

# ROMANIA

## Part 1: Reaching Orphans & Villagers in Oradea, Northern Romania

Story and photos by Tom Price

### *Defending the Fatherless*

*Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.* Isaiah 1:17

Karen Bucur gently caressed a youngster lying in one of many cribs. The 3-year-old boy's head was nearly double the size of a normal toddler's. He is one of countless abandoned babies in Romanian hospitals—many with special needs.

“His condition—water on the brain—could have been treated if the necessary medical procedures had been performed.” Karen said sadly. “Except for a miracle, he could die soon.” The child's legs twisted awkwardly



Karen Bucur, right, entertains a toddler held by Maria. Nurse's assistants Maria, Marinela, left, and Agi, center, grew up in orphanages and now minister to abandoned children with the Bucurs.

Part of a 26-person mission team, Heather Bromley of CC Fort Lauderdale, FL, caresses

a 3-year-old boy who suffers from water on the brain. His condition could have been alleviated if treated earlier. But now, without a miracle, he will likely die. Several believers with Pathway to Joy Ministries (PTJM) care for abandoned children.

while he stared vacantly into the distance. The room had three other infants in cribs suffering from various maladies—some treatable, others not.

A glass partition separated an adjoining room with two other abandoned infants. Nursing assistants Maria and Agi lovingly talked to each baby while changing diapers, feeding, and caressing each one. Down the hall, Marinela did the same.



A child enjoys a snack during VBS in an impoverished village near Oradea.



Topher Harrison of CC Fort Lauderdale cares for a baby that was left at the hospital—a common occurrence.



Left, Youth Pastor Mike Leger of CC Fort Lauderdale shares at a Sunday service while long-term missionary and pastor, Cornel Bucur, translates at CC Tinca.



Pastor Cornel anoints the sick with oil and prays for them.

Years before, all three of the nursing assistants were introduced to a personal relationship with Christ by Karen and her husband, Cornel Bucur. The young women had grown up in a state-run orphanage. Now the three of them are part of a staff led by the Bucurs that gives abandoned babies the care and nurturing they would not readily receive in a hospital. They hope to place these abandoned babies into local Christian homes since Romanian law currently forbids international adoption.

Having accepted Christ through the Bucurs' ministry, Maria commented, "I want to give the love of Jesus to these kids—like Karen

and Cornel gave me. Now I can offer to these precious little ones the compassion we missed growing up in the orphanage." Maria, Agi, and Marinela became Christians through summer Bible camps run by the Bucurs after the communist government was ousted.

In the 1990s, the three teenagers had suddenly appeared at the missionaries' home, not knowing where else to turn after the orphanage abruptly discharged everyone over the age of 18. Having met the Bucurs during Bible camp, the girls had come to the only people who had shown them compassion.

Karen Bucur remembered, "Our tiny two-room apartment was hardly big enough for our family and children. But we could not share the love of Christ and then turn our backs on these young ladies. So I called my husband to ask what to do."

Cornel added with a smile, "Like a spiritually mature husband, I said, 'Let's pray and then God will show us what to do.' I went into my next meeting and forgot about praying. Karen called me back and asked, 'Cornel, what did God show you?' I said, 'Sorry, but I forgot to pray.'"

Karen told her husband to take his time. "The girls are taking a shower now," Karen told Cornel calmly. "I am sure they can stay here until the Lord shows you otherwise."

Cornel concluded, "That's how our orphan placement ministry began." The girls stayed



Following old traditions, men and women sit on separate sides of the church.

until the Bucurs were able to place them with foster families. From that experience Karen and Cornel discovered the incredible difficulties these young adults faced as they transitioned from life in an orphanage to independent living.

***But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*** John 1:12

### Risky Beginnings

Cornel grew up in Oradea, a large city in northwestern Romania, honing his street skills in the town's dangerous neighborhoods. As a young man he learned to despise

the authoritarian abuses of power with its bribery and corruption in the communist system. Cornel's life was transformed when he was invited to an illegal, underground Christian church. He accepted Jesus as his Savior that first evening.

