

ROMANIA

Part 3: Bucharest, Braşov, and in between

Story and photos by Tom Price



Believers pray for Geanina, second from right, before she is baptized.

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:21-22

"Jesus had just risen from the dead," explained Pastor Ken Sutton at a Calvary Chapel home fellowship in Romania. Once a missionary there himself, Ken shares oversight of the Calvary movement in the former communist country. "Our Savior's first concern was to breathe the Holy Spirit into the same men who had, just days earlier, run away and turned their backs on Him as He headed to the cross."

Ken stood with his back to a bare wall in a chilly room with cement flooring. Nearly 45 inhabitants of a Gypsy village crammed together on long wooden benches for the Sunday service. Located 65 miles north of Bucharest in the village of Valenii de Munte, it was one of three vibrant church plants in the area. The works had been established by CC missionaries Steven and Alice Quarles from CC Lake Elsinore, CA.

Ken continued, "In the next verse and many others, like in Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus talks to His disciples about forgiveness. Would you be ready to forgive these men so soon?" The crowd shook their heads. He knew that residents of this Gypsy village struggle with the concept of forgiveness in a culture that esteems revenge and retribution.



Pastor Ken Sutton, center, preaches in a Romanian Gypsy church in the village of Valenii de Munte, 65 miles north of Bucharest, while missionary Cristi Ionescu translates the Easter service message. The fellowship was one of three church plants begun by CC missionaries Steven and Alice Quarles. Ken was from CC Costa Mesa at that time and now leads Calvary Everett, WA. He oversees the Calvary fellowships in Romania.



Steven Quarles carries a child across a rickety bridge.

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Matthew 6:14-15

Earlier, missionary Steven Quarles jokingly had told the congregation to feel free to throw rotten fruit at Ken if his teaching went too long—an unusual comment to make about a visiting pastor from CC Costa Mesa, CA. However, Steven knew that this congregation’s attention could easily wander. There was still much ahead on the agenda.

In the corner of the room, Geanina listened intently to Ken’s teaching. Tears of anticipation began to flow down her cheeks. A new believer, Geanina was to be baptized after the teaching—much to the chagrin of her parents. Christians had prayed, and the parents reluctantly relented after several months. She had longed to make this public declaration of her faith in Christ through baptism but would not disobey her parents’ wishes.

Geanina’s friends comforted her, placing their hands on top of each other’s. The service ended, and the congregation and the entire village walked up a hill to a nearby field where a large tub had been filled. Steven played several worship songs, in spite of a broken string on his guitar. Then he explained baptism to the curious crowd and gently let Geanina down into the water.

Cold, wet, but beaming, Geanina spoke to the crowd, “My relationship with Jesus Christ has given me the peace for which I have always longed. I am a new creation in Christ.” Tears of joy mixed with the baptismal water as friends gathered around for congratulations and hugs.

Reaching the Least

After the baptism, Steven’s wife Alice Quarles spent an hour encouraging a young Gypsy mother. Almost two feet taller than the Romanian, Alice hunched over uncomfortably to get to the woman’s eye level. The woman’s faith had faltered after her second infant showed signs of a similar lung disease that had killed her other baby two years ago. Steven had performed the funeral service.

The missionary family knew only too well the pain of losing a child. Five years earlier their oldest son, Nick, had passed away after



Gypsies joyfully watch as Geanina is baptized by Steven.



Teens stand in the baptismal tub at the site of the home fellowship.

a long bout with cancer. Alice and Steven find strength and a peace that surpasses understanding knowing their son finished well and is with the Lord. They returned to their mission work in Romania with their four remaining children.

Alice encouraged the woman, “Turn to the Lord—not only to intercede for your baby but also for your entire family, so they may come to know the Lord.” The young woman had a desire to know God but was a poor reader, making it difficult for her to understand the Bible. Alice offered to help with her reading skills.

Alice explained, “Like many of the Gypsy women, it is a big step to move from a superstitious fear of God to understand God’s love and grace. It is hard for these people to

comprehend heaven since life is very tough for them. The only thing that will ease the pain is faith in the Lord Jesus.”

For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, Who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, Who treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God of hosts is His name.

Amos 4:13

Steven & Alice Quarles

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Alice hunches over to share the hope of the Gospel with a young woman who was afraid of losing her second child to the same disease that took her first baby.



Pleading to be called on to answer difficult Bible questions, the children raise two fingers, traditional in the Romanian culture.



Cornel Dan and Petra Nae call upon the students.

On Eagles' Wings

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself."

Exodus 19:4

"Shampoo, soap, sandwiches, and salvation—that is what we offer at this outreach," said missionary Rebecca Hampshire jokingly. Aptly called On Eagles' Wings, this ministry of CC Bucharest focuses on helping youngsters who lack the financial resources to receive an education.

