

2010 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses







2010 Yearbook of **Jehovah's Witnesses**

Containing the Report for the Service Year of 2009

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‘Love endures all things. Love never fails.’

—1 CORINTHIANS 13:7, 8.

Increasingly in these “last days,” people are “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, [and] lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God.” (2 Tim. 3:1-4) What a refreshing contrast is found in those who serve Jehovah! It is love that motivates us to preach God’s Word. Love inspires us to “work what is good toward all.” (Gal. 6:10) And it is love that identifies us as true disciples of Christ. —John 13:35.

How important it is to keep cultivating our love for Jehovah and his dear Son, Jesus Christ, by reflecting on all they have done for us! Vital too is the need to grow in our love for our brothers and for those who have not yet come to know Jehovah. Though trials will come our way, love will help us to endure. May the yeartext for 2010 remind us to keep growing in this precious quality, love.

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A LETTER FROM THE Governing Body

Dear Fellow Witnesses of Jehovah:

What a privileged people we are to bear the name of the Universal Sovereign, Jehovah! That name is eternal, imperishable, and incomparable. It was Jehovah who gave us his name to bear, and especially since the year 1931, we have been identified with that distinctive name. (Isa. 43:10) It is with unreserved pride that we identify ourselves as Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Devil relentlessly tries to blot out the name of God. Under his control, the nations spurn Jehovah's name. Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion, hates the divine name and has removed it from many Bible translations. In contrast, Jesus held high his Father's name, giving it first place in the model prayer he taught his followers. He said: "You must pray, then, this way: 'Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified.'" (Matt. 6:9) Later, in heartfelt prayer to his Father, he said: "I have made your name manifest to the men you gave me out of the world." (John 17:6)

Following Jesus' fine example, we are more determined than ever to herald Jehovah's name vigorously throughout the earth.

The yeartext for 2009, "Bear thorough witness to the good news," prompted us to accomplish our ministry fully. (Acts 20:24) There is no doubt that Jehovah has richly blessed our efforts this past service year. A tremendous witness was given worldwide to the glory and honor of Jehovah's name. A new peak of 7,313,173 publishers joined their voices in preaching to all, as well as teaching those of honest heart who are searching for solutions to the many problems facing them each day. An attendance of 18,168,323 at the Memorial of Christ's death shows promise that millions more may yet call upon Jehovah's name before the end of this wicked system of things.

As long as Jehovah permits, we will continue to preach the Kingdom good news with zeal, using every possible means to reach people in our territories. (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10) Whether from door to door, on the streets, by letter writing and telephone witnessing, or informally, may we endeavor to make known Jehovah's name and purpose to as many people as we can.

We have every reason to believe that Jehovah will soon act to sanctify his name. (Ezek. 36:23)

The time is fast approaching when all those who defame it will be silenced. What a glorious day that will be for all of Jehovah's loyal servants, who have made known Jehovah's name and have upheld his universal sovereignty!

Jehovah's loving care for his people was clearly evident at the "Keep on the Watch!" District and International Conventions held throughout much of the world in 2009. Those conventions proved to be a milestone in our theocratic history, motivating us to be more aware of the need to be watchful for Jehovah's day.—Mark 13:37; 1 Thess. 5:1, 2, 4.

Truly, Jehovah is good to us; he fills our hearts with rejoicing. He makes us lie down in grassy pastures and conducts us by well-watered resting-places.—Ps. 23:1, 2; 100:2, 5.

Rest assured of Jehovah's continued blessing upon you as you stay busy in Kingdom service in the months ahead!

With warm Christian love to our worldwide brotherhood,

Your brothers,

Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses



Highlights of the past year

REPORTS from around the world confirm that Jehovah's Witnesses have been busier than ever preaching the good news of the Kingdom "in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations." (Matt. 24:14) As a result of their endurance and united, unselfish labors of love, "the word of Jehovah has sounded forth, and in every place their faith toward God has spread abroad."—1 Thess. 1:8.

UPBUILDING AND ENJOYABLE FAMILY WORSHIP

On January 1, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses made a significant adjustment to their weekly meeting schedule. The Congregation Book Study was renamed the Congregation Bible Study and was scheduled to be

held in conjunction with the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting. All were encouraged to use for Family Worship the evening previously devoted to the Congregation Book Study.

How have Jehovah's servants responded to this loving adjustment? The feelings of many are summed up by one husband who wrote: "Thank you, thank you, and thank you. Words cannot express how my wife and I have benefited from the Family Worship evening. It has deepened our love for Jehovah and, at the same time, has brought us closer together as a couple. What a wonderful and wise arrangement by our heavenly Father!"

What are families doing to make the most of this valuable new time slot? A mother wrote: "Some nights we go through page 31 of *Awake!* together, and other nights we watch one of the organization's videos. The children not only do their own research but also have fun learning and enjoy the Family Worship time. They are assigned to research a Bible character one month and to give a talk the next month. The same goes for my husband and me. Our ten-year-old son's first presentation on Noah was an excellent talk! He even told us how we can apply the information today. Then he took out a scale model of Noah's ark that he had built. Our daughter had a part the following week on the missionary trips of the apostle Paul. When she was finished, we all applauded, and she then quizzed us in a part she called Do You Remember? It was amazing!" This family has found the arrangement for Family Worship to be a real blessing from Jehovah. "My husband and I went through a lot this past year," says the mother, "and this is what we really needed to keep us going."

Another sister wrote: “I would like to express gratitude for this provision, which has awakened me spiritually! After our children grew up and moved out of the house, my husband and I stopped having a regular family study. Now we do. Most of the time, the study lasts two hours, and the time goes by so quickly!”

As the great tribulation draws ever closer, may the time you have set aside for Family Worship help you to dig deeper into God’s Word and strengthen yourself spiritually to oppose the Devil. Make the most of this precious time to “draw close to God, and he will draw close to you.”—Jas. 4:7, 8.

DOING MORE TO OFFER BIBLE STUDIES

Beginning in January 2009, congregations were urged to designate one Saturday or Sunday each month to focus on offering Bible studies. The result? Many publishers have been experiencing surprise and great joy—surprise because offering a study is easier than they had expected and joy because of the variety of people who have accepted a study in the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Traveling overseers report that congregations are enthusiastic about this new arrangement, and early results are very promising. For example, in the first five months, over 8,000 new Bible studies were started in Italy.

Publishers who have never conducted studies are now making return visits and starting studies. Carolina, in Peru, said: “Before this arrangement I did not conduct any Bible studies, but the suggestion of concentrating one day a month on this made me see the need to strive to start a Bible study. I have been able to show householders that a Bible study is simple and does not take much time. Thanks to Jehovah, by apply-

ing the suggestions we have been given, I have had good results; now I conduct two Bible studies.”

Satya, a pioneer sister in Britain, was apprehensive about offering a Bible study on the first call. But on the day set aside for offering Bible studies, she determined not to return home without trying this method. She was delighted when a lady immediately accepted her offer. It was much easier than Satya had expected!

Luca, a young brother in Palermo, Sicily, regularly left our magazines with a widow who was afraid to let anyone into her house. One Saturday afternoon, on the day to offer Bible studies, Luca approached the widow with the *Bible Teach* book open, and he read an excerpt from the book. The lady was intrigued by the book and took some time to talk to Luca. He told her that he had in his hand the answers to her questions—including the one about whether she would ever see her husband again. Luca opened the book to page 72, which explains who will be resurrected. The lady was touched by this Bible hope and accepted a Bible study. She now has a regular study, inviting the Witnesses into her home without fear.

“From the start,” reported a circuit overseer in Peru, “this arrangement has helped most congregations increase the number of Bible studies they conduct. One congregation in Chiclayo reported 25 new studies in one month, and in Chepén, 24 new studies were started.”

Young publishers have also had success offering Bible studies. Eleven-year-old Giovanna in São Paulo, Brazil, relates: “One Saturday afternoon I was working door-to-door with my mother, offering Bible studies in the *Bible Teach* book. At the first door, I asked the householder, a well-known businessman, if he believed

that the Bible is inspired by God. He said yes. Then I showed him 2 Timothy 3:16. He said that he was moved to see a young girl telling him such beautiful things, and he accepted the book.

“When I called back on the man, I took my grandfather because he is an acquaintance of the householder. The man asked us in, and I invited him to look at the table of contents in the *Bible Teach* book and choose the subject that interested him the most. He chose chapter 11, ‘Why Does God Allow Suffering?’ After reading the first two paragraphs, he and his wife asked many questions. They were so happy to find all the answers in the Bible, and they agreed to a regular study. How happy I was to start a study at the first door we called on!”

Of course, not everyone will accept a Bible study, and not all those who start will continue. But as God’s fellow workers, we keep offering Bible studies to as many people as possible, knowing that Jehovah is drawing sheeplike ones into his organization before the destruction of Satan’s system of things.—John 6:44; 1 Cor. 3:9.

TECHNOLOGY HELPS TO “SPEED IT UP”

Jehovah’s people rejoice in the fulfillment of the thrilling prophecy: “The little one himself will become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation. I myself, Jehovah, shall speed it up in its own time.” (Isa. 60:22) There can be no doubt that Jehovah continues to use technological innovations to speed up the spiritual growth at this exciting time. Thus, the Governing Body authorized the development of an administration software system that could be used by all branches worldwide.

The development team, originally based at the South Africa branch, have moved to the World Headquarters, in Brooklyn, New York, where they continue to develop and maintain this software. About 20 branches serve as regional support centers, assisting nearby branches to utilize useful features of this computer tool.

What are the benefits? Because the branches all use the same software, they can share information. For example, all the printing branches worldwide can know what literature the other branches have in stock. If one branch is overstocked with a literature item, another branch can request it rather than print a new supply. This feature, along with tools that forecast the demand for literature based on prior requests from the field, has resulted in reducing overstocked literature in all branches.

A photograph showing three women in a bright room with large windows. On the left, a woman with short dark hair wearing a green patterned jacket is looking at a small book held by a younger woman in the center. The younger woman has long dark hair, wears glasses and a pink shirt, and is holding a black bag. On the right, another woman with long brown hair, wearing a green top and a long tan skirt, is also looking at the book. She is holding a larger open book. The scene is brightly lit by natural light from the windows, which look out onto green foliage.

***Even young publishers
enjoy offering Bible
studies***

The program helps Bethel workers to handle efficiently such tasks as processing literature and magazine orders, compiling annual field service reports, arranging conventions and assemblies, and assigning traveling overseers and special pioneers. The software also helps with purchasing, accounting, and the handling of inventories, which has reduced dependence on expensive commercial software.

LETTING SPIRITUAL LIGHT SHINE ONLINE

Just as literal light penetrates into dark corners, so too God's people 'let their light shine' in all parts of the earth. (Matt. 5:16) A particularly useful tool that illuminates the most remote places is our official Web site **www.watchtower.org**. This Web site features magazine articles, tracts, and brochures in some 383 languages, as well as the complete *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in 11 languages. In all, there are more than 700 articles available on the site. The home page, updated weekly, features recent articles on popular topics. What are the results of having material that is in print in so many languages readily available online?

