs also generally increase during the cold season, with the need for heating, more electricity etc. - necessities many people simply can't afford.

We were happy that we were again able to run our various winter relief projects, through which we provided firewood or other means of heating, as well as warm clothes and winter shoes for children, besides continuing the delivery of food packages.



While delivering firewood, some people told us that their monthly pension is about 25 EUR. One cubic metre of wood costs around 35 EUR. So this wood was a great blessing, which they would not have been able to afford otherwise.



Lord over the rain

One of the advantages of outreaches during summer is the possibility to meet people outside - even more so this year when the pandemic made outside venues and distance-keeping essential. It is more difficult at other times of the year, when in Moldova torrential rains can fall and make village dirt-roads impassable, even on foot.

At the end of September, after a long period of drought, it started to rain exactly on the day a small team set out for another food parcel outreach. When they arrived in the first village, it was already pouring down so strongly that the pastor who was going to accompany them, suggested they return home. With such rain, it would be difficult to even get to people's homes, and there would be no possibility for conversations: staying outside was impossible, but - being ashamed of their poverty - people were generally hesitant to invite people inside their small houses, and with the added fear of the pandemic there was no chance of it at all.

The team was not sure what to do, but after prayer decided that they would at least try to do two visits. As soon as they had taken that decision and stepped outside, the rain lessened, and after the first visit stopped altogether. In the end they managed to do 14 visits in that one day - visits where they clearly saw God's hand with them in their encounters with people and felt God's Spirit touching hearts, especially during the last visit. And only when this 14th visit was just drawing to a close, the rain started again...



Joy in the midst of hardship

The gift of winter clothes and daily care for children attending the Day Centres helps to cover essential needs as well as show them the generous love of Jesus.

Attending church in Pănăsești on a Sunday morning, you may often hear 12-year-old Dana contribute a song, praising God with her beautiful voice. However, you may not at first sight discern that this quiet, friendly, loving girl also carries a deep sadness and suffering in her heart. Dana loves coming to the church services, but she first became connected to the church in Pănăsești because she frequents the Day Centre this church runs during the week - a place where all children have one thing in common: the experience of poverty and hardship, often also combined with neglect, abuse or violence. Dana is loved by her father, but a handicap prevents him from being able to provide for the family. Her mother sadly seeks solace in alcohol. When she drinks with her friends, she sometimes does not come home for several days. Whenever Dana calls her mother on the phone, she is either drunk or does not pick up at all. The Day Centre workers can see that this makes the girl very sad, but they are happy they can at least provide a place of joy and love for Dana, who very much enjoys all the activities at the Day Centre and has made many friends there. Recently Dana had another cause for joy, when she received a set of brand-new winter clothes to equip her for the cold season. Through our winter projects we could again provide warm clothes and/or winter shoes for 700 children from poor families, and about half of these went to children from our Day Centres. The same was true for our project providing school supplies earlier in autumn.

These are significant expenses, at the beginning of the school year and again at the beginning of winter, which many families find hard to afford, but a lack of appropriate notebooks, pens etc. will hinder the children in keeping up with school work, and a lack of appropriate clothes may keep them from attending school at all during winter. Moreover, these lacks also lead to discrimination by other pupils and sadly also often by teachers. It is a hard fate for many children who face hardship by no fault of their own. Dana's situation is all too common, with alcohol ruining many families, and poverty can take many more forms, which you find in every single one of the Day Centres. Other children in Pănăsești who received winter clothes and come to the Day Centre include the siblings Alex and Felicia, whose father earns about 80 EUR per month, which most of the time is not even enough to buy food for this family with four children. Their mother herself grew up as an orphan, was often beaten and starved, and did not receive any love or care. Or there's Tatiana, whose parents' only income is acquired through begging, and who first came to the Day Centre at age ten without knowing how to read or write, never having attended school at all. For all of them - and many similar cases all across the country - the daily time spent at the Day Centres, and the occasional gifts through special relief projects, are a precious and much valued blessing, covering essential needs as well as showing them the generous love of Jesus.

DAY CENTRE UPDATE:



After schools opened again in September, we could soon also re-open many of our Day Centres, which in spring had been closed down because of the pandemic. The children are very happy that they can be back at the Centres and they appreciate every activity there even more than they did before. Although these Centres are set up for 20 children in each location - and most of them had this number of children until the lockdown - after re-opening in autumn the Centres were faced with an increased number of requests by other parents to also include their children. In most places the Day Centres now take care of a bigger number of children, even though this puts a strain on their finances and other resources. In some places, where authorities will not yet allow the local Day Centre to run (e.g. because their space is too small to function under current regulations), the workers continue bringing food parcels to the children's homes and also keep in touch with the children in other ways. One Centre invited the girls to come on two days per week to learn to sew, with other specific activities planned for the boys another time.

