

Welcome to Mission Sonlight, Reporting from the Euro-Asia Division for the first quarter of 2008. To the south of Moscow, where the division's headquarters are located, lies the Moldovan Union.

The landlocked country of Moldova is located in the western part of this Division's territory. Bordered by Romania and Ukraine, Moldova lies in a very fertile region with rich black soil covering three quarters of its land mass.

Before World War II, Moldova was a part of Romania. After the war it was incorporated into the Soviet Union. When communism fell, Moldova gained its independence on August 27, 1991.

Although the country has a favorable climate and good farmland, it remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. Having no mineral deposits, the population depends on agriculture for its economy. All of the country's energy supplies must be imported and this adds to the economic difficulties of Moldovan citizens.

Ethnically, the country is made up of several groups of people. Moldovan/Romanian comprise the largest percentage of the population with Ukrainians, Russians, Gaguz, Bulgarians and others also living in the region.

As with most eastern European countries, the predominant religion among the people is Eastern Orthodox. This creates unique challenges for our brothers and sisters in Christ who long to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Organizationally, the Moldovan Union is fairly young, having been established in 1989. The population of its territory is almost 4 million people. The Seventh-day Adventist presence in this country is growing with a baptized membership

of just over 11,700. Today there are 153 church congregations meeting but not all of them are blessed with church buildings.

In the capitol city of Kishinev, a Mission SONlight team had the opportunity to visit a church that was built long before the fall of communism, nestled behind the homes surrounding. One of its sister congregations of this Adventist church does not currently own a building for members to worship in each Sabbath. Pastor Vasilli Gorbul served as the Moldovan Union president until his retirement. Pastor Vasilli was not content to sit back and rest on his past accomplishments, so he has continued on as a stipend pastor. As he shepherds his flock in Kishinev each week, he is faced with the problem of not having a permanent church building.

“Currently, we have about 100 members who come together on Sabbath,” says Pastor Vasilli. “We must meet wherever we can find a location, but this is not always easy.”

The congregation rents facilities but many times their plans will be interrupted because the room is needed for other meetings. This can happen with little or no notice. Imagine arriving for church only to be told you have to cancel your services, because another meeting will be taking place.

Working with Pastor Vasilli are four young adults who are eager to tell others what they have found in their friendship with Jesus. They meet with resistance from people when they can't give a location and time that services will be held.

“It is difficult for us to bring visitors because we do not know whether we will be able to hold services each Sabbath,” says Sajin Iurie. “We bring them but when we arrive, church may have to be cancelled because the landlord says a more important

meeting takes precedence. This is a bad witness to those we invite. The people wonder what kind of church it is, when we can't even appear to be organized.”

When they are able to meet, often there is not enough room for everyone to crowd into the space. Many will have to stand during the service, and the children will have to be in the hallway or standing on the windowsills in order to hear.

“Our country is mainly of the Orthodox religion,” says Sejin Elena. “The Orthodox church has many beautifully arranged churches. This is important in our culture and it makes a good impression on visitors and potential members.”

Elena is quick to say that the Adventist members know that grand beauty in a building isn't important, however a clean, neat and organized building will go far in showing others that your beliefs are something to consider and study more fully.

“I think it is also important to have a church for the children,” says Elena. “I was talking with my husband and told him that if we had a child I would rather live in a community that had a church. I would want my child to learn reverence for God and the environment of a church helps them learn the holiness of His presence.”

Rotaru Vasile agrees with his friends. “There have been times that the only place we have had to meet was in the park. This can be distracting to both the adults and children.” He recalls that there have been several times that they couldn't even worship together on Sabbath because there was no place to go. “When we can't meet we are very sad,” says Rotaru.

Rotaru experienced the rejection of a friend who he brought to church. “In Moldova, our mentality is that a church should be something that speaks about God and is filled with holiness. Several years ago, I invited a friend to come with me to church.

We met in a small room and it was crowded and difficult to have the service flow smoothly. After the service, my friend told me that she would not come again because we were not a church. I felt so badly, because we were not able to represent God in a pleasing manner to her.”

The desire and hope for a worship facility is evident in the hearts and words of the members of the Kishinev church. They want their visitors to see them as an organized and united body of believers. They want to be able to tell others this is where you can find us on Sabbath morning. They want to be able to share the gospel, the truth as it is in Jesus with friends in a way that is meaningful to their culture.

“Right now, we may be a small congregation. I believe, with our own permanent church building, we will see the membership dramatically increase,” says Pastor Vasilli. We are asking God that He will bless all of the people who will help with this project in a special way.”

The 13th Sabbath Offering for the Euro-Asia Division is coming soon. What gift have you planned to give, so others can worship in a church and share the joy of Jesus with their friends?

From Kishinev, Moldova in the Euro-Asia Division, this is Mission Sonlight.