"Most of the children live with extended families who reside illegally in abandoned buildings without running water or electricity. They come here to take showers before

Only one child consistently attended when the ministry began several years ago. Believers taught 10-year-old Elvis how to read. Rebecca and Cornel were then able to enroll him in a school that specialized in helping poor children. Elvis lives with his illiterate relatives in an abandoned building without a legal address, so he did not have an identification card. Lack of an ID card keeps many youngsters out of school.

Rebecca commented, "We were shocked when the school let Cornel and me use our ID cards to enroll Elvis into school." Soon the missionaries were signing up many other youngsters and filling out the entrance paperwork. Elvis, now 13, is the biggest kid in his third-grade class. Along with his advanced age came other problems.

"Elvis lives in a tough situation—with relatives but without any parental guidance," offered Rebecca. After three years of relative cooperation, Elvis had begun to lie to them and skip school.



Elvis

"Cornel, Petra, and I had to act as parents," said Rebecca, "and restricted him from playing football until his behavior changed for the better. We told Elvis, 'What you are doing is wrong. This is what God says about it. We love you and we are not going to give up on you.'"

Elvis' behavior slowly began to improve. This past fall Elvis was at the church talking to Rebecca, Cornel, and Petra. He asked them about death and eternal life. They told him again about the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, and he said he wanted to accept Christ.

After being led in a prayer of repentance, Elvis began to weep. Rebecca recounted, "We have known Elvis for more than three years and have never seen him shed a tear. He cried for a long time." Since then, Elvis has been faithfully coming to church and spending as much time as possible with his spiritual family at CC Bucharest.

"The most notable change is that he is constantly helping Petra, Cornel, and me to guide the younger children in knowing right from wrong. Now he plays on a European football team while keeping his grades up," Rebecca concluded.

Cornel and Petra also help all the youngsters with their homework. "Both Petra and Cornel are great examples for these children," said Rebecca. Petra came out of a Gypsy background—lacking any incentive to work and having a family firmly against Christianity. Her sister once defiantly spit on Petra's Bible.

At an outreach conducted by Steven and Alice Quarles, Petra dedicated her life to the Lord. Later she attended the CC Bible College in Hungary. Petra learned to speak English while attending the school. She also speaks Romanian and Romany, the Gypsy language. She helps guide the children attending On Eagles' Wings while working on her educational degrees.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Matthew 6:33

Cornel, who usually goes by his last name, Dan, grew up in a Bucharest orphanage. During summer camps, CC missionaries introduced him to a relationship with Jesus Christ. "Steven Quarles was teaching, and he made the Gospel message very clear,"

recalled Cornel. "I felt that the Holy Spirit came upon me, and I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior."

That winter, Cornel was invited to spend Christmas with the Keenans, a missionary family from CC Huntington Beach, CA. "It was like an American movie," Cornel remembered fondly. "Everyone was so nice and loving, and they made me feel so special. I had never experienced anything like it growing up in the orphanage."

After attending Bible College in Hungary, Cornel joined the staff at CC Bucharest. He oversees computer maintenance and purchasing, creates the church bulletins, and translates the Bible study and the Bible-training program.

When teaching the Gypsy children, Rebecca refers to both Cornel and Petra as examples of how God can perform miracles in those who submit their lives to Jesus Christ and walk in His ways. ✠

Romania



Missionary Rebecca Hampshire walks students back to their homes after Bible study at CC Bucharest. Through On Eagles' Wings ministry, the CC missionaries are helping poor children stay in school while assisting their Christian growth.

CC Bucharest

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.” Exodus 19:5

In 2001, Pastor Shane Herman of CC El Centro, CA, led a team to Romania, the country that he and his wife Randie were praying about serving as long-term missionaries. While sharing the Gospel in a Bucharest city park, he noticed a toppled statue of the Soviet-era communist leader, Vladimir Lenin, a stark reminder of Romania’s troubled times. To almost everyone’s surprise, Shane climbed on top of the decaying statue.

“Communism told you that God was dead!” Shane yelled to the gathered crowd of passersby. “But now Jesus Christ remains alive in our hearts while this regime is dead.” He gestured down to the communist statue on which he stood. Later Shane told the crowd how one could have a personal relationship with the true Creator of the world through His Son, Jesus.

One young girl in the crowd eagerly raised her hand to accept Christ. Others followed her lead and raised their hands as well. Shane sensed that there was a heartfelt longing in that teenager which came from a great hunger to know God.

The girl, Maria Brinzaru, began attending CC Bucharest. Growing up in an orphanage, she had been seeking God in the Orthodox Church. She knew that the candles, chanting, and icons were a poor substitute for the true relationship for which she longed. Several months later, Shane returned to pastor the CC church in the capital city of Bucharest.

“Maria was the first Romanian who touched our lives,” remembered Shane. “She was the first to accept the Lord and later became a part of our family.”

