

January-March 2002

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McCracken Memo

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Athens, Greece

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A thousand apologies for the delayed prayer letter! We are MUCH better at keeping in touch with **regular prayer updates via e-mail**. If you would like to be added to the e-mail list, please write to us at the e-mail address on this page and we will add you to the list.

GOD HAS DONE MANY THINGS since our last letter but we only have space to mention a few...

NEW PROGRAM:

«The Jesus Restaurant»

In the Fall we started a new program we have dubbed "**Tea House**". However, we have learned that the refugees refer to it as "**The Jesus Restaurant**". In order to deal with the increasing number of refugees coming to our **Athens Refugee Center**, we now offer a sack of food and a cup of hot tea. The food currently includes bread, a fruit, a vegetable, and two hard-boiled eggs. They are welcome to stay and watch videos, play table games and ping-pong, attend language classes and Seekers Bible studies or they may take their food and leave. The new program represented a MAJOR increase in required expenses which we did not have available. But of course God did, and He has faithfully provided every day since we took the step of faith to follow His guidance into this new endeavor. **For a while, we were feeding over 3,000 refugees a week. Then the numbers dropped a bit and are starting to go up again. Currently, we are feeding**

between 2,000 and 2,500 a week.

Our new Tea House has not only allowed us to feed more refugees and expose more refugees to the Gospel through our classes, videos, and literature, but it has also ***freed up those of us with evangelism gifts to interact personally with many more people than before.***

Also, **God is actually bringing more WOMEN and CHILDREN to the ARC** during the Tea House ministry! This is an answer to prayer and providing more ministry opportunities for the women on our team.

CHRISTMAS OUTREACH--2001

(Those of you who made a financial investment in the Christmas Outreach this year will find this next section redundant as it was in the letter we sent, thanking you for your generous gift, so you may want to skip over to the next section. Those of you who prayed, read on....)

We had been planning it for months—our biggest event of the year, the annual Christmas Outreach to refugees. Last year had been our largest outreach thus far—two nights, 500 refugees. This Christmas, because of the recent surge in the refugee population in Athens, we had decided to *double* everything...twice as many backpacks, rain suits, and New Testaments to give as gifts...*plus* a sleeping bag for everyone.

The main problem (beyond how to pay for and where to keep all of this stuff before the big day) was how to distribute

1,000 gifts and meals when our facility only holds 300 people. The Lord provided for the costs through very willing and generous people like you. And after planning and discussing it for months, we finally decided to have our Christmas program coincide with a normal day of our **Tea House** feeding program: each refugee would line up at the kitchen window to receive a "sack lunch" as well as a backpack filled with the other gifts, and then sit down to enjoy a ROTATING presentation of singing, skits, and testimonies while the refugees would be free to come and go as they please.

Things were going great. **The first wave of 300 people was really enjoying the sacks of food** (with yogurt and pistachios added to the regular offering of bread, fruit, vegetable, and hard-boiled egg) to make their "meal" a little more special. The refugees were also listening with rapt attention to our volunteers singing at the front of the room, especially when the lyrics were in Kurdish or Farsi languages. Everything was going according to plan. But God had other ideas.

Everyone was enjoying the program so much that they didn't leave. That left the 700 other refugees outside, waiting impatiently in a line that wrapped around the block. Once people started emerging from our facility, and word spread that we were giving away backpacks, all it took was one false step for a stampede on our gate to ensue. Pushing, shoving, and refusing to line up in an orderly fashion, the

mob didn't leave until hours later, and by then we had already decided that there was no other choice than to close for the day.

Obviously, we were very discouraged, but we had given the day to God, and He had evidently taken us seriously. We thought we would cover everyone in one day, but He seems to have had a longer time span in mind. He made sure that another 300 or so Afghans, who live in a nearby park, got food, backpacks, and His message to them **the next day** when they came by invitation to the **Persian Christian Fellowship** meeting. And He decided who would receive the remaining gifts whenever we held a lottery for our **Shower Ministry** on Fridays (as well as receiving a backpack until they ran out). Apparently, God thought He would be better than we would at deciding who really needed these gifts.

Sometimes God's messages are loud and clear, like when all of our well-laid plans dissolve into a near-riot. And sometimes they are soft, like the gentle nudging of a heart. Thank *you* for listening to God's prompting and praying for this ministry.

LIFE CHANGES...

Here are a few brief **testimonies** I have learned of lately:

* **Zacharias is a Greek man** who is a volunteer with our **Helping Hands** ministry. He was sharing with me yesterday how our ministry was instrumental in him coming to the Lord. Seeing many believers from different

countries and different denominations **DEMONSTRATING** and living out together in unity what they claimed to believe really impacted him and moved him quite a bit closer to Christ! This was over 2 years ago and I just learned of it yesterday.

* I was told the other day about an **Iranian refugee** who came to Athens as a **dogmatic Muslim**. He visited the **Athens Refugee Center** and even stayed in one of our **Nests** for a while, but remained for a long time resistant to the Gospel. After some time, he began attending another Iranian fellowship in Athens and then alternated between that one and the one at the **ARC** (led by our Iranian team member Nader). Finally, without ever confessing Christ, he moved on to England where he has settled down. Recently, he contacted his friends in Athens to tell them that not only has **he finally put his trust in Jesus, but he has been baptized, is growing in Christ, and IS LEADING A BIBLE STUDY FOR IRANIAN REFUGEES!**

* **Ali has been an Iranian Muslim seeker** who has not only been staying in one of our Nests for several months now, but has also been very faithful in attending Bible studies and helping us in our various ministries. Most of us who did not know him very well were just assuming that he was already a believer. Last month he told our team member Themis that after spending a lot of time studying and thinking and praying, **he has decided that he wants to become a follower of Jesus!**

* Last month I had the privilege to baptize in the International Christian Fellowship (pastored by Ray Bheam) a woman from the Philippines, a man from Iran, and **our son Kyle** (from Greece)!

PRAYER REQUESTS

* We are developing a ministry focus that more intentionally and strategically uses short-term teams. Please pray for God to send us teams and to give us His wisdom.

* Our ministry budget has more than doubled in recent months. Please pray for us to remain dependent on GOD's provisions.

* As of last count, **The Refuge** account had about **\$15,000** in it. Thanks to all who have invested in this vision of an evangelistic shelter ministry. Please pray that the rest will come in (about \$385,000 more).

* Our Iranian brother and his wife Ella are still trusting God for their financial support. **They need about 2/3 more to be at 100%.**

Financial Contributions:

Write checks to International Teams, and specify for the McCrackens account, OR for "Nader & Ella in Athens", OR for "The Refuge" account, OR for the "HELPING HANDS" account. Thank you.

Thank you. **Send to:**
International Teams
411 W. River Rd.
Elgin, IL 60123-1570 USA