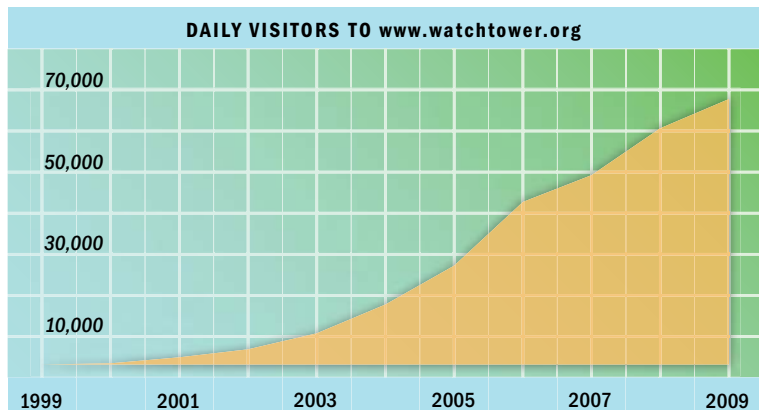
Pat, who lives in Florida, U.S.A., has found the Web site to be the quickest way to get literature in foreign languages. She writes: "After we had completed our distribution of the tract *Would You Like to Know the Truth?* I started printing out the tract in the languages of some who accepted it in English but who also speak another language." With what results?

Pat printed out a Thai tract for a lady who owns a little market. The lady was delighted and could not believe that Pat had found Thai literature so quickly. This

woman and other customers in the market wanted the name of our Web site so that they could visit it for themselves. One of the women invited Pat to visit her at her home to continue their discussion. Like Pat, many find it beneficial to print a few pages in different languages from the Web site to share with interested people of other nationalities.

Last year more than 24 million people from every continent visited our Web site. Since 2007, the number of visitors has increased by 33 percent. Individuals from all over the world, including isolated islands, submit requests for a personal visit or a home Bible study. The number of electronic coupons submitted since 2007 increased some 55 percent. Yes, spiritual light is beaming in the remotest parts of the earth, all to the praise and glory of our Father in the heavens. —Matt. 5:16.

In addition to the www.watchtower.org Web site, www.jw.org has been developed to make certain key



publications available in digital form. What is the value of this specific Web site?

Trisha, from Missouri, U.S.A., expressed the feelings of many when she said, "I look forward to Thursday with great anticipation." Why? Because Thursday is usually the day she can download recordings of new issues of the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines from www.jw.org. Trisha is one of thousands of our brothers and sisters around the world who frequent this spiritually rich Web site. They download audio magazines, the Bible, dramas, books, brochures, and tracts in 27 languages. American Sign Language publications are also available in two popular video formats.

Who uses this Web site to download our publications? Primarily our spiritual brothers and sisters but also members of the public in over 200 countries, including a number of lands where our work is restricted. We have regular visitors from such places as Papua New Guinea, St. Helena, and even Antarctica. How do audio downloads benefit our brothers and sisters? In French Polynesia, for example, shipping delays often cause supplies of our printed magazines to arrive after the issue date. Since even publishers on the remotest islands have Internet access, they can listen to the latest issues the day they are posted on the site.

Deborah, from Illinois, U.S.A., has severe health problems that keep her somewhat isolated from the congregation and also make it hard for her to remember what she reads. She now downloads and listens to the publications and says, "My retention of material has improved, and I am able to discuss what I have heard with confidence."

A couple in a small town in Texas, U.S.A., conduct a study with a Bible student from Siberia, and they

are happy to be able to download audio magazines for her in Russian. A brother in California, U.S.A., enjoys going for an early morning jog with a digital player and earphones, listening to our magazines as he runs.

Every week a couple in a small town in northern New Zealand download audio material for the meetings—the *Watchtower* study article, chapters from the books “*Keep Yourselves in God’s Love*” and *Learn From the Great Teacher*, and the assigned Bible reading for the week. They listen to the material throughout the week. The husband comments, “We now find that we are both speaking a lot more about spiritual things rather than about the stresses at work.” Many families around the world have a similar routine.

Each week the chapters for the assigned Bible reading are downloaded thousands of times—especially on Tuesdays. The current *Watchtower* study article is the most popular download every Saturday and Sunday. In addition, congregation elders can print organizational forms and talk outlines directly from the site. Overall, these provisions help the organization save time, money, and labor.

‘IT WILL TURN OUT FOR A WITNESS’

While Jehovah’s Witnesses seek to lead “a calm and quiet life with full godly devotion,” it does not surprise them when they are persecuted. (1 Tim. 2:1, 2) Jesus Christ warned his disciples that they would be objects of hatred, when he said: “People will lay their hands upon you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, you being haled before kings and governors for the sake of my name.” Yet, Jesus pointed out that such persecution would backfire

on enemies of pure worship. He foretold: “It will turn out to you for a witness.”—Luke 21:12, 13, 17.

In fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy, Jehovah’s Witnesses contend with unjust treatment in numerous places. Court victories in many lands have helped to protect their legal freedom, including their right to preach from house to house and to assemble freely for worship. Although challenges remain, we have enjoyed significant legal victories this year that confirm the religious nature of our activities.

Austria Culminating a 30-year effort by our brothers, in May 2009 the Federal Ministry of Education, Art, and Culture of Austria granted Jehovah’s Witnesses the highest possible level of recognition as a religious community. The Witnesses are now the 14th religious society in Austria to enjoy this status. Following the positive judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in July 2008, the Court issued three additional judgments in favor of our brothers in Austria, establishing beyond dispute that Jehovah’s Witnesses have full recognition as a religious society.

South Africa In 2005 a lawsuit against the South African Department of Labour was taken to the Labour Court of South Africa on behalf of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of South Africa and members of the Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah’s Witnesses serving at the South Africa Bethel. The lawsuit sought a ruling that would establish that the Bethelites should not be classified as employees under South Africa’s labor laws. In March 2009 the Labour Court issued a favorable decision confirming this fact and also substantiating the religious nature of the activities carried on at Bethel.

Uganda In 2007 the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) issued a ruling that members of the Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses serving at the Uganda Bethel are employees as defined in Uganda's Income Tax Act. The matter was submitted for resolution to the High Court of Uganda in Kampala on behalf of the International Bible Students Association (IBSA) against the URA. In June 2009 the High Court ruled in favor of IBSA, finding that the Uganda Bethelites are not employees. The court took special note of the fact that the Bethelites "receive the same support regardless of the tasks they perform." The court concluded that the Bethelites are members of a religious order and receive food, shelter, and modest support only to care for personal necessities in the course of carrying out charitable and religious activities in Uganda.

Armenia The authorities continue to arrest and imprison our brothers of military age for their conscientious objection to military service. As of August 2009, there were 74 brothers in prison. Since all domestic courts have ruled against the brothers, four separate applications have been filed with the European Court of Human Rights seeking relief. The government also continues to impose exorbitant Value Added Tax on the religious literature our brothers receive from other countries. Whether this unjust financial burden will be removed or not, we are confident that our brothers will continue to be spiritually well fed.—Isa. 65:13.

Azerbaijan Our brothers there contend with a steady decline in their freedom of worship. It is increasingly difficult for them to obtain literature and to meet for worship. Although they enjoy legal status in Baku, the

capital, the lack of registration in other cities has led to frequent illegal police raids of meetings held in private homes, followed by hours of detention in police stations. This occurs even though the law does not require worshippers to register in order to meet in private homes. On April 9, 2009, our brothers filed for national registration with the government of Azerbaijan. We are hopeful that this registration will ease the difficulties experienced by our brothers.

Egypt Over the past three years, brothers from Egypt as well as from Belgium, Italy, and the United States have met with Egyptian authorities to obtain legal status for our work. As a result, the authorities have granted our brothers in Egypt permission to worship peacefully in private homes in groups of 30. Even so, some elements of the government continue to mistreat our brothers. The State Security offices keep our brothers under surveillance and sporadically interrogate and threaten congregation members. In addition to meeting directly with the authorities, our brothers are making efforts to obtain legal status through the courts.

Eritrea In total disregard for fundamental human rights, the authorities arrested 23 members of one congregation on June 28, 2009, including elderly sisters and three children ranging from two to four years of age. Although the elderly sisters have since been released, the children are still in prison with their mothers; the fathers were imprisoned long ago. Thus, whole families are now in jail. This brings the count of our brothers and sisters in prison to 64, which includes three brothers who have been imprisoned since 1994 for their neutral stand on military service without be-

ing informed what laws they are alleged to have broken.

India Over the past few years, Jehovah's Witnesses in India have become victims of mob attacks when engaging in their public ministry. They have also endured verbal and physical abuse, threats of imprisonment, and the burning of their literature. Oftentimes, after being beaten our brothers are arrested and imprisoned and face criminal prosecution. Angry mobs influence local authorities to act against our brothers by falsely accusing them of violating local laws.

For example, in December 2008, three of Jehovah's Witnesses (a mother, her daughter, and her ten-year-old granddaughter) in Kundapura, Karnataka, returned to visit a woman in Koni Village who had shown interest in learning about the Bible. Later, five or six men forcibly took the three Witnesses to the local police station. A mob gathered, and the police charged the sisters with trespassing, promoting enmity between classes, and insulting another religion. The Witnesses were eventually allowed to go home. Our brothers and sisters in such circumstances are being given legal assistance.

Moldova Our brothers in Transnistria, the internationally unrecognized region of Moldova, continue to display zeal for Kingdom interests, although they have been under constant threat of ban or liquidation for some 12 years. Despite numerous challenges, the brothers have experienced Jehovah's blessing and a measure of success in defending Kingdom interests in the courts. Here are three examples: An Orthodox priest who verbally and physically abused two of our sisters while they were preaching in the

village of Ordășei was held liable and fined, the city court in Tiraspol handed down a favorable decision in connection with the brothers' efforts to register our community there, and a decision was handed down against the Rîbnița City Tax Inspectorate for unlawfully taxing food provided for volunteers while they were working on a Kingdom Hall construction project.

Kazakhstan The General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan initiated protests that resulted in favorable court rulings for our brothers. Earlier, courts in Kyzylorda, Shymkent, and Saryagash had ordered that our religious activity be suspended for six months. As a result of the rulings in November 2008, however, our religious freedom was restored in the Kyzylorda Region, in Shymkent, and in the entire southern Kazakhstan region. Additionally, in December 2008, after seven years of denials by the local government, the city court in Atyraū held that Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to legal registration in that city.

Russia During the past service year, our Administrative Center here has been subjected to repeated investigations by the prosecutor and numerous other State authorities, with the obvious intent of unlawfully closing down our religious activities. Individually, our brothers and sisters are being subjected to harassment and hundreds of groundless investigations. In one instance, a pregnant sister suffered a miscarriage after police illegally raided a religious meeting. A 15-year-old boy who was also present at the meeting was illegally detained. The prosecuting authorities are using the Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity as a basis for liquidating several of our local congregations and banning our religious literature. These

unfounded allegations of extremism have led to other official abuses of religious freedom, including unjustified arrests, deportations, and denial of entry to four foreign legal representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses who were assisting in the defense against these false charges. One of these brothers was detained in a holding cell in Moscow for 23 hours.

Members of the Federal Security Service have interfered with numerous rental contracts at venues for meetings and conventions, causing rental agreements to be canceled. Authorities have also obstructed the building of new Kingdom Halls. Crimes against the Witnesses include torture while in police custody on trumped-up criminal charges.



South Korea On June 16, 2008, the government of South Korea backed off from the announcement it made on May 7, 2008, to give conscientious objectors the opportunity to participate in alternative civilian service. It stated that “the issue of conscientious objection to military service required further study and the forging of a broad national consensus.” To date, the Korean National Assembly has not considered any bill on alternative service. The brothers are awaiting decisions from the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations, which ruled favorably on two applications. In January 2009, the Korean Presidential Commission on Suspicious Deaths in the Military acknowledged that the Korean government was responsible for the violent deaths of five of Jehovah’s Witnesses who were forcibly conscripted into the army from the 1970’s to the mid-1980’s. This is the first significant decision recognizing the State’s responsibility for deaths resulting from violence within the military.

