

THE HISTORY OF THE NEST

In February 1998, HELPING HANDS rented a three-bedroom apartment to temporarily house homeless refugees. Furnished with bunk beds, it housed up to twelve people at a time. Initially, it was used for sheltering Kurdish believers who were the founding members of the Kurdish Christian Fellowship in Athens, but others in need also found a place of refuge, new life, and nourishment.

The shelter ministry of HELPING HANDS proved to be very effective in meeting physical and spiritual needs of those who we serve.

We hope to open it again in the near future.

These shelters were NOT just apartments. They were places of fellowship for believers, places to hear and experience the Good News; places where refugees who come to Christ can be prepared to be "sent out" as "missionaries" to other lands. This is not simply a nice theory, rather it has been the reality witnessed for more than 7 years.

To better understand the effectiveness, here are a few (among many) examples of residents impacted by the Shelter Ministry:

«M» and his wife and young old son (Iranians) became residents of one of our Nests. «M» came to the Lord almost immediately while his wife took longer but also eventually put her trust in Jesus. «M» was a house leader and one of our most faithful workers, winning him the «Helping Hands Volunteer of the Year» award for 2002.

An Iranian believer, «N», and his wife «E» (Filipina) were the house leaders of one of our «Nests», where new

believers and sincere seekers from Iran and Afghanistan were housed for shelter, evangelism, and discipleship. It was «training ground» for «N» (who is also the leader of the Persian Christian Fellowship). «N» and «E» are now full-time team members of the IT/AthensTeam.

«N», an Afghan refugee, came to Jesus and stayed in our Nests for some time until the Lord provided for him to run his own «hotel» business which he used as an opportunity to share Christ with Muslim residents.

«M» and «M», Iranian refugees, stayed for a long time in one of our Nests. Now they are both sharing Christ with Muslim refugees in other ministries in Athens and in Crete. Kurds, Iraqis, Iranians, Albanians, Romanians, Afghans, Nigerians, Palestinians, and others **have been sheltered, brought to Christ, disciplined, and/or «sent out» to tell others through this important and strategic ministry.**

Because most of those who stayed in the "Nests" were believers (or became believers while there) and because ALL of them only stayed there temporarily before moving on, **these places were not only physical shelters from the elements but also places of spiritual preparation** where they could be strengthened and nourished before "spreading their wings for flight".

Thank you for praying about what part God may invite you to play in the re-opening of this strategic opportunity to reach the nations for Him!

Every summer we have the opportunity to do something special, for some of the refugee kids. In the summer of 2005 we were able to send 7 kids for 21 days to the Christian Camp of the Greek Evangelical Church of Greece in their camp outside of Athens. These kids had great time and the opportunity to meet other Greek kids, make friends, play, and hear about Jesus. **We do thank the leaders of the Greek Christian Camp** who so lovingly accept refugee children every year. Because many parents did not allow their kids to go to a camp for so many days, we organized our own Kids Camp. **Ibir and Kate Cami** report:

This summer, we took 28 refugee kids, ages six to fourteen, to a local retreat center for a three-day camp. Everyone had a wonderful time! We went to the beach, made crafts, sang songs, and did our best to keep the kids busy morning until night. At the end of the three days, the children performed a mini-musical for their parents and we presented a video from the camp. Many parents had tears running down their faces as they watched their children have fun being kids. Perhaps the best part of the camp was the conversations we had with the older children. They asked very good questions, and listened attentively as we shared our testimonies with them. One girl asked my team mate Sahar, after hearing her testimony, **if she could find God the same way Sahar found Him.** "Of course you can," Sahar responded, "He is waiting for you to seek Him and He will show Himself to you. There is a verse in the Bible that tells us that Jesus is behind the door of our heart and He is knocking, and whoever opens the door He will come into their heart."



Hundreds of Euros and hours of effort went into making this camp possible, but it was undeniably worth it. The children had a break from their difficult lives, they experienced the love of Christ all day each day. As my team mate said the last day, **the children who arrived at the camp were not the same children who left it.** Not only that, but my relationships with each of the children is forever deeper because of the time we spent and the memories we built together.

Please pray with us for these kids, that they would seek the Truth and find Him.



THE NEW HELPING HANDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Helping Hands association is governed by a Board of Directors of 5 people who are elected every two years by the official members of the association.

Following the laws of our constitution, on Saturday, Jan. 28th, 2006, the members of the Helping Hands association came together to elect the New Board of Directors.

The five members of the board are:

- President:** Rev. Meletis Meletiadis, Pastor of the Greek Evangelical Church of Volos, Greece
- Secretary:** Polixeni Boukis
- Treasurer:** Themis Sirinidis
- Advisory Members:** Pastor Dimitris Lekkas and Kallie Skaife

Helpings Hands also has a full-time **General Director:** Rev. Nikos Stefanidis



PERSIAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

For some years now we have hosted the Persian Christian Fellowship (PCF) at our Refugee Center where our Iranian brother and teammate **Nader** preaches the Gospel to many every week. We offer also Greek classes and some food to those coming. **We have seen God working miracles** in this place as many refugees hear about Jesus and many give their lives to Him. Nader writes about a recent case of a refugee accepting Jesus:

Last night in the Persian Fellowship, two men raised their hands to receive Jesus. One of them was an Afghan I talked to after the meeting. I asked him how he came to believe in Jesus. He said, "When I entered Greece (in 2004), one thing I saw that touched me was the cross on top of the Greek church. That feeling was very strange to me. I came to the Persian Fellowship 2 times only. It was hard for me to

understand what I was hearing from the messages. I did not come to this church again.

