

Christmas with the Criminals

December 2012

Dear Ones,

Door of Hope is fortunate, indeed blessed! Because of our honesty and reliability, we have wide-open welcomes into Bulgaria's main, high security prison. In Communist times, crowds of prisoners were executed for their doubts. Christians dispatched for their faith. The prison is now operated by reliable, professional men and women. With the Governor's permission like last year, we are organising a special Christmas party. It's really different! Most of the guests are murderers, thieves, drug pushers and gang bosses. The extra special guests are their *wives and little children brought in from the outside*. It will be something like the party Jesus spoke about many winters ago; respectable people left out in the cold, the least, lost and little welcomed into the warm.

Between 600 and 800 prisoners reside in small claustrophobic cells. 60% are poor marginalised gypsies whose families receive our help. Last year under the supervision of ten policemen, many of the criminals were directed into a large secured room to meet their children. Sunshine illuminated hardened lives, kisses covered little faces. Competitions and games were organised, old fashioned sack and three-legged races: fathers giggling happily with their children, mothers peering thoughtfully through puffs of cigarette smoke. Momentarily, families were joyfully united. Tough criminals, including murderers, secretly wept. We saw them. Each child received a Christmas parcel and every father was handed a Bible which they happily accepted. Finally, the families were left alone for a while with their regrets, their tears and vows of love. Farewells were made. That final hug, last endearment, and then the bleak return to cells instead of homes.

"The social effect was tremendous," said Vanya Basileva, assistant Director of the Prison. But it was more than that, the unseen Christ of Christmas had appeared in the shoe box, the laughter and the murderer reminded of child-like innocence.

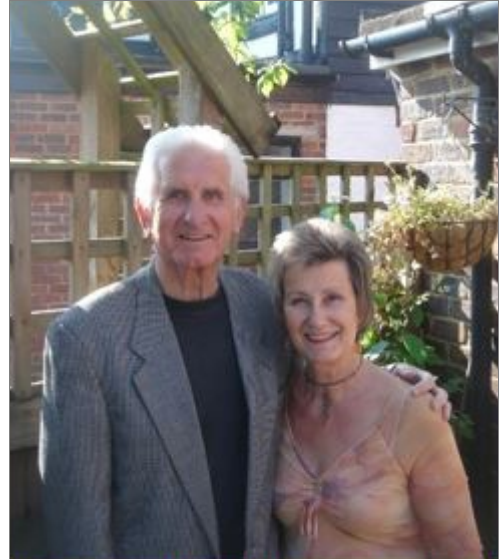
Many of these mothers and children live in ghetto conditions. Husbands are behind bars for every crime imaginable, from cheating, stealing a pig, to murder. Now the children have to suffer. An added humiliation being as wife and child of a prisoner, they are frequently maligned and rejected in their community.

By the time that you receive this letter (with the help of *Link Romania* Charity), 4000 shoe boxes, plus crates of clothes, will have been delivered to ghetto areas of Bulgaria, Ukraine, as well as the families of prisoners. Boxes containing Christmas

gifts for the children, mother and grandma. Dolls, toy motor cars, games, sweets, hats, gloves, tooth paste, toiletries, and other niceties. Delivery of these boxes are not restricted to ethnic origins or religious beliefs. Love and mercy boasts **no** limits of constraint.

Door of Hope invite You to share your love this Christmas. We are thankful to God that some of our transportation costs have already been covered, but we do have further costs and travel expenses in the Ukraine and Bulgaria. **Your special Christmas donation would be appreciated.** The children mentioned in this letter cannot write to you, but we know they are grateful. If donations received exceed our costs, please be assured that every penny will reach poor children and elderly in other Door of Hope projects.

We wish you sweetest peace and sacred awareness this Christmas.



British Director, Rev. Philip E. Streeter & Diane

Rev and Mrs Phil and Diane Streeter.

ECL DOOR OF HOPE

Bringing Hope to the hopeless and Help to the helpless

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