Tajikistan The Religious Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Tajikistan was banned in 2007, and our literature from Germany was confiscated by customs officials. An appeal was submitted to the military court, and in September 2008, the appeal was denied. A subsequent appeal was filed with the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court, which also rejected the appeal. These decisions uphold the banning and confiscation of literature. Additional efforts are under way to help our brothers.

Turkey The brothers there face challenges relating to military service. One brother has been in prison for two years for his resolute stand. Many oth-

er brothers of military age continue to be threatened with fines and imprisonment as well as loss of jobs. In March 2009, the brothers were informed that the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations had started to investigate two complaints that were filed on behalf of the Witnesses.

Additionally, in May 2009, the European Court of Human Rights decided to join three pending applications together to begin the process of investigating whether the human rights of six of our brothers are being violated—four of these brothers having spent time in prison. Jehovah’s servants are grateful for the interest being shown by these two judicial bodies and hope that a measure of relief may be in sight.

Uzbekistan The legal situation of Jehovah’s worshippers in Uzbekistan is steadily deteriorating, with our brothers increasingly being the target of State-sponsored persecution. One married father of two sons was released from prison on May 14, 2009, after completing a two-year sentence for teaching religion. The next day, he was deported to Tajikistan, the country of his citizenship. Three other brothers remain in prison for organizing “illegal religious activity.” Attorneys for the three are preparing further appeals to the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan. Local brothers and a foreign delegation of brothers have had several meetings with the Uzbekistan State Committee of Religious Affairs and its representatives in an effort to resolve these matters.

EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Jehovah’s Witnesses in Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Russia, Serbia, and Turkey have a total of 22 applications pending before the

European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, France. The applications cite violations of basic human rights afforded to all citizens living under the jurisdiction of the European Convention on Human Rights. Nine of the applications involve the right to refuse military service, seven involve persecution and discrimination on the basis of religion, four involve deregistration or banning of a legal entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses to organize the work, and two object to a government's interference in the right to assemble peacefully for worship.

On June 17, 2008, the ECHR gave attention to the application brought by the *Association Les Témoins de Jéhovah* (ATJ) against the government of France. The application focuses on the discriminatory 60 percent tax levied on all the religious contributions the ATJ received from 1993 through 1996. The Court raised additional questions about the possible violation of Article 9 of the European Convention dealing with freedom of religion. Jehovah's Witnesses in France and in other countries of the Council of Europe are now waiting to see whether the Court will accept this case.

While Satan tries to disrupt true worship by “framing trouble by decree,” Jehovah's servants remain “solid in the faith, knowing that the same things in the way of sufferings are being accomplished in the entire association of [their] brothers in the world.” May all true worshippers continue to take an unflinching stand against Satan and throw all their anxiety upon the God of all undeserved kindness, knowing that he cares for them and will make them firm and strong. —Ps. 94:20; 1 Pet. 5:7-11.

“QUALIFIED TO TEACH OTHERS”

Training has been a characteristic of the Christian congregation from its very beginning. The apostle Paul told Timothy: “These things commit to faithful men, who, in turn, will be adequately qualified to teach others.” (2 Tim. 2:2) Today, too, Jehovah’s organization has numerous training programs. Since 2008, for example, 6,528 elders from the United States branch territories—including Alaska, Bermuda, and the Turks and Caicos Islands—attended 70 classes of the School for Congregation Elders at the Watchtower Educational Center in Patterson, New York.

The intensive week-long instruction covers various aspects of elders’ lives, helping them to take the lead in the preaching work and to be more effective teachers in the congregation. (2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3) The course also encourages them to maintain their spirituality and that of their family and trains them to ‘handle the word of the truth aright’ when assisting others. (2 Tim. 2:15) The following are a few of the many expressions of gratitude made by elders who attended the school.

“The humility of the instructors was an example of how to treat the brothers in the congregation. My heart wells with appreciation for the Governing Body. This is one of the greatest educational privileges that has ever been extended to me in my years in the truth.”

“Our God, Jehovah, knows what we need and when to provide it. My faith has been renewed, and my spiritual battery has been recharged. This experience has helped me to appreciate what Jehovah has done by means of the visible part of his organization and also to see how he is caring for all of his people.”

“This has been a tremendous experience. The more I learned in the school, the more I realized how much I didn’t know. I have developed a new appreciation for personal study and why I must apply all that I learned to myself.”

“The training has better equipped me to care for my family and the congregation, with the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:16) It has assisted me to reflect on what type of man I am.”

“I would not trade this one week with Jehovah’s instructors for a university education.”

“What an uplifting and beneficial experience! It has energized me to carry on in Jehovah’s service, be self-sacrificing, and be a source of refreshment to our brothers and sisters. (Isa. 32:2) Thank you, Jehovah!”

“Through this course we have perceived the love of Jehovah. It has been like a shepherding call from him.”

“I thank Jehovah for this privilege to learn how better to handle my assignment to his glory and praise.”

In due course the Governing Body will announce arrangements for elders in other places to get the benefit of this timely instruction.

BRANCH DEDICATIONS BRING JOY

On January 24, 2009, Samuel Herd of the Governing Body was the guest speaker at the dedication of the new branch in Tanzania, in East Africa. Twenty-five years ago, the branch started in a three-room cinder-block building known by Witnesses throughout Tanzania as House Number 46, Magomeni Quarters. Many of the 779 joyful guests from 22 countries had tears



in their eyes as they reflected on the progress of the work since the ban there was lifted in 1987. “Only Jehovah could make such a thing possible in this land,” observed one old-timer. Now the preaching work has flourished, and over 14,000 publishers rejoice, thank Jehovah, and make melody to his name.—Ps. 92:1, 4.

At the Netherlands branch office, on Saturday, May 2, 2009, some 600 brothers and sisters from 31 lands attended the dedication talk delivered by Theodore Jaracz of the Governing Body. A residence wing had been added to the structure originally built in 1983, and the areas formerly used for printing magazines had been converted into offices and a video studio for the Regional Audio

Video Center (RAVC). The RAVC assists in producing CDs and DVDs in 24 languages, most of which are spoken in Europe. In addition, the RAVC sup-



Brother Jaracz giving the dedication talk at the Netherlands branch





***Brother Herd giving
the dedication talk at
the Tanzania branch***

ports video productions in some 20 different sign languages. This work includes coordinating the production of CDs in Europe, Africa, and Oceania and DVDs worldwide. The Netherlands branch also buys and ships items needed by branches in other parts of the world, and the remodeled facilities are well suited to these activities.

“KEEP YOURSELVES IN GOD’S LOVE”

Indeed, we have many reasons to rejoice. How blessed we are to be living in these thrilling times! True, as prophesied, “the last days” are “critical times hard to deal with.” (2 Tim. 3:1) But with deliverance so near at hand, it is vital for each one of us to be resolved to heed Jude’s compelling exhortation: “You, beloved ones, by building up yourselves on your most holy faith, and praying with holy spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love, while you are waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ with everlasting life in view.” —Jude 20, 21.



Preaching and Teaching Earth Wide

JEHOVAH offers to people everywhere a precious gift—the good news of the Kingdom. We who have accepted that gift and who love Jehovah have the privilege of sharing it with others. In so doing, we experience the joy of pleasing both the Giver of that gift and those who receive it. Truly, the preaching of the good news is an expression of our love for God and for neighbor. (Matt. 22:37-40) In the pages that follow, read how Jehovah’s people are demonstrating that love through their zealous preaching earth wide.

A stylized world map in light gray, showing the continents and major oceans, serves as a background for the top half of the page. The map is centered and covers the entire width of the page.

2009 Grand Totals

Branches of Jehovah's Witnesses:	118
Number of Lands Reporting:	236
Total Congregations:	105,298
Worldwide Memorial Attendance:	18,168,323
Memorial Partakers Worldwide:	10,857
Peak of Publishers in Kingdom Service:	7,313,173
Average Publishers Preaching Each Month:	7,046,419
Percentage of Increase Over 2008:	3.2
Total Number Baptized:	276,233
Average Auxiliary Pioneer Publishers Each Month:	304,551
Average Pioneer Publishers Each Month:	794,317
Total Hours Spent in Field:	1,557,788,344
Average Home Bible Studies Each Month:	7,619,270

During the 2009 service year, Jehovah's Witnesses spent over \$140 million in caring for special pioneers, missionaries, and traveling overseers in their field service assignments. ■ Worldwide, a total of 19,829 ordained ministers staff the branch facilities. All are members of the Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses.

2009 SERVICE YEAR REPORT OF

Letter and number following each country's name indicates

Country or Territory	Population	2009 Peak Pubs.	Ratio, 1 Pub- lisher to	2009 Av. Pubs.	% Inc. Over 2008
Albania (D-11)	3,600,000	4,125	873	4,070	3
American Samoa (N-26)	70,100	224	313	206	6
Andorra (F-4)	84,484	182	464	170	6
Angola (N-6)	17,000,000	72,680	234	71,949	6
Anguilla (O-32)	14,436	64	226	60	9
Antigua (P-32)	89,138	475	188	450	
Argentina (N-36)	36,260,130	140,363	258	136,904	3
Armenia (G-9)	3,240,000	10,586	306	10,332	5
Aruba (Q-29)	106,698	790	135	754	
Australia (O-19)	21,991,653	64,815	339	63,454	2
Austria (F-5)	8,359,197	20,884	400	20,662	1
Azerbaijan (G-9)	8,730,300	871	10,023	838	17
Azores (G-1)	244,677	749	327	718	7
Bahamas (G-35)	342,400	1,670	205	1,549	2
Bangladesh (J-14)	156,050,883	127	1,228,747	123	10
Barbados (Q-33)	270,000	2,499	108	2,451	2
Belarus (E-7)	9,671,900	4,669	2,072	4,507	4
Belgium (E-4)	10,771,539	24,965	431	23,764	1
Belize (H-33)	307,899	2,072	149	1,927	6
Benin (L-4)	6,769,914	9,962	680	9,401	4
Bermuda (F-36)	67,837	491	138	453	1
Bolivia (M-36)	10,227,299	20,213	506	18,942	6
Bonaire (Q-30)	12,877	90	143	85	5
Bosnia & Herzegovina (C-10)	4,590,310	1,209	3,797	1,184	2
Botswana (O-6)	1,798,372	1,785	1,007	1,733	4
Brazil (L-37)	191,480,630	708,224	270	689,577	3
Britain (E-3)	59,842,108	133,900	447	128,435	1
Bulgaria (F-7)	7,262,675	1,707	4,255	1,679	4
Burkina Faso (K-3)	15,755,416	1,375	11,458	1,328	6
Burundi (M-7)	8,038,618	9,114	882	8,511	10
Cambodia (K-15)	14,494,293	378	38,345	364	17
Cameroon (L-5)	17,500,000	33,834	517	33,365	3
Canada (C-31)	33,592,686	112,705	298	110,467	1
Cape Verde (K-1)	429,474	1,882	228	1,805	3
Cayman Islands (H-34)	49,035	298	165	233	8
Central African Republic (L-6)	4,430,000	2,515	1,761	2,438	5
Chad (K-6)	10,300,000	616	16,721	582	2
Chile (M-35)	16,928,873	70,473	240	68,537	2
Chuuk (L-21)	67,556	53	1,275	47	-4
Colombia (J-35)	45,101,266	141,179	319	139,194	4
Congo, Dem. Republic of (M-6)	68,692,542	156,035	440	144,697	3
Congo, Republic of (M-5)	4,012,809	5,619	714	5,085	3
Cook Islands (O-26)	19,569	181	108	158	-1
Costa Rica (J-34)	4,509,290	24,930	181	23,894	6
Côte d'Ivoire (L-3)	21,962,580	8,358	2,628	8,101	5
Croatia (B-9)	4,491,543	5,603	802	5,510	1
Cuba (G-34)	11,236,790	91,651	123	90,738	1
Curaçao (Q-30)	141,766	1,694	84	1,646	
Cyprus (H-7)	877,600	2,302	381	2,254	4

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES WORLDWIDE

the country's location on maps following this chart.