Then I had a dream about the Lord, and came back to this place and asked you for a Bible, but my two uncles (who I live

with) strictly forbade me from coming to this Fellowship again. But my uncles were not able to stop my heart's desire to know about Christianity. **For two years I have been reading that Bible you gave me. I came to know Jesus through the Bible.**

Last Monday, I saw a dream again. In that dream a man told me that I must be born again. For three days I tried to find you but I could not." I asked him, "What will happen if your two uncles find out that you became a believer in Jesus?" He answered me (speaking of the Judgment Day), "In that day, my uncles cannot save me." Praise God for this kind of faith".

Please keep in your prayers Nader and his wife Ella for they are very valuable to the ministry and to us. Pray that the Lord will provide for their support.



RUSSIAN FELLOWSHIP



Some years ago our teammate **Susan Pearson** started the Russian Tea Room Ministry. Now a young Russian who was saved in Greece and has a special love for his own people took over the leadership of this ministry.

Every Saturday night our brother **Alexei Bolboi** works with about 35 to 50 Russians who are coming to share a meal and to meet others from their homeland. Alexei has seen the opportunity to preach the word of God and to witness to many.

Please pray for this ministry too and for our brother Alexei and his wife with their four children.

RUSSIAN

SHOWER & HAIRCUT MINISTRY

Our team mate **Themis Sirinides** who is responsible for the shower ministry reports:

Many times refugees will come up to me saying things like "I haven't taken a shower in months", or "I haven't shaved or bathed in weeks, can I please take a shower?" Every week about 50-60 shower tickets are given out, and they are extremely valuable to the refugees. On shower days some of the men will even wait up to four hours for their turn to shower. Clean towels, soap, razors, and shaving foam are provided for them, and our teammate **Tatiana Vladimirovna** (from Russia) provides haircuts by appointment during shower ministry. Before they leave, hand cream, hair gel, and cologne are given out, and the transformation

is remarkable! As more than one refugee has told me after taking his shower, **"Thank you! I feel like a new man."**



OUR VISION

RESURRECTING THE "NEST" MINISTRY

(NEST: temporary domicile for creatures of flight)

Dear Praying Friends,

In June 2005, it was unfortunately necessary to TEMPORARILY shut down our shelter/discipleship ministry (called "The Nest"). There were two primary issues that forced this decision: (1) management issues, (2) financial matters. It was very painful for all of us to close the NEST because of finances. **It was very hard for us to tell the refugees to please leave the house since we had to close it down, because we DID NOT HAVE ANY MORE MONEY to keep it open.**

Please pray with us as we seek God's will and ask Him to provide the means for us to open it again. We believe that some of the major management issues can be resolved at this time. However, Helping Hands has a financial policy that tries to balance faith and wisdom by requiring that any NEW MINISTRY (or resurrected ministry) must have at least 50% of MONTHLY costs pledged, and 100% of initial start-up costs on hand before beginning. As of this writing, we have 8% of the monthly and 100% of the start-up costs. We are estimating that monthly costs will run about 2000 Euros (\$2,400 USD), and start-up costs will be around 4,000 Euros (\$4,800 USD).

Although our previous Nest ministry was primarily devoted to temporarily housing and discipling young men, **our hope is for the new one to provide temporary shelter for mainly women, children, and families as they are the most vulnerable**, and there is such a growing number of them. God willing, some day we will have a place (or places) that can shelter all, regardless of gender or family status. If this is something God would lay on your heart to invest, you can make out checks of ANY AMOUNT to International Teams, with a note clearly designating it for «The Nest/Athens», and send to: International Teams, 411 W. River Rd., Elgin, IL 60123 USA (or to the I.T. organization in your country, if you don't live in the U.S.)

We believe that this is very passionately in God's heart, and we BELIEVE that you care about this ministry that God is using to reach the nations. **So we are simply asking you to ASK GOD how He may want you to play a part, and then be obedient.** Please pray for His will to be done as we seek to be a blessing to the nations in Jesus' name. If you are not familiar with the Nest ministry as it was, there is more information to read below. The resurrection of the Nest ministry will be similar in purpose, only slightly different in practical management issues. One of the major losses this past year was not only the ability to help homeless refugees find shelter, but also a significantly less impact in the area of discipleship opportunities. The Nest ministry was one of our most powerful opportunities to combine proclamation with demonstration.

We hope and pray that this can continue again.

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING GOD TO USE YOU IN THIS HIGHLY PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF HIS LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLES!

Grateful for you,
Scott McCracken

