

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." 1 Samuel 7:12.

It is my humble duty which I count it right to acknowledge what the Lord has done for us for the past one year which has perpetuated the memory of it just as Samuel did "'Thus far the LORD has helped us.". We are thankful for God's goodness to us thus far and for His blessings in the years to come. By God's grace we will still depend not on our strength but His. "Thus far the LORD has helped us." and He will continue to help us even to the end of the world.

Beloved friends, it has taken a while to write this newsletter for our international and local friends as well. The reason is that there have been lots and lots of things to do that kept me postponing writing it. I thank you for your prayer support all this time.

Kirsi, and I and our children have been busy lately with many things going on with school at home. Kirsi is having a study leave from work in order to finish her Master's thesis which was left undone some years ago. It has been a lot of travelling for her to Joensuu and back got meetings. At the same time kids have been very support as they have not complained a lot when I am late from work while Kirsi is away for studies. Now that Christmas here it feel refreshing for kids to have three weeks holiday.

LEAF opened a door for immigrant work last year September 2016 and called me to serve as a missionary. So, I reported to work and had nothing special to do other than to get some information about my work and prayed to God that He will open the door to start a contact. As I prayed and stayed in the Church's open door, an idea came to me to request my wife Kirsi to send invitations to people to come to our Church. Then there came teacher from Helsinki University asking if we had any Finnish language courses for beginners. It is then that Kirsi and I devised an idea to send invitations again to other centres and places to say that do have language café for every Monday evening. Kirsi immediately offered to volunteer and then God sent the first person to come to the door of Luther-Church after we sent the advert to asylum centres. There came many people all the time.

Further, it was during this time that more people started coming to our Baptism school. The Rev.Dr. Pekka Huhtinen provided me with two full cartons of Arabic Bibles and that was indeed good resource to start the work with because it made it a lot easier to do Bible dereferences in their own language. I also had with me English Small Catechisms and that is what I started with. I realized that when teaching these Catechumens needs to understand the Bible and Lutheran teachings in their own mother tongue.

Further, I wrote to Rev.Steve Sax of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in South Carolina USA for from his congregation to sponsor me with Luther's Small Catechisms. Rev. Steve then promised to support us with over ten books. Then it happened that Mikael and Kristian Römer were come home for Christmas to they carried the books with them. Then I wrote to Dr. Robert Rahn requesting for LHF Books in other languages more especially French and Arabic. He then sent me 6 Arabic Catechism and offered to help organize for us to get more books. Later on, my friend Martti Simojoki and his wife Hanna-Kaisa noticed that they had 70 Small Catechisms in Somali language and humbly asked them to provide them to me. My missionary course colleagues Jiska and Santeri Marjokorpi also provided us with more Arabic Bibles. All the time the Lord kept on opening doors for more teaching materials. For the past two months LHF has sent me 200 Luther's Small Catechism in Arabic, 40 Catechism in Farsi and other teaching materials. So, the Lord has positioned brothers and sister from all over to support us with these teaching materials.

I had no idea how this work would look like but now I know. Neither did I know how my work schedules were to look like but now I have fixed time. I had no idea that people could keep coming but the Lord has always sent people from all walks of life to visit our International Divine service. During my Catechism and Baptism instructions, I have encouraged the new Christians to witness to their friends about their Christian faith and in so doing they are able to invite others to come and that is what has happened all the time.

I have been having a continues baptism instructions. By continues I mean that a new convert can join the teachings but will not be baptized at the same time with those who join earlier. It takes roughly four to five months to get the whole scheme of lectures and get ready for baptism. Currently, I have lectures at Luther-Church every Tuesday 17:00-20:00, Wednesday 17:00 and on Thursday at Tapiola Lutheran Church which is not changed to. Each lecture usually takes three hours. The Catechumens, are instructed to understand the ten commands, why they are written and learn individual commandments with Biblical roots. Another area which I focus is the two Sacraments namely the Sacrament of Baptism and Sacrament of the Lord's supper and their details. Details such as; *what are the benefits of both Sacraments?* I also strongly point out FORGIVENESS in confessing of our sin, receiving absolution.

Besides teaching from the Bible and Small Catechism, I also teach on how to live with other cultures. I focus on the Finnish culture and way of living so that if some of them gets resident permit then they are able to understand their host. Some have even told me that "*It is easy to understand you since you are an asylum seeker like us*" in this way they identify themselves with me and it is easy this way. I feel honoured to be part of these foreigners.

Challenges:

I wish to say that this work has got a lot of challenges. First, cultural communications, besides the fact that I have translators all the time but still it is hard to for these new converts to understand the details of Christian faith. Some of them still have Islamic impact in their thinking. I have come to understand that there is a section of Islam sects which allows its members to cheat in some situation. This does not augur well with the ten commandments. I could see how they are struggling with some issues, but I have promised to have Wednesday as a day when they ask any bothering question as young Christians.

Secondly, most of these new converts don't have a good environment where they can read the Bible. The reason is that in the refugee camps, there are ten people living in one room and it is possible that only one has become a Christian and so most of the time one has to keep it secret. Although we have sent some Facebook groups where they can chat with friends, but it must be done with a lot of caution. So, the only place is better ground for better learning is in the Church. But the venue has got challenges as well. These brothers and sisters don't have money to travel to Church and, so it is a lot challenging that most of these people come to Church by cheating in the trains and in most cases, they are caught by conductors and are given heavy fines which they always bring to me to help although there is no budget of this kind.

Another challenge that comes with our Church venue is that we have the teachings at the very time when they should be having dinner. This means that they will not have dinner for that day. In some cases, I have

offered to buy pizza for those who are able to walk with me to where we have cheap pizza in town. I always feel honoured to serve one of these little ones.

Another challenge is depression. Most of these brothers are kept in the rooms and are having nothing special to do other than to sleep wake up for breakfast then go back to bed then up for lunch and back to bed till dinner. The normal young men who are in their prime time are heaped up in rooms doing nothing. I could see their struggles and desire to do something. Other wants me to allow them to come to Church as volunteers even in cleaning but this provision does not seem easy to organize. So now it has been noted that out of the ten men sharing one room 9 of them are depressed. In my own view therefore, there is a danger that those who are still Muslims in their respective camps might end up being radical. There is danger of heaping people together and in the end, they are departed to their countries and then bitterness and hate. Thank God that Karku Oppisto has taken so many immigrants to learn Finnish language and Bible. When I visited Karku at the beginning of December and spoke to these men they sounded happy and a little relaxed that there they are able to share issues related to their faith and even strengthen one another in their Christian walk.

Another external challenge is that after some people have been deported they keep on struggling and hard to find a place where they can attend Church without friends and relatives noticing. They engage in chats all the time. From outside others might think I am only teaching and sharing coffee or tea but the work is wide and needs one's time and patience.

I wish you a Merry Christ and blessed new of the Lord AD 2018.

In Christ I remain His servant and yours.

Richard