2008 Av. Pubs.	2009 No. Bptzd.	Av. Aux. Pio. Pubs.	Av. Pubs.	No. of Cong.	Total Hours	Av. Bible Studies	Memorial Attend- ance
3,957	244	412	949	71	1,615,985	6,132	11,420
194	1	7	26	3	50,193	325	798
161	3	7	15	3	34,912	114	350
67,830	4,356	2,532	7,050	1,022	16,783,855	237,082	329,741
55	4	2	9	2	17,307	116	278
449	16	18	44	7	94,856	579	1,424
132,927	5,197	8,376	14,099	1,934	31,529,757	125,665	313,845
9,823	612	896	1,872	109	3,339,607	9,039	24,711
752	32	27	36	10	121,052	763	2,518
62,159	1,331	2,156	4,133	794	10,739,079	25,278	114,211
20,527	499	611	1,149	296	3,439,672	10,743	33,863
714	27	86	178	7	314,778	1,506	1,839
668	45	30	64	15	155,937	852	1,709
1,513	89	75	152	32	343,246	1,919	4,142
112	9	6	22	3	33,727	200	433
2,410	68	114	156	30	436,513	2,236	6,282
4,329	236	390	670	56	1,325,860	3,598	8,688
23,603	443	834	1,080	373	3,569,529	8,875	43,691
1,821	15	104	285	50	537,014	3,163	7,952
9,040	562	540	1,120	156	2,574,479	20,874	34,488
447	11	7	68	5	103,143	315	945
17,898	1,007	1,428	2,408	232	5,310,213	27,571	64,967
81	3	3	9	1	20,205	139	290
1,163	33	88	219	16	386,270	687	2,296
1,670	91	79	129	41	359,365	2,584	4,397
667,793	30,028	25,401	59,978	10,749	137,143,876	803,456	1,650,459
126,580	2,932	4,306	9,533	1,521	21,237,742	55,473	223,432
1,616	69	83	318	25	514,809	1,789	3,726
1,257	19	59	183	35	385,856	2,488	4,028
7,710	815	542	1,146	161	2,881,775	22,719	35,645
311	19	15	194	8	206,229	1,022	1,710
32,364	1,635	1,194	2,744	335	7,162,313	57,177	91,642
109,086	1,947	4,702	9,520	1,345	21,155,159	44,790	186,581
1,749	103	104	297	34	533,210	4,063	9,208
216	14	13	24	4	49,991	235	694
2,326	120	93	272	53	610,645	5,031	15,230
569	18	20	74	18	162,638	954	4,136
67,133	2,472	3,850	7,501	827	15,801,664	62,112	171,544
49	2	2	15	3	23,949	197	255
133,774	7,103	5,671	15,735	2,079	31,687,608	205,409	493,022
140,202	9,177	4,526	11,830	3,044	31,467,675	353,724	951,867
4,936	294	243	311	72	1,240,649	16,994	25,079
160	9	8	17	3	33,862	164	449
22,474	1,296	1,052	1,816	371	4,647,041	29,884	64,336
7,712	299	472	1,053	186	2,441,054	22,126	32,854
5,451	122	253	427	69	1,132,800	2,471	9,926
89,737	3,293	5,503	6,656	1,250	16,996,062	148,147	213,993
1,641	53	61	112	22	284,691	1,919	4,523
2,168	88	131	214	30	489,187	1,465	4,482

Country or Territory	Population	2009 Peak Pubs.	Ratio, 1 Pub- lisher to	2009 Av. Pubs.	% Inc. Over 2008
Czech Republic (E-5)	10,675,070	15,512	688	15,348	
Denmark (D-4)	5,511,451	14,282	386	14,153	
Dominica (P-33)	72,660	394	184	365	5
Dominican Republic (O-29)	11,700,000	31,115	376	29,960	5
East Timor (N-18)	923,198	148	6,238	127	19
Ecuador (K-34)	14,053,674	67,135	209	65,909	7
El Salvador (H-33)	5,789,494	35,831	162	34,305	5
Equatorial Guinea (L-5)	622,505	1,130	551	1,074	8
Estonia (D-6)	1,340,415	4,302	312	4,196	1
Ethiopia (L-8)	75,000,000	8,672	8,649	8,509	4
Faeroe Islands (C-2)	48,778	119	410	112	11
Falkland Islands (Q-37)	3,140	5	628	4	-20
Fiji (N-24)	837,271	2,432	344	2,313	9
Finland (C-7)	5,326,314	19,047	280	18,940	
France (F-4)	62,596,000	123,272	508	118,085	1
French Guiana (J-37)	210,000	1,963	107	1,935	3
Gabon (M-5)	1,429,820	3,558	402	3,326	5
Gambia (K-2)	1,782,893	208	8,572	194	-1
Georgia (G-9)	4,385,400	17,860	246	17,272	5
Germany (E-5)	82,002,356	165,837	494	162,890	
Ghana (L-3)	23,242,259	98,212	237	92,787	8
Gibraltar (G-3)	29,000	111	261	101	11
Greece (G-6)	10,539,771	28,859	365	28,569	1
Greenland (A-38)	56,462	170	332	157	25
Grenada (Q-32)	104,000	576	181	550	
Guadeloupe (P-32)	450,000	8,546	53	8,227	2
Guam (K-20)	178,430	681	262	658	5
Guatemala (H-33)	14,017,057	29,008	483	27,355	5
Guinea (K-2)	10,057,975	651	15,450	630	3
Guinea-Bissau (K-2)	1,533,964	130	11,800	122	
Guyana (J-37)	777,648	2,546	305	2,471	5
Haiti (O-28)	8,373,750	16,019	523	14,910	5
Hawaii (J-26)	1,288,198	8,411	153	8,226	3
Honduras (H-33)	7,937,634	18,482	429	17,595	6
Hong Kong (J-17)	7,008,300	5,053	1,387	4,925	2
Hungary (A-10)	10,020,000	23,706	423	22,331	2
Iceland (B-1)	319,246	348	917	340	5
India (J-12)	1,145,429,000	30,717	37,290	29,638	6
Indonesia (M-17)	227,000,000	22,023	10,307	21,097	4
Ireland (E-2)	5,925,109	5,868	1,010	5,713	4
Israel (H-8)	11,515,500	1,332	8,645	1,313	1
Italy (G-5)	60,114,021	243,432	247	240,262	1
Jamaica (H-34)	2,825,928	11,954	236	11,632	2
Japan (G-19)	127,078,679	217,819	583	217,530	
Kazakhstan (F-11)	15,776,492	17,225	916	16,446	4
Kenya (M-8)	36,500,000	23,801	1,534	22,321	5
Kiribati (M-24)	92,424	108	856	99	19
Korea, Republic of (G-18)	48,746,693	97,385	501	96,620	1
Kosovo (D-11)	2,350,000	169	13,905	167	6
Kosrae (L-22)	9,922	28	354	24	-11
Kyrgyzstan (G-12)	5,432,000	4,749	1,144	4,514	4
Latvia (D-6)	2,255,000	2,483	908	2,360	2
Lebanon (H-8)	3,971,941	3,630	1,094	3,562	
Lesotho (P-7)	1,880,661	3,551	530	3,387	1
Liberia (L-2)	3,476,608	5,689	611	5,255	5

2008 Av. Pubs.	2009 No. Bptzd.	Av. Aux. Pio. Pubs.	Av. Pio. Pubs.	No. of Cong.	Total Hours	Av. Bible Studies	Memorial Attendance
15,339	284	525	704	235	2,315,219	6,480	27,293
14,114	198	443	736	203	2,178,327	4,713	21,877
349	16	12	42	8	94,732	588	1,240
28,479	1,545	1,925	4,826	401	8,834,234	61,534	113,853
107	22	7	27	3	45,100	234	426
61,607	3,869	3,852	9,459	831	17,449,428	116,799	232,128
32,560	1,894	1,594	2,400	645	6,895,303	41,115	91,950
997	104	65	156	9	320,625	3,364	4,594
4,167	117	190	447	52	847,379	2,811	7,396
8,147	558	609	1,449	164	2,758,621	6,292	24,785
101	1	5	26	4	33,261	78	172
5		1		1	738	4	11
2,122	69	136	243	56	535,003	3,371	9,507
18,962	313	568	1,710	300	3,014,551	10,746	27,091
116,978	2,464	5,245	9,135	1,525	22,744,636	48,658	208,350
1,879	103	112	172	35	470,755	3,942	7,833
3,160	204	213	381	29	961,998	8,509	10,865
196	8	12	26	3	60,848	381	510
16,465	960	908	2,543	188	4,236,254	9,825	33,704
162,544	3,485	4,600	9,263	2,227	26,130,416	74,733	269,303
85,752	5,881	3,205	5,760	1,397	19,703,253	256,468	280,821
91		1	10	2	16,247	27	176
28,189	631	1,163	2,953	377	5,572,272	12,231	48,181
126	2	6	31	6	37,298	122	340
551	16	24	41	9	118,820	613	1,676
8,057	248	331	497	133	1,472,789	9,719	20,288
626	20	36	106	8	175,559	880	1,997
25,946	1,612	1,185	2,669	412	6,100,207	33,994	82,786
613	41	37	104	18	208,510	1,476	3,272
122	6	6	36	2	62,221	418	553
2,347	184	115	243	45	520,577	3,848	11,818
14,264	1,147	762	1,763	221	3,739,512	29,629	65,254
7,968	103	407	1,061	94	1,932,279	6,294	19,584
16,626	1,284	871	2,249	270	4,625,291	27,239	55,400
4,835	267	364	717	59	1,415,697	6,091	9,239
21,839	812	891	1,517	273	4,164,037	13,454	43,829
325	6	13	44	5	71,356	282	625
27,861	1,698	1,334	2,740	421	5,637,388	30,985	78,170
20,309	963	983	1,787	381	4,818,819	25,555	49,575
5,485	128	245	638	114	1,205,370	2,871	11,210
1,300	63	55	90	20	254,249	902	2,726
237,738	5,026	11,433	26,533	3,101	52,654,953	114,276	435,712
11,410	440	520	1,195	194	2,298,272	14,686	36,447
217,339	3,502	16,468	63,269	3,173	80,714,867	172,315	326,983
15,747	986	1,149	2,439	195	4,461,340	14,383	32,262
21,196	754	857	2,908	521	6,108,825	38,306	61,689
83	1	12	14	2	36,942	219	309
95,242	2,880	9,171	34,564	1,412	43,142,969	70,908	141,878
158	18	11	44	4	72,173	295	422
27	1		3	1	5,334	44	72
4,323	276	365	835	61	1,340,470	5,322	9,835
2,318	91	130	354	36	663,800	2,336	4,140
3,552	82	113	141	66	549,683	1,920	6,459
3,341	266	146	313	77	773,210	5,250	8,438
5,018	340	227	634	95	1,579,835	18,100	73,881