Shane led CC Bucharest for almost six years until health concerns brought him back to the healing desert air in El Centro, CA. In Romania, he had dangerous seizures in which he would lose consciousness, possibly linked to his asthma and the city’s highly elevated pollution.

Shane returned to Romania this past Easter Sunday. It was the first time in nearly two years that he had visited the church that he had guided through some difficult but wonderful years. Current pastor Florin Enescu led worship with a mix of Romanian and English songs. Memories of sweet fellowship in the small missionary church stirred Shane as he raised his hands in praise.

Shane understood that God had used Florin and his wife Claudia at CC Bucharest to help heal wounds—from both a previous church split and Shane’s quick exit because of his

illness. The Enescus had been involved with the Calvary movement in a church in southwest Romania for a dozen years before being asked to consider leading the work in Bucharest. Florin’s vision for CC Bucharest was a return to the Book of Acts—the teaching of the apostles, enjoying brotherly fellowship, and remembering Christ in the breaking of bread and prayer.

On Friday evenings, outreach teams from the church set up in front of the national theater where many students congregate. The church supports the work of On

Eagles’ Wings and assists children in their neighborhood. The small but cohesive congregation is intent on reaching their area for Jesus. Before this past Easter, the congregation fasted, met together for prayer, and meditated on God’s Word. That evening they broke their weeklong fast together.

“That is the worship and the life of the church. Our desire is to be a church of prayer,” commented Florin. “We are praying that Jesus would give us His heart, that our eyes would be open to His vision for Bucharest, and that He would lead us to be witnesses of

light and salt.” Evangelical Christians are disapprovingly called “repenters” by those in the Orthodox Church.

Florin added, “Any time someone calls me a repentor, I can honestly just smile and say ‘guilty as charged.’”

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15



Pastor Florin Enescu, in maroon, and the CC Bucharest family pray for Petra Nae for Boise, ID, in the assistant pastor. The church hosts teams coming to minister to

healing during a midweek service. William Anderson, far right, a missionary from CC

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There are several Calvary fellowships throughout Romania.



Maria Brinzaru, in light blue, came to Christ during a CC outreach. She grew up in a Bucharest orphanage.



Cornel Dan, right, translates for Pastor Florin, left. Cornel grew up in an orphanage and is on the church staff.

Calvary Chapel Brasov

“Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9b

Jamie Hogan, newly appointed pastor of CC Brasov, Romania, said, “The transition wasn’t easy for the church body, but God led us through that time and has been our strength.” Jamie and his wife, Andreea, left the CC Bible College/Conference Center in Murrieta, CA, in May, eager to continue a Calvary Chapel church in the center of the former communist country.

The fellowship had faced many changes in a short period of time. The former missionary family, Keala and Heather Hoe, had felt called to return to America. The congregation in Romania was deeply saddened to lose the Hoe family because through them they had grown in the Lord. At the same time, CC Brasov had to relocate and change meeting times.

Jamie continued, “In spite of some early setbacks, we knew that the Lord had confirmed our move.” He had been a missionary in Bucharest years before when he met and married Andreea. Jamie had to leave an assistant pastor position in Bucharest to return to the U.S. because of complications with hepatitis C. Eligible to participate in a free clinical trial in San Diego, Jamie worked at the CC Bible College while receiving the normally expensive interferon treatment.

While at Murrieta last winter, the Hogans were asked to pray about returning to Romania to take over the work in Brasov. At the same time, they had also felt the Lord calling them back to Romania. Wanting to receive confirmation from God about the move, the Hogans were stunned to find out that the testing headquarters for Jamie’s medical treatments had been moved to Romania. This enabled him to continue with the treatment program and encouraged them to move.



Jamie Hogan

Near the end of October, Jamie and Andreea led a group of 25 believers from the Brasov fellowship to a conference hosted by CC Bucharest and a missions team from CC El Centro, CA. There the Hogan family experienced sweet

fellowship and sensed the congregation’s acceptance of Jamie as their leader.

“I felt that the transition ended there,” observed Jamie. “People understood that in order to see fruit happening outside the church, we first needed to focus on spiritual growth within the church.”

The church is made up of several different nationalities since Brasov headquarters international relief agencies for the abandoned and orphaned children throughout

Romania. Many people from the different agencies attend CC Brasov. 🇷🇴

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” John 15:8

CC Brasov

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Shane Herman, left, worships at CC Brasov. He had been the pastor of CC Bucharest until illness forced him to leave the country. This was his first trip back to Romania.



An orphan cuddles with a missionary as she sings with the CC Brasov worship team.



Entertainers perform a Romanian folk dance.

Romania

In the Festival of the Youth in Brasov, seven teams of horseback riders, representing the seven days of creation, ride into town the first Sunday after Easter. The celebration can be traced back 1,000 years.