Growing quickly in the Word, Cornel began an evangelistic musical group and preached in different churches. Since organized worship of God was illegal, Cornel was arrested shortly after turning 18 and sent to a reeducation labor camp for two years. After his release, he was given asylum in America.

"As I left Romania, I swore that I would never set foot in this evil country again," Cornel said. He was accepted into Moody Bible



A Gypsy woman in the village of Tinca cries as a skit reminds her of her life's temptations and struggles.



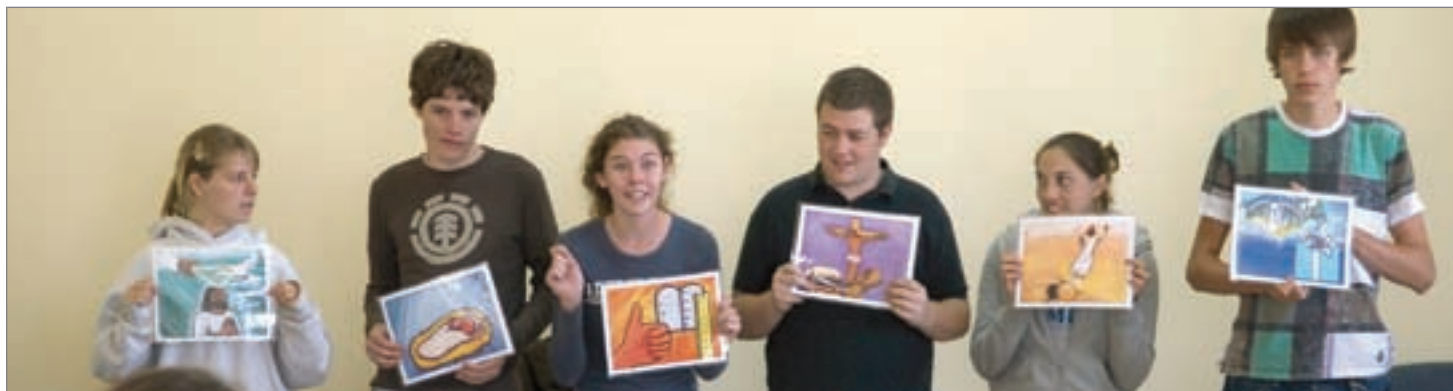
Eddie Carvalho, playing the role of Christ, shields a new believer from temptations of drugs, alcohol, sex, and money.



Village children respond to a VBS skit.



A lumber truck passes a family in a horse-drawn cart, a common sight in Oradea.



Youth from CC Fort Lauderdale share the salvation story with pictures of Christ's life. During their Easter break, 21 youth and 5 adults traveled from Florida to reach out to orphans, conduct a VBS, and witness to non-believers.

Institute in Chicago, where he met Karen. They married and went on to Wheaton Graduate School. He was hired by Radio Free Europe because of his Romanian language ability and natural broadcasting voice. Despite the station's secular direction, Cornel transmitted evangelical messages back to his home country. That eventually led to Cornel being hired to set up Christian radio stations to blanket Romania. After graduating from Wheaton and before returning to Romania, Cornel took his young family to Florida, where they integrated into CC Fort Lauderdale's mission program.

Trained and sent to Romania as missionaries from the fast-growing south Florida church, Cornel, Karen, and other Christians conducted retreats, outreaches, and summer camps for the underprivileged and abandoned youngsters.

The overwhelming number of orphans continues to plague Romania unlike any

other former Eastern Bloc country for several reasons. During the communist reign that ended violently in 1989, each family had been required to have five offspring or suffer economic consequences. That led parents to place youngsters in an orphanage when the family was unable to care for them. The government's strategy had been to build a mighty communist army. Today, pressure from the European Union is persuading the government to begin solving the problems and consequences of their state-run orphanages.

*A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.*

Psalm 68:5

### Freedom Explosion

"After the fall of the Iron Curtain," Cornel said, "Romania experienced an explosion of freedom, being able to study the Bible publicly for the first time in almost half a century."