Country or Territory	Population	2009 Peak Pubs.	Ratio, 1 Pub- lisher to	2009 Av. Pubs.	% Inc. Over 2008
Liechtenstein (F-4)	35,593	53	672	49	7
Lithuania (D-6)	3,338,700	3,130	1,067	2,997	2
Luxembourg (E-4)	580,947	1,994	291	1,955	3
Macao (J-17)	544,200	180	3,023	173	3
Macedonia (D-11)	2,032,017	1,325	1,534	1,304	2
Madagascar (O-9)	19,920,224	21,855	911	20,894	8
Madeira (H-1)	247,367	1,148	215	1,115	
Malawi (N-8)	13,066,320	75,877	172	71,386	3
Malaysia (L-16)	28,300,000	3,474	8,146	3,376	8
Mali (K-3)	12,666,987	251	50,466	230	-4
Malta (G-5)	404,139	591	684	576	3
Marshall Islands (L-23)	64,522	198	326	175	-3
Martinique (P-32)	401,000	4,606	87	4,503	2
Mauritius (O-10)	1,275,323	1,730	737	1,685	2
Mayotte (N-9)	186,452	82	2,274	73	-3
Mexico (G-31)	107,550,697	689,705	156	668,876	4
Moldova (F-7)	4,095,000	20,231	202	19,672	2
Mongolia (F-15)	3,041,142	233	13,052	221	25
Montenegro (D-10)	620,145	214	2,898	205	2
Montserrat (P-32)	5,097	10	510	9	
Mozambique (O-7)	21,284,701	46,378	459	43,324	2
Myanmar (J-15)	50,020,000	3,629	13,783	3,508	4
Namibia (O-5)	2,103,761	1,701	1,237	1,621	6
Nauru (M-23)	10,800	15	720	11	120
Nepal (H-13)	28,563,377	1,160	24,624	1,086	15
Netherlands (E-4)	16,538,360	30,469	543	29,452	
Nevis (P-32)	12,355	61	203	57	8
New Caledonia (O-23)	248,625	1,842	135	1,768	4
New Zealand (Q-24)	4,328,823	14,091	307	13,462	2
Nicaragua (H-33)	5,590,000	22,190	252	20,898	5
Niger (K-4)	11,453,651	291	39,360	276	5
Nigeria (L-4)	140,003,542	312,315	448	291,179	3
Niue (O-26)	1,398	30	47	28	12
Norfolk Island (P-23)	1,860	9	207	9	13
Norway (C-4)	4,838,192	10,659	454	10,384	2
Pakistan (H-12)	176,242,949	1,000	176,243	842	-1
Palau (L-19)	20,461	88	233	83	-9
Panama (J-34)	3,450,349	13,168	262	12,653	4
Papua New Guinea (M-20)	6,716,662	3,907	1,719	3,619	3
Paraguay (M-37)	6,853,578	8,398	816	8,196	1
Peru (L-35)	29,152,987	106,939	273	100,910	4
Philippines (K-18)	90,000,000	166,130	542	162,647	5
Pohnpei (L-22)	34,680	90	385	84	
Poland (E-6)	38,135,876	126,518	301	125,679	
Portugal (G-2)	10,154,729	49,454	205	48,610	1
Puerto Rico (O-31)	3,954,037	25,776	153	25,155	2
Réunion (O-10)	802,000	2,807	286	2,760	3
Rodrigues (O-11)	37,748	38	993	35	
Romania (F-6)	21,498,616	39,232	548	38,653	1
Rota (K-20)	2,899	12	242	7	40
Russia (C-15)	141,904,000	157,175	903	154,387	3
Rwanda (M-7)	9,790,071	17,564	557	16,177	8
Saba (O-32)	1,500	14	107	10	11

2008 Av. Pubs.	2009 No. Bptzd.	Av. Aux. Pio. Pubs.	Av. Pio. Pubs.	No. of Cong.	Total Hours	Av. Bible Studies	Memorial Atten- dance
46	2	1	1	1	5,475	24	82
2,934	101	178	353	43	743,076	2,431	5,591
1,897	45	71	112	32	333,979	985	3,784
168	6	7	30	2	52,365	194	452
1,277	68	64	198	20	377,296	1,129	3,400
19,417	1,639	929	2,973	433	5,842,628	53,582	103,198
1,119	33	53	90	17	228,093	900	2,171
69,178	4,541	2,852	5,762	1,196	13,728,153	73,928	230,810
3,123	146	169	662	105	1,040,826	5,805	9,441
239	12	13	44	7	88,742	638	915
560	17	16	48	7	105,127	255	998
180	1	10	19	3	46,301	439	1,018
4,404	130	236	348	56	932,047	4,893	10,257
1,651	60	62	114	26	320,673	2,002	3,903
75		3	3	1	12,684	100	210
641,834	23,191	20,646	79,214	12,119	144,440,094	871,258	2,050,912
19,272	900	917	1,694	240	3,658,242	13,789	39,849
177	20	28	84	3	114,068	548	796
201	1	24	25	4	60,837	136	637
9			2	1	2,871	26	87
42,447	2,499	1,332	4,184	995	8,800,458	55,656	216,403
3,383	211	131	451	72	798,192	3,740	7,803
1,535	98	61	138	33	364,490	2,562	4,962
5			2	1	3,528	26	144
945	134	82	196	13	324,656	2,351	4,818
29,318	484	880	1,190	397	4,201,473	10,487	51,578
53		2	4	1	11,481	65	240
1,698	54	101	120	25	365,920	2,117	5,768
13,142	449	552	907	174	2,379,366	7,399	26,045
19,816	1,297	882	2,416	332	5,206,651	37,550	80,474
263	16	10	44	6	85,803	409	916
281,953	13,999	8,411	29,585	5,168	56,156,922	559,497	632,646
25		1	5	1	7,559	44	81
8		1		1	940	2	20
10,173	208	261	582	167	1,477,456	4,159	17,073
851	52	33	51	19	154,024	1,021	3,526
91	1	7	14	1	24,549	157	253
12,137	552	590	1,388	263	2,933,202	18,006	44,853
3,500	200	157	354	59	789,095	4,919	25,191
8,118	371	305	1,081	155	1,975,167	9,671	20,001
96,701	3,362	6,405	22,399	1,209	32,214,685	173,508	343,621
155,412	9,816	6,950	26,325	3,087	35,606,540	163,019	523,200
84		6	7	1	21,524	151	288
125,681	2,853	4,033	6,816	1,813	16,585,755	46,409	210,947
48,118	1,233	2,094	2,820	646	8,739,418	27,158	96,576
24,746	652	911	2,523	323	4,972,013	16,290	60,241
2,685	88	151	150	33	529,531	2,147	5,840
35	1	1	4	1	8,849	41	115
38,103	1,218	1,223	2,863	532	6,718,384	22,188	79,654
5		1	3	1	3,681	18	41
149,251	7,354	10,856	24,205	2,235	43,912,145	125,772	283,571
14,926	1,630	1,229	2,846	388	6,300,215	41,435	67,843
9	2		1	1	1,881	16	46

Country or Territory	Population	2009 Peak Pubs.	Ratio, 1 Pub- lisher to	2009 Av. Pubs.	% Inc. Over 2008
St. Eustatius (P-32)	3,500	23	152	19	19
St. Helena (N-3)	3,900	113	35	109	-4
St. Kitts (O-32)	50,675	201	252	188	1
St. Lucia (Q-33)	172,000	739	233	662	4
St. Maarten (O-32)	41,000	338	121	324	-4
St. Pierre & Miquelon (D-37)	6,125	12	510	12	20
St. Vincent (Q-32)	109,000	343	318	329	3
Saipan (K-20)	71,400	188	380	178	6
Samoa (N-25)	180,741	391	462	388	-4
San Marino (F-5)	31,434	209	150	202	11
São Tomé & Príncipe (M-4)	212,679	541	393	515	10
Senegal (K-2)	13,711,597	1,086	12,626	1,063	2
Serbia (C-11)	8,118,146	3,871	2,097	3,776	
Seychelles (M-9)	87,298	302	289	290	9
Sierra Leone (L-2)	6,440,053	1,952	3,299	1,679	9
Slovakia (F-6)	5,412,254	11,211	483	11,114	
Slovenia (B-8)	2,038,733	1,971	1,034	1,950	2
Solomon Islands (M-22)	539,464	1,830	295	1,735	
South Africa (P-6)	49,052,489	87,512	561	81,419	1
Spain (G-3)	46,157,822	108,739	424	105,558	2
Sri Lanka (L-13)	20,300,000	4,706	4,314	4,532	5
Sudan (K-7)	39,154,490	1,749	22,387	1,676	6
Suriname (J-37)	501,145	2,379	211	2,336	4
Swaziland (P-7)	1,018,449	2,699	377	2,576	1
Sweden (B-6)	9,302,133	22,418	415	22,054	
Switzerland (F-4)	7,701,900	18,093	426	17,301	1
Tahiti (M-27)	245,405	2,248	109	2,204	7
Taiwan (J-17)	23,100,000	7,061	3,271	6,866	6
Tanzania (M-8)	41,475,951	14,171	2,927	13,275	2
Thailand (K-15)	65,905,000	2,997	21,990	2,933	7
Tinian (K-20)	2,940	16	184	15	-25
Togo (L-4)	5,518,300	15,640	353	15,116	4
Tonga (O-25)	120,898	232	521	219	2
Trinidad & Tobago (R-33)	1,297,944	8,776	148	8,640	2
Turkey (G-8)	71,517,100	1,975	36,211	1,935	3
Turks & Caicos (N-29)	22,942	247	93	214	19
Tuvalu (M-24)	11,636	51	228	46	2
Uganda (L-7)	30,388,000	4,945	6,145	4,790	6
Ukraine (E-7)	46,022,306	147,607	312	143,609	3
U.S. of America (E-32)	302,771,526	1,154,275	262	1,096,502	4
Uruguay (O-37)	3,241,000	11,265	288	11,193	2
Vanuatu (N-23)	229,011	439	522	391	6
Venezuela (J-36)	28,384,132	113,002	251	109,521	6
Virgin Islands (Brit.) (O-31)	24,500	236	104	224	7
Virgin Islands (U.S.) (O-31)	110,000	665	165	613	3
Wallis & Futuna Islands (N-25)	15,769	65	243	60	-6
Yap (L-19)	12,167	23	529	22	-8
Zambia (N-7)	12,896,830	159,529	81	140,250	7
Zimbabwe (O-7)	12,230,607	35,807	342	33,506	5
30 Other Lands		20,768		19,004	14.1
Grand Total (236 Lands)		7,313,173		7,046,419	3.2