PRAY / GIVE:

With the general economic crisis and ongoing effects of the pandemic, we are certain there will be a continued need for relief projects and a great possible impact of ministry in this area. However, these also take up the majority of our budget and we really need to trust God for the finances for these to come in, when many of our partners have also been hit hard by the economic crisis connected to Covid-19. Besides immediate relief (food parcels, clothes, firewood etc.), also our continuous long-term relief-projects - like Day Centres and Elderly Care facilities - need ongoing funding.

Multiplying disciples

A new training helps Moldovan believers develop confidence for sharing Jesus through their everyday lives - and also to equip others in turn.

Maricela knew that as a follower of Jesus, His command to her was to “go and make disciples” - but she did not think she had the necessary courage and confidence. However, she did have the desire to obey Jesus, so when this young Moldovan heard about a course offered by OM, designed to help ordinary believers make disciples, she was eager to participate. “People here don’t have the habit of sharing,” Maricela explained one of the obstacles why she thinks discipleship is not practised enough in Moldova. The course challenged her to take the initiative and helped her with ideas for different approaches and methods. One such suggestion was sharing a conversation with God on social media. When Maricela tried this, she was surprised to see that the most positive feedback came from friends who do not know Jesus. She said this made her realise how desperately they need a Saviour. Her confidence and courage grew throughout the course, and today Maricela confidently talks about Jesus, whatever the place or circumstance.

When a few years ago we re-defined our focus as ‘seeing vibrant communities of Jesus followers among the least reached’, it was clear that we would never reach this goal independently as a mission organisation, but that the whole Church of Christ needs to be involved in this. In Moldova, too, we understood that, though as OM we are called to share the gospel and make disciples of Jesus, especially where there are not yet any, we must also seek to empower the local church for this work. “In order to see such vibrant communities, we need more disciples of Jesus who themselves make disciples that in turn again make new disciples,” Oxana, the leader of our Training ministries, explains.

When the pandemic hit and our previous training formats suddenly did not work, the time seemed right for us to translate and start running the Zúme course - a discipleship training developed for exactly this purpose, which moreover can be facilitated online. With a lot of group discussion and practical applications for each week, it is not so much a teaching about discipleship, but a practical guide into the process of discipleship, giving the participants concrete tools and ideas, as well as a supportive network where they receive encouragement, prayer and feedback.

Maricela’s initial doubts and insecurities are very common. Just like her, many other Moldovan believers feel unequipped or unworthy of making disciples, or have no clear idea what this command actually means. The training is immensely valuable in helping them understand and embrace that this is not just for ‘special’ people like pastors or missionaries, or for special occasions like mission trips, outreaches or evangelistic services at church, but is intended - and possible - for each one of them, as a natural part of daily life.

So far about 50 people have gone through this training directly with us, while several of these participants have then gone on to lead this course for a new group themselves - and again, Maricela is among them. Having participated in one of the first trainings held by OM, she has not only learnt to use different tools to confidently and intentionally share the gospel and her own testimony with friends, colleagues or neighbours, but she also leads four new groups in this training. One of these group members recently testified about already having seen one relative come to faith as a result of applying this training.

Ordinary people, using ordinary resources, can have an extraordinary impact for the Kingdom of God. For Maricela - and an increasing number of other Moldovan believers - this has become a personal conviction and lived out experience.

Jesus is our measurement.
Not you. Not me.
Not history.
Not ideals. Not rituals.
Jesus and Jesus alone is our measurement.
How he lived.
What he said.
How he loved.
Everything.

(from the Zúme vision)



team members during a Zúme online meeting...



...and passing on the course material at church

“Ordinary people, using ordinary resources, can have an extraordinary impact for the Kingdom of God.”



A different kind of missionary

Supporting mission work can have many faces - and if you offer God what you have, He'll use it!

Maria never carried the title of ‘missionary’, nor ever thought of claiming it. Indeed, she often expressed her regret about not being able to go and serve in mission work the way she saw the OM team do, nor having had such opportunities when she was younger. And yet, there are few people who have ever been part of OM in Moldova - whether short term or long - who have not been served by Maria in one way or another.

You would meet her somewhere at the OM base: in the hall or on the stairs, with a vacuum cleaner or a garbage bag in her hand, cleaning bathrooms or washing piles of dirty bedsheets and towels. For more than 20 years she was taking care that our OM buildings were clean and accommodations prepared before another team arrived for an outreach. She would go above and beyond to make sure everything was clean and ready, and people would feel welcome and cared for. For the permanent team working in the offices, Maria became a friend, full of motherly concern and love. Despite her many chores, she would always stop and ask how you are, and it was not unusual to see her praying with a team member somewhere in the hallway.