Karen added, "The spiritual hunger was amazing—we were able to do evangelism and crusades all over the country." The Bucurs were also allowed to take the children from the orphanages up into the mountains for summer retreats. There the children learned about a heavenly Father Who would never leave them or forsake them.

Cornel added, "We realized that sharing God's Word through evangelism and church planting would be the surest remedy against current and future child neglect and abandonment." Romania's immense social problems were caused by the absence of Christ in people's lives and the subsequent presence of sin and apathy. In response, the couple began Pathway to Joy Ministries (PTJM) in 1995. It reaches out to the most desperate infants in the hospitals, places youngsters in foster care, and directs short-term mission teams as well as plants churches and begins youth groups.



Children are fascinated with the texture of Bianca Blades' hair. The 14-year-old from Fort Lauderdale was horrified to find two young boys covered in filth and sleeping under a car.



CC Fort Lauderdale's mission team leads the outreach in song at the nearly completed youth center in Tinca.



Alina and Alexandra, the two children in the middle, had been rescued from dire circumstances by PTJM. They are living with a Christian foster family.



CC Fort Lauderdale youth leader Christabel Chuah, left, shares the hope of Christ with Romanian teens in a park. She was a missionary in Russia for nearly six years.

### South Florida Youth Evangelize

Bianca Blades wanted to cry. While in the Gypsy village of Tinca, Bianca had just met two little boys covered in filth. The abandoned boys had been living underneath a car, and some older children were making fun of them.

"I prayed fervently that God would give me wisdom and tell me what to do," recalled Bianca, 14. "I just wanted to weep, but the two little boys were looking to me for help. My heart was breaking for them."

Bianca was part of a 26-member youth mission team from CC Fort Lauderdale that came to minister with the Bucurs. The believers found that the boys' father was in prison and their mother was an alcoholic—leaving the 5-year-old to scavenge for food for himself and his 3-year-old brother.



PTJM staff member Julia Tent holds a mentally handicapped toddler who had been abandoned to the hospital and is now living with a foster family, pictured in the background. Julia oversees the placement of neglected children into Christian homes.

Believers helped clean the youngsters up and gave them fresh clothes. Karen asked local women about the two boys' plight. "We pray that we can locate the mother and persuade her to sign the two boys over to us for foster care," Karen said. "Even if a child is neglected, the law still requires us to secure parental consent."

**One Child at a Time**  
*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.*

James 1:27a

Several months ago in another village, believers had intervened in a similar case.

Karen had observed two little girls, Alina and Alexandra, coming to the church that Cornel had begun. She learned that the girls were living in a mud hut with no heating, their mother mentally ill. Karen immediately took blankets and food. She also took their plight to the Child Protection Agency.

"The case was caught up in bureaucratic red tape since the girls lacked birth certificates," Karen explained. "At the same time, we were concerned that the girls could freeze to death." Finally the mother was persuaded to sign the consent forms and PTJM was able to move the children into a healthy Christian home. The girls' hair needed to be cut off because of lice, but in a short time they seemed happy and adjusted.

abandoned to the hospital and is now living with a foster family, pictured in the PTJM hopes to open a vocational training center/safe house to serve many children.

Karen and Cornel have a vision for a vocational training center for teenagers who are released from orphanages. Aside from education, the center would provide a protected home environment for children who are at risk, like Alina and Alexandra, and for children who have been confined to a hospital. This would give the ministry time to find suitable foster families while the government works through the legal problems. Karen and Cornel are praying that volunteers from Calvary Chapels around the world would staff the center.

Cornel said, "A vocational training center would not only provide Christian discipleship, but practical life skills that will help

some of these teens integrate into society instead of having babies and begging to survive. Most post-orphan graduates have never assimilated, due to a lack of education and skills, and end up living on the streets."

Karen added, "We just keep praying for solutions. There is a need to place at least 200 children from Oradea in foster care, and God has been faithful to provide answers—one child at a time." ☞

*"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Matthew 6:20a-21



Karen Bucur takes a walk with some children who grew up in the orphanage.



An orphan draws his conception of Jesus Christ dying on the cross.

### Pathway to Joy Ministries

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