2008 Av. Pubs.	2009 No. Bptzd.	Av. Aux. Pio. Pubs.	Av. Pio. Pubs.	No. of Cong.	Total Hours	Av. Bible Studies	Memorial Atten- dance
16	1	1	3	1	4,828	37	90
113	1	1		3	10,367	65	257
186	4	8	22	3	49,257	335	739
639	15	35	79	9	164,542	1,053	2,030
337	14	16	33	5	80,241	510	1,118
10		1	3	1	4,137	6	17
318	15	18	44	7	89,308	511	970
168	9	14	28	2	55,994	347	553
403	10	21	68	9	110,148	525	1,674
182	1	13	32	2	59,199	117	382
469	41	35	94	10	182,297	1,981	2,136
1,043	42	50	153	26	327,203	1,981	2,495
3,785	97	232	447	55	959,341	1,980	8,365
266	18	8	23	4	58,757	379	781
1,544	136	92	177	34	448,809	3,746	8,536
11,133	192	249	273	161	1,310,695	2,760	20,253
1,915	39	79	183	29	425,021	1,050	3,082
1,737	67	53	247	43	374,124	1,837	8,157
80,496	4,812	3,047	7,405	1,716	16,793,053	100,551	208,085
103,517	2,152	5,669	10,060	1,437	23,646,933	58,339	197,097
4,321	147	239	425	84	936,326	5,916	11,523
1,574	107	74	239	42	474,235	3,696	6,313
2,236	76	154	191	47	510,274	3,781	8,563
2,547	198	96	230	79	583,098	3,565	7,658
22,068	312	686	1,672	325	3,385,731	9,098	35,963
17,068	282	479	703	276	2,500,101	7,935	30,429
2,051	129	127	161	27	490,853	3,185	7,418
6,454	511	656	1,824	103	2,742,856	11,696	16,325
13,067	850	484	1,528	428	3,242,474	21,521	47,549
2,742	129	190	666	81	967,565	4,306	6,771
20		1	2	1	3,340	21	49
14,479	857	853	1,269	247	3,691,773	41,658	56,015
214	23	11	32	5	57,572	289	562
8,445	253	578	959	110	1,871,208	10,684	23,251
1,877	86	105	159	27	429,272	1,127	3,631
180	8	10	24	4	54,742	431	862
45	2	2	2	1	6,838	56	194
4,525	379	238	693	111	1,412,526	11,890	17,085
139,479	6,329	9,467	16,101	1,595	34,120,815	98,019	270,505
1,059,253	34,739	42,076	118,678	12,800	230,075,885	657,544	2,469,036
11,027	405	457	568	161	1,827,494	9,429	24,727
370	29	16	45	4	92,484	921	2,580
103,469	5,293	6,066	16,124	1,399	28,868,438	159,706	364,193
210	1	14	33	3	54,793	251	817
598	17	23	86	9	146,945	632	1,827
64	5	3	7	1	14,325	104	225
24		1	6	1	7,935	56	126
131,034	10,527	4,163	10,389	2,241	27,064,702	248,962	650,611
31,791	2,917	1,638	3,590	936	7,993,708	66,807	85,233
16,649	1,359	1,274	5,128	488	7,487,761	27,023	35,142
6,829,455	276,233	304,551	794,317	105,298	1,557,788,344	7,619,270	18,168,323





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RUSSIA

ALASKA

*NORTH
PACIFIC
OCEAN*

MIDWAY

HAWAII

WAKE ISLAND

MONGOLIA

DEMOCRATIC
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC
OF KOREA

CHINA

REPUBLIC
OF KOREA

JAPAN

BHUTAN

BANGLADESH

MYANMAR

LAOS

MACAO

TAIWAN

PHILIPPINES

TINIAN SAIPAN

YAP

PALAU

CHUUK

POHNPEI

MARSHALL
ISLANDS

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

KIRIBATI

TUVALU

TOKELAU

WALLIS &
FUTUNA ISLS.

FIJI

SAMOA

NIUE

AMERICAN
SAMOA

TONGA

COOK ISLANDS

NEW
CALEDONIA

NORFOLK
ISLAND

NEW
ZEALAND

SINGAPORE

MALAYSIA

BRUNEI

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

VIETNAM

INDONESIA

EAST TIMOR

MANUS

NEW IRELAND

BOUGAINVILLE

SOLOMON
ISLANDS

NEW BRITAIN

PAPUA
NEW GUINEA

AUSTRALIA

OCEAN

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26



Africa

LANDS	57
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POPULATION	878,000,158
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PUBLISHERS	1,171,674
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BIBLE STUDIES	2,382,709
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Benin Claude and his wife, Marie-Claire, have been enthusiastic missionaries for 27 years. In February, Marie-Claire slipped and fractured her foot. Two weeks later, while working in the missionary home, Claude fell and broke his foot. Both had casts, Marie-Claire on her right foot and Claude on his left. Claude wryly remarked, “We always like to do things together!”

Claude’s cast permitted some mobility, but Marie-Claire was confined to the home for weeks. Though she arranged to conduct 4 of her 12 Bible studies at the missionary home, she missed other aspects of the ministry. So she decided to sit in front of the missionary home at a table full of publications and speak to passersby. In March she spent 83 hours at her table. Did Jehovah



bless her initiative? That month she placed 14 books, 452 brochures, 290 magazines, and more than 500 tracts.

Ethiopia Arega, who lives in an isolated village, decided to wallpaper his home. Though in his country some people use newspapers for that, he wanted something in color. At the market he saw a man offering the brochure *Enjoy Life on Earth Forever!* Arega obtained a copy and, without reading it, took it apart and pasted it to the walls of his house. Two years later, he noticed on the “wallpaper” the statement: “Jesus was God’s Son.” This was different from the mysterious Trinity he had been taught. His interest aroused, Arega walked for nine hours to the nearest town to find the people who say that God has a Son. His first attempt was unsuccessful, and he returned home disappointed. Later, he tried again, but this time people directed him to the house of the brother from whom he had obtained the brochure. Arega’s resolve was tested further, as he had to wait for hours before the brother came home. A discussion led to a Bible study. In the months that followed, Arega made more trips to town to take in knowledge of God. When he talked with others in his village about what he had learned, much opposition arose and many people shunned him. But he did not give up, and others became interested. When the number of interested ones reached 13, two special pioneers were assigned to the area. Soon they were conducting over 40 Bible studies, and about the same number of people were attending meetings. Eight local publishers are now active in the area. For our new brother Arega, the pictures on his wall have become more than just colorful decoration.



***Self-discipline and modern technology helped
a sister to conduct a Bible study***

Ghana With the rapid spread of cell phones throughout Africa, it is said that a “communications revolution” is under way. As an incentive to subscribers, many companies provide free call time at certain hours of the night. A sister named Grace made use of this provision. She found it difficult to study with Monica, her Bible student, because Monica was always busy with other matters. Grace did all she could to continue the study, even arranging to go to Monica’s house at 5:00 a.m. But Monica’s schedule changed, and even this time was not practical. Then Grace thought of making use of the free night-call arrangement. Monica agreed, and they arranged to study over the phone at 4:00 a.m. They were disappointed to find that so many were already using the network at that time that it was almost impossible to get a connection. Thus, they arranged to get up even earlier so they could study at 3:00 a.m., although this was a challenge for these two working mothers. Grace says: “I prayed to Jehovah and asked him for the strength and

the desire to continue in order to sustain the interest of my student. I set my phone alarm and disciplined myself to get up at that time. Even though I was very tired, I did not allow that to discourage me.” How happy she was that she had made the effort, as she was present to see Monica baptized at the 2008 “Guided by God’s Spirit” District Convention! Recently, Grace has used the same free night-call method to study with a woman who has now begun attending meetings.

Mozambique In August 2008, a jacket fell out of a passing vehicle and landed near the mud hut of a poor, widowed sister. The sister picked up the jacket and found that the pockets contained documents, three small bags of expensive jewelry, and nearly a thousand dollars in cash. She insisted that someone in the village use the phone numbers listed in the documents to report the loss. That evening, four men in a car arrived at the village. In the presence of village authorities, our

sister handed the jacket to the owner, with all its contents intact. The man began to cry and said that if it had fallen into the hands of anyone other than one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, he would have had little chance of recovering his belongings. Our faithful sister, though poor, gave a witness in the community that brought rich praise to the name of her God, Jehovah.



Her faithfulness gave a witness

The Americas

LANDS	55
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POPULATION	910,761,124
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PUBLISHERS	3,575,123
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BIBLE STUDIES	3,778,321
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Barbados Many parents find it beneficial to teach their children to memorize Bible texts. One family in Grenada had the satisfaction of learning how their six-year-old son used a Bible text to uphold the truth that Jehovah is superior to all. The boy's father writes: "One afternoon when my wife, Laura, went to pick up our son, Stefan, from school, his teacher called her aside and said to her: 'I just have to tell you how impressed I am with your son. Even though I don't share your beliefs, I must confess that I admire how well he articulates his beliefs.'

"When they got home, my wife eagerly asked Stefan what happened in school that prompted the teacher's compliment. He then related that during the first session at school, the teacher made the statement that 'Jesus is God.'

"Stefan then put up his hand, and when he was acknowledged by his teacher, he said: 'No, Miss. Jesus is not God. The Bible says that Jesus is the *Son* of Jehovah, so he can't be Jehovah.'

"The teacher replied: 'Well, I believe that Jesus is the same as Jehovah.'

"Stefan then said: 'But the Bible says that Jehovah



Family worship equipped Stefan to witness at school

alone is the Most High, not Jesus. Only Jehovah is the Most High.’ He was quoting from Psalm 83:18, a scripture that we had previously helped him to memorize and to understand. Although the teacher is a very serious type of person, she was no match for a six-year-old child armed with accurate Scriptural knowledge.”

Ecuador Several brothers boarded a bus to return home after working Quichua-speaking territory out in the countryside. Since the bus was equipped to play videos, they got permission to show the Quichua video about Noah and David for the many passengers, who all spoke Quichua. What a surprise for them to see and hear something in their own language! They were so attentive that when the bus stopped to pick up a passenger, they asked him to sit down quickly so they would not miss anything. At the end of the pro-

gram, there were numerous requests for the video. Some passengers had Bible questions and wanted literature; others gave their name and address so someone could visit them in the city, and all received an invitation to the Memorial to be held in Quichua. This no doubt contributed to an outstanding Memorial attendance in the area.

Mexico While preaching from house to house, Gabino, a pioneer brother, came to a home and knocked on the door. No answer. He knocked again and then a third time. After pausing, he knocked a fourth time. The door opened, and an anguished man stood there crying. He immediately invited Gabino in but could not talk because he was so upset. Gabino began to speak comfortingly about the good news, and the man calmed down. “Do you see that chair over there?” asked the man. “When you knocked the third time, I was standing on that chair. Do you see that rope up there? When you knocked the fourth time, I had the noose around my neck. But I took it off to answer the door. Thank you for persisting because if you had not, I would have hung myself.” He explained that he was distraught over problems with his wife. Gabino made arrangements for a Bible study. Usually, this pioneer

His persistence saved a life



knocks only once or twice at a door. But this time his persistence, perhaps under angelic direction, brought fine results.

Chile During the campaign to invite interested ones to the Memorial of Christ's death, a small child approached a Witness and asked her, "How old are you?" The sister, somewhat surprised by the question, responded, "And how old are you?" The little girl said that she was six years old and that her mother had given her a letter to give to one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The mother had instructed her daughter to find a Witness who was not a child but who was not elderly either. So the sister told the girl that she was 25 years old. The girl gave her the letter. It read: "When you have visited my home, I have not mustered up the courage to answer the door. I am suffering from severe depression and have asked God for help. I have also tried to listen to your message and read the Bible, but it

has been very difficult for me. I would like to study the Bible with someone who can help me get over a failed marriage. If you can help me, please come to my home this afternoon, since this morning I am in bed. Thank you."