Maria’s life was never easy, living in the Soviet Union and experiencing its fall and the ensuing hardships in the new but struggling country of Moldova; as well as suffering personal misfortunes, like losing her husband and having to provide for herself and her children. Especially during the first years after his death, their financial situation was desperate - but it also strengthened Maria’s faith and her trust in God’s provision. The small salary she received from OM for her services was always direly needed, yet when her daughter Oxana considered giving up her paid job (which also supported her mother) in order to join OM, Maria fully supported and encouraged her in this step.

Maria’s life experience is something she uses to build others up and point them to God, and she is glad of every opportunity to do so. This autumn, she was able to join one of our outreaches with food parcels - a brave thing to do at age 63 in the midst of a pandemic, but she was just happy that she could visit people and share Jesus. On one occasion while she was sharing the gospel, the team leader sent a message to Oxana, expressing

how great it was to have her mother in the team: As they visited lots of elderly people and many widows and single mothers, these would often relate much better to someone of Maria’s age and situation, and she could share testimonies from her life about God’s provision and faithfulness.

At the end of 2020, problems with her legs, which had troubled her already for a few years, increased so badly that Maria can now hardly walk and was forced to retire from her work at OM. Besides the physical limitations, this is also an emotional challenge, as all her life she has been active and working hard, and in her generation throughout life there was no such thing as hobbies or leisure time. It is another step in her journey of faith, needing to lean on God in a new way for her identity and sense of purpose and worth.

Maria did not have opportunities of travelling or a career; nor of serving as a traditional missionary or even of supporting missions financially - but she still served God’s mission with her whole life, putting herself at God’s disposal where she was at: A mother bringing up her children in a way that led them to God, a gracious neighbour reflecting God in her circle of acquaintance, a humble servant of the ministry she saw happening around her. She used what she had: hands to serve, ears to listen, lips to encourage others and pray for them; and a lifelong experience to testify to God’s faithfulness and love. Maria may not have made a name for herself in this world - but surely her name is well known in heaven.



The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

(Matthew 9:37)



Workers for the harvest

The small church in Vadul lui Voda was itself started only a few years ago and does not yet have many members, but these are very active in their small town, and have also started ministry in several villages in the area, where there are no evangelical churches at all.

Our newest Local Ministry Team recently moved there to support this ministry.

Everything started with a small group, meeting for a cup of tea and talking about Jesus. In 2013 Lena and Sergiu Bîrlad, members of a church in Chişinău, felt called by God to move to the small town of Vadul lui Voda, where they started to regularly invite this group into their apartment. The first period of time was difficult, as many people held suspicions and prejudices against them as believers. (In Moldova people often reject any faith besides the Orthodox one, and strange myths may be circulated about evangelical groups).

However, after two years this “seekers group” had outgrown the small apartment and over the next period of time repeatedly had to look for a new place to meet. In 2017, with the help of a church in the USA, they bought a plot of ground and built a temporary building, with space for about 50 people, to use as a church. Although there are only nine official church members at the moment, plus another few preparing for baptism, the building is getting too small, as many other people are attending regularly - some simply out of curiosity, others were helped through various projects and so became interested in the faith. OM helped the small church with various relief projects they could offer to their community, and also opened an Elderly Care project and a Day Centre for children - which also led to several of these children’s parents starting to come to church.

The church also started ministry in several villages in the area, where there are no evangelical churches at all: Văduleni, Boşcana, Mărdăreuca and Coşerniţa. For some of these, a visit with the Bus4Life had opened new doors for ministry in late 2019.

The small church truly feels that “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”

Though as OM we had already come alongside this work through occasional short-term teams, the Bus4Life and various relief projects, we wanted to respond to the need of more permanent workers to disciple new believers and reach out to these communities. We are thankful that in late 2020 we could form a small Local Ministry Team to work alongside this small church and actively further the church planting activities in the area. Among other activities, they help the newly opened Elderly Care project in Boşcana. One of the people they visit regularly to deliver warm food is Maria, who has health problems and moreover suffers because her nephew often takes away the little money she receives from the state and also occasionally uses violence against her. At first she was hostile towards the believers, but now she is happy every time they come - ready to share her troubles and eager for the visitors to pray for her. “On the days you pray for me, I have peace,” she explains, “and also at night I can sleep more peacefully.”



Thank God with us for this opportunity and pray for the team as they serve and build relationships. Pray for a good collaboration with the local church workers, that they may be mutually encouraged by each other, and that many people will get to know God through their ministry.

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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