That afternoon the sister visited the woman and invited her to the Memorial and the special talk, both of which were of true com-



***She found a Witness
who was neither young nor old***

fort to her. Since then, she has continued to benefit from regular meeting attendance and is making fine progress in her Bible study by means of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* And her six-year-old daughter? She, as well as her 12-year-old sister, are also enjoying a personal Bible study.

Puerto Rico A sister writes: "I was offering the magazines on the street when I saw a young lady putting air in the tires of her car. I approached her, but before I could speak, she asked for *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* saying that she loved to read them. Although I offered her a home Bible study, she said that she could not accept because she lived on the second floor of her mother's home and her mother was very opposed to our work. When I asked for her address, she gave me only the name of the street. On another occasion I went to the street and tried to find where she lived but with no success. Then, one day, I went to the street and asked the neighbors if they knew a certain Nancy, a mother with two small children. To my delight, I finally obtained her address. However, I still could not find her at home, so I left magazines and notes for her. When I finally contacted her, she began to cry and said she wanted to visit the Kingdom Hall. She came and enjoyed the warm spirit of love among the brothers and sisters. She told me that she had been unable to respond to my earlier visits because her mother had destroyed my notes and magazines before she returned home. We began to study the Bible in the home of her sister, and soon Nancy was attending meetings regularly. Now she never misses a meeting. She has enrolled in the Theocratic Ministry School, and it is a delight to hear her and her two small children participate in the meetings."



Asia and the Middle East

LANDS	47
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POPULATION	4,073,556,172
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PUBLISHERS	635,896
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BIBLE STUDIES	579,554
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South Korea A man who lives near a Kingdom Hall found a note on his car, which was parked in front of his house. The note read: "I scratched your car by mistake while parking. Please call me, and I'll have it fixed for you." Having observed the conduct of Witnesses who attend the nearby hall, the man said to himself, 'Such an honest person must be one of Jehovah's Witnesses.'

A sister named Su-yeon had left the note, and when she got the phone call from the man, she apologized and offered again to have his car fixed. Imagine her surprise when the man asked, "Excuse me, but are you one of Jehovah's Witnesses?" The man said that he would have his car fixed and told her not to worry about it! He further said that he would like to meet her, since there were things that he wanted to know about the Witnesses. Su-yeon, accompanied by her father and another spiritual brother, went to meet him. "I have been able to observe the Witnesses," the man said, "because I live near the Kingdom Hall. You are fine people. I can't understand why you are so hated." Using the Bible and the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Su-yeon's father was able to answer the man's many questions. He now enjoys a regular Bible

study with Su-yeon's father and is making fine spiritual progress.

Lands where the work is restricted or banned An army colonel was touched by the positive effect that the truth had on his wife, who was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Consequently, he agreed to a Bible study. His commander, a general, learned about this and called him in to talk with him. The general told him that if he did not stop meeting with Jehovah's Witnesses, he would be sent to the remotest place in the country. The colonel boldly answered that his wife had studied the Bible for a long time and that he did not see anything dangerous in it. Therefore, he would not stop studying the Bible. After some time, the colonel decided to leave the army. Now he is a baptized Witness, serving as a regular pioneer and ministerial servant. Interestingly, the wife of the general he spoke to also started studying the Bible. The general could not stop her either, and now she too serves as a regular pioneer.

In another country, a sister started a Bible study with a young woman whose husband severely opposed her. Since the Bible study could not be held at the woman's home, the two women arranged to study in a small park. During their study an elderly man who was taking a stroll in the park continually circled them, observing what they were doing and listening to their conversation. One day, he approached them and asked some questions about the Bible. During the next study, he did the same. The woman who was studying became a little upset and said, "I only have one hour to study the Bible, but you come and take up all my time by asking too many questions." After that, the sister arranged for a brother to study with the

man, who made quick spiritual progress and started attending meetings. Each Sunday, two women in his neighborhood saw him leaving home, well-dressed and with a briefcase in his hand. They were curious about where he was going and learned that he had begun to believe in a certain “new religion.” Deciding to investigate, the two women followed the man to the Kingdom Hall. Several sisters talked with them and asked if they wished to study the Bible. One accepted. These three individuals—the young woman who was studying in the park, the man who was contacted in the park, and one of the women who followed him—have made excellent spiritual progress and were recently baptized.

Cambodia Louy, a pioneer in Cambodia, regularly rides her bicycle to a village where houses are constructed of bamboo and are on stilts. There she conducts Bible studies. Three days before the Memorial, when she was in the village explaining the purpose of the Memorial to one of her Bible students, curious children began to gather around and ask questions. The group of children grew and grew. Louy handed out 57 Memorial invitations. The following day Louy cycled to the village to conduct another study, and this student said that her relatives and friends would like to attend. So Louy left another 20 invitations for the Bible student to distribute. Now Louy became worried as to how she could help all these people attend the Memorial. After praying, she talked to the father of one of her Bible students, who is the village coordinator. He assured Louy that if she arranged for just one *tuk-tuk* (a small carriage usually seating four, which is pulled by a motorcycle) to take them, everyone could go because they would either stand up or sit on one another’s

knees. Louy was very happy to see 18 individuals attend from this village.

India A brother who works as an auto-rickshaw driver seized the opportunity to witness to a passenger who happened to be a journalist. She was impressed with his courage, since some Witnesses in that area had been assaulted by opposers while sharing the good news. The journalist decided to reproduce their conversation in a national newspaper. She wrote: "I decided on a little gentle provocation: 'Haven't you heard the news today? How your people have been beaten up and churches attacked in different parts of the state?' He said, 'Yes, I read about it in today's paper.'"

She arranged for just one "tuk-tuk"



‘So what will you do if [the opposers] continue to trouble you?’ He shook his head, saying: ‘It doesn’t matter. We will continue to believe [the truth].’”

Describing the tract that the Witness had given her, she wrote: “At home I took the pamphlet out of my bag. It had an impossibly idyllic scene on it with green meadows, a lake, flowering trees, people harvesting grain and fruit, and snow-capped mountains. ‘Life in a peaceful new world,’ it said. The message inside was religious. Ordinarily, nobody would object to being handed a pamphlet, whether it advertised a sari shop or a way of life. But start talking of a peaceful new world, and you might set the wheels of hate in motion.”

Philippines In one part of the region of Zamboanga is a mountain so high that its peak can be seen from 125 miles away. Brothers living near the mountain would often joke while in the field service, saying, “What will we do if there is an interested person living at the top of that mountain?” One day while they were preaching at the base of the mountain, a man approached, saying that he was looking for Jehovah’s Witnesses. He said that he wanted their help in studying the Bible. The brothers asked him where he lived. When he pointed to the summit of the mountain, the brothers were speechless. The man explained that his house was, not at the summit, but behind the mountain and that the only way to get there would be to climb over the top of the mountain. After recovering from their surprise, the brothers agreed to go. A Bible study was started, and now the man attends weekly meetings at the Kingdom Hall, even though it is very far from his house. This man is now among the people of all nations streaming to “the mountain of the house of Jehovah.”—Isa. 2:2.

Europe

LANDS	47
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POPULATION	736,988,468
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PUBLISHERS	1,563,910
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BIBLE STUDIES	819,067
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Finland Two brothers were offering home Bible studies house to house with the tract *Would You Like to Know the Truth?* A man opened the door, interrupted their introduction, and invited them in. “I have many questions,” he said. “Why are you coming just now?”

“Well,” the brothers answered, “we are in this territory with our congregation.”

The man responded: “I have been praying for Jehovah’s Witnesses to come to my door. Usually I am jogging at this time, but today I did not go. And now you have come!” The man felt that his prayers had been answered. At his place of employment, people often talked negatively about Jehovah’s Witnesses. Interested in learning whether such assertions were valid, he went to a library to search for information. He found the book *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, read it, and realized that the accusations against us were lies. Hence, he earnestly wanted to meet Jehovah’s Witnesses. A study was started, and he began to attend our meetings immediately. He witnessed to his former wife and their daughter, and they too started to study.



Learning a foreign language led to a Bible study

Britain Kirsty, a regular pioneer, learned French and Lingala so that she could witness to the Congolese people in her territory. One day she saw a Congolese woman who was struggling to get on the bus because she was loaded down with packages. Speaking in Lingala, Kirsty offered to help her and lifted her bags onto the bus for her. “Why do you, a white person, speak Lingala?” asked the woman. Kirsty explained that she attends a Lingala-language congregation and that the local Witnesses had taught her the language so she could speak to people about the Bible. Kirsty wanted to offer the woman a Bible study, so she stayed on the bus until the woman reached her destination. Kirsty then carried the woman’s bags up to her third-

floor apartment. Kirsty was welcomed inside by the woman's husband and their four children, and she showed the family how a Bible study is conducted with the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* The wife and the two older children are now studying the Bible. All three are making efforts to please Jehovah.

Georgia Two young pioneer brothers decided to move to a mountainous area of the country where there were few Witnesses. They started preaching in village after village, and the response was outstanding. They distributed hundreds of pieces of literature and started many Bible studies. When the brothers began to preach in the mountains, they had few provisions and did not know where they would sleep. But their needs were always met. People in the villages invited them into their homes overnight and fed them. At times, even people who did not wish to listen to their message invited them to spend the night with them and to share a meal. Later, the brothers were appointed as special pioneers in this territory. Because of conducting so many Bible studies, they placed a reasonable limit on the number of students they could care for. It is still not unusual for individuals to approach them on the street and ask for a Bible study, and in spite of limiting the number, each brother has conducted, on average, more than 20 Bible studies every month.

Hungary A sister regularly receives milk in bottles that are hung in a bag on her fence. One day, when sending back the empty bottles, she put the tract *Would You Like to Know the Truth?* into the bag. To her surprise, with the next delivery of fresh milk, the dairy-maid attached a slip of paper with some questions regarding the tract and a request for a Bible. The sister

immediately visited the dairymaid on the farm where she lived and started a Bible study with the help of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Beforehand, the woman had been searching for answers to her questions in different churches, but her spiritual hunger had not been satisfied. In fact, her search had raised even more questions in her mind. When one of her daughters also showed keen interest, the sister gave her the book *Learn From the Great Teacher*. The mother explained that the girl would often wake up at night because of nightmares. However, after reading some of the chapters in this book, the girl is less fearful and now sleeps peacefully at night. The Bible study continues, and the mother regularly attends the meetings on Sunday with her two daughters.

Italy Cristina and Manel, two full-time preachers, were distributing the tract *Would You Like to Know the Truth?* in a rural part of central Italy. At one farm

Informal witnessing can take many forms



they heard noises coming from the backyard. As soon as the householder saw the Witnesses, she shouted: "Quickly! Run! Come and help me!" As the Witnesses hurried to help, they saw that she was trying to stop a huge, angry pig from getting out of the pigsty. The gate was broken, and the woman was worried that the pig would run into the woods nearby. She was on her own, desperately trying to keep the gate closed. "You hold it shut while I go and find something to block it!" the woman yelled to Cristina. Cristina immediately replied that she was terrified of the pig. The woman then handed Manel a pumpkin and a knife and said to her: "Don't worry. Keep throwing bits of pumpkin to the pig to keep him busy while I go and look for a new bolt."

The woman then disappeared, and several minutes passed. Meanwhile, Cristina was urging Manel to hurry up and keep throwing food to the pig, but Manel was finding it difficult to cut through the pumpkin's hard rind. Finally, the woman reappeared and repaired the gate. Heaving a sigh of relief, she exclaimed: "You two were sent by the Almighty!"

"That's exactly right, Madam!" they replied as they pulled out the tract and showed it to her.

The woman immediately said: "This is too important to stand here and talk about. We need to sit down and talk calmly." So she fetched some chairs, and as they sat out in the sun in the farmyard, the woman asked many questions and listened with keen interest and appreciation. Later, arrangements were made for a Bible study to be started. Cristina and Manel say that they had this experience thanks to a pig who tried to escape at just the right time.



Oceania

LANDS	30
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POPULATION	38,338,482
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PUBLISHERS	99,816
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BIBLE STUDIES	59,619
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Australia Fred, a Witness in a quiet coastal town, left three of our DVDs with a man. Later, Fred received a letter from the man, which said, in part: “Watching and listening intently to the DVDs was a calming experience. I could feel the peace, joy, and smiles of the people I was watching. I have not felt that way for many years. Now I am beginning to believe that there could be a better life ahead for me. In the past, I was often rude to Witnesses who called at my door. For this I sincerely apologize. Your people have approached me with nothing but friendliness and the desire to spread the good news. Who knows, one day you may look over your shoulder at your Kingdom Hall and see me sitting behind you.”

New Zealand Two sisters called at a government-run family trust organization and arranged an appointment with the director. In preparation they put together a “family pack,” specially designed to include subjects that would be of interest to the director in her work with families. The pack consisted of the books *The Secret of Family Happiness* and *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, along with the August 2007 issue of *Awake!* featuring the cover series “Seven Steps to Better Parenting” and the Octo-



**Preparing the
“family pack”**

ber 2007 issue featuring the series “Keep Your Children Safe!”

When making the visit, the sisters explained the voluntary nature of our work and said that we have deep interest in helping families, especially spiritually. They spent time showing the contents of the pack. The director listened, accepted the literature, and said she would like to share the information with all 35 employees. She added that the *Awake!* articles would benefit all 503 families listed in her records. The sisters managed to collect 557 copies of the *Awake!* magazines. Two weeks later, they received a phone call informing them that all the magazines had gone out to the families.

Fiji A young man named Viliame proved to be an exceptional rugby player and aspired to play for his country. His brother, Leone, also wanted to pursue a career in rugby, but after accepting a Bible study with a special pioneer, he realized that he could not serve two masters. He began attending meetings and gave up rugby.

His mother, a Witness, bought him clothing to wear to meetings, but during an argument Viliame took Leone's meeting clothes and ripped them up. Leone was devastated, but he chose not to retaliate. Some time later, Leone took his watermelon crop to market, and with part of the proceeds, he purchased meeting clothes for himself as well as a Bible, pens, and highlighters for use at meetings. He bought the same things for Viliame. Remembering his own spiteful act, Viliame was deeply touched by his brother's kindness. He donned the new clothing and surprised his brother by attending a meeting. Viliame also accepted a Bible study, and the two brothers progressed spiritually. As both were preparing for baptism, Viliame received a lucrative offer to play rugby in Europe, an offer many young men dream of receiving, as it holds the promise of financial security and personal glory. However, his goals had now changed, and he decided instead to dedicate himself to Jehovah. Both Viliame and Leone served as auxiliary pioneers for the first six months after their baptism. Seeing the good example of his children, Waisea, their father, also accepted a Bible study. Waisea made great changes and was baptized along with his two daughters at a special assembly day.

They gave up a lucrative rugby career to serve Jehovah



Acts of Jehovah's Witnesses IN MODERN TIMES

Uganda Truth-hungry Ugandans have endured the most violent chapters in this land's history. Find out how they managed to have meetings in the open, even when they were under ban. Learn what *Obwakabaka bwa Katonda* means and how it unites you with these faithful brothers and sisters.



Albania How did true worship survive when all religious activity was abolished? Would our brothers stand firm despite hours of brutal torture? What advice did a dying integrity keeper give to young brothers who faced imprisonment? Find out in this faith-strengthening chronicle of loyalty and integrity.



Belize Humble and hardworking servants of Jehovah have blazed a theocratic trail in this cultural melting pot. Find out what happened on "the Battlefield," and see how Jehovah's Witnesses responded to Hurricane Hattie's violent fury. Read about a maritime preaching trip along the idyllic Belize Barrier Reef.





Uganda

FOR centuries, explorers searched for the source of the mighty Nile River, which snakes through half of Africa and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. Eventually, some explorers focused on Lake Victoria and its surrounding mountains as the primary sources of the Nile's perennial waters. In recent decades, many of the inhabitants of that area have been excited to discover the source of a more precious water—"living water" that imparts "everlasting life." (John 4:10-14) This is the story of the people of Uganda who have been "thirsting for righteousness."—Matt. 5:6.

"THE PEARL OF AFRICA"

Uganda, straddling the equator in the middle of Africa, is a beautiful land with a moderate climate. Melting glaciers high up in the majestic Ruwenzori Range—called the Mountains of the Moon—send sparkling waters cascading into myriads of rivers and lakes. Fertile soil and copious rain make Uganda ideal for growing coffee, tea, and cotton. Plantains, a cooking banana, grow abundantly and are used for *matooke*, one of Uganda's main dishes. Locals also eat cassava, maize meal, millet, and sorghum.

This tropical country is home to lions, elephants, hippos, crocodiles, leopards, giraffes, and antelope, as well as chimpanzees, an assortment of fascinating monkeys, and the endangered mountain gorilla. Gorgeous birds fill the air with delightful melodies. Indeed, there is so much beauty in Uganda that the country has been hailed as "the pearl of Africa."

UGANDA'S BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

About 30 million people from approximately 30 ethnic groups inhabit Uganda. Many are religiously inclined and belong to Christendom's churches; but as elsewhere, formal worship is often interwoven with traditional religious practices. Ugandans are generally friendly and hospitable, and it is not uncommon for some to kneel when greeting or serving a person who is their senior.

Sadly, though, in the 1970's and 1980's, this beautiful "pearl" and its precious people were severely scarred by political upheavals and the thousands of deaths that resulted. Moreover, the ravages of the AIDS epidemic have added to Uganda's grief. Under such circumstances, Jehovah's Witnesses have brought comfort and hope to these resilient people.

TRUE PIONEERS

The first record of the Kingdom-preaching work in Uganda dates back to 1931, when the South Africa branch office supervised the preaching work in all of Africa south of the equator. To open this tremendous territory, the branch assigned two pioneers, Robert Nisbet and David Norman, to preach in the area that is now Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Brothers Nisbet and Norman were determined to take the good news of the Kingdom deep into the interior of Africa. They launched their campaign in Dar es Salaam on August 31, 1931, with 200 cartons of literature. From there they went to the island of Zanzibar and then on to the seaport of Mombasa en route to the highlands of Kenya. They traveled by train, working the towns along the railway line to the eastern shores of Lake Victoria. Crossing the lake by steam-



David Norman and Robert Nisbet brought the good news to East Africa

ship, the two intrepid pioneers arrived in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. After placing much literature, as well as subscriptions to *The Golden Age*, the two brothers continued by car even farther inland.

Four years later, in 1935, four pioneers from South Africa undertook another expedition into East Africa. They were Gray Smith and his wife, Olga, along with Robert Nisbet and his younger brother George. With two well-equipped delivery vans fitted out as living quarters, these enterprising pioneers negotiated bad roads and battled their way through elephant grass up to ten feet high. "They often slept out in the wilds," says one report, "and could see, hear, and feel the throb of the heart of Africa with its abundance of wildlife—roaring lions at night, peacefully grazing zebras and giraffes, and the ominous presence of rhinos and elephants." Undaunted, they visited towns that had never been reached with the Kingdom message.

While Gray and Olga Smith spent some time in Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Robert and George Nisbet headed for Nairobi, Kenya. Later, when colonial authorities ordered the Smiths to leave Tanganyika, they made their way to Kampala, Uganda. This time, however, conditions were not so favorable, and

the Kampala police kept them under constant surveillance. Undeterred, in just two months, the Smiths placed 2,122 books and booklets and arranged for six public meetings. Eventually, though, the governor issued a deportation order compelling the couple to leave Uganda. They traveled to Nairobi, where they met up with the Nisbet brothers before returning to South Africa.

With Jehovah's blessing, these preaching campaigns were exceptionally successful, and an excellent witness was given. Despite religious opposition and mounting pressure from colonial authorities, the pioneers distributed over 3,000 books and more than 7,000 booklets, besides obtaining many subscriptions. After these campaigns, many years passed before preaching activity was resumed in Uganda.

RENEWED ACTIVITY

In April 1950, a young couple from England, Brother and Sister Kilminster, arrived in Kampala to set up house. They eagerly preached the good news and were delighted when two families, one Greek and the other Italian, responded to the Kingdom message.

Then, in December 1952, Brothers Knorr and Henschel from the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, visited Nairobi, Kenya. Brother Kilminster did not want to miss the opportunity to be with them, so he traveled all the way from Kampala to Nairobi. Brothers Knorr and Henschel provided the little group in Nairobi with encouragement and arranged for a congregation to be organized in Kampala. That fledgling congregation soon started producing good results, and a peak of ten publishers shared in the ministry during the 1954 service year.

During the same year, Eric Cooke, from the branch office in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), visited East Africa and spent some time with the new congregation in Kampala. Although the brothers enjoyed a weekly congregation study of *The Watchtower*, they were not yet very active in the Christian ministry. So Brother Cooke encouraged Brother Kilminster to conduct all the congregation meetings, including a weekly Service Meeting. To expand the preaching work further, Brother Cooke emphasized the door-to-door ministry and lovingly provided a number of the publishers with personal training.

Up till then, much of the preaching had been done among the Europeans living in Uganda. But Brother Cooke observed that most native Ugandans in Kampala spoke Luganda. He suggested that in order to reach the hearts of the local people, the brothers needed to translate a publication into Luganda. In 1958 publishers began using the newly translated booklet *"This Good News of the Kingdom."* What a stimulus that proved to be! The work progressed, and in 1961 a

**George and Robert Nisbet and Gray and Olga Smith
with their vans on a raft ready to cross a river**



Uganda Overview

Land Encompassing thick tropical rain forests, wide-open savannas, countless rivers and lakes, and the majestic, snowcapped Ruwenzori Range, Uganda is a country of amazing contrasts. It covers an area of 93,263 square miles and includes almost half of Lake Victoria, the largest lake in Africa.

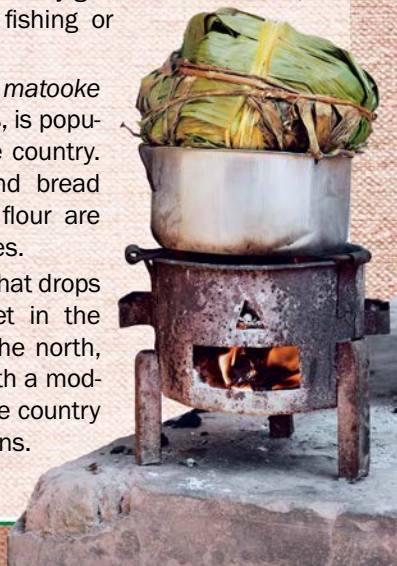
People More than 85 percent of the population, which is made up of approximately 30 ethnic groups, live in rural areas.

Language Luganda is the most common of the more than 32 languages spoken in Uganda. The official languages are English and Swahili.

Livelihood Producing coffee, tea, cotton, and other cash crops, Uganda is an agricultural country. Most Ugandans are farmers who live on the food they grow for themselves, but some earn a living from fishing or tourism.

Food A steamed dish called *matooke* (pictured), made from plantains, is popular in most of the south of the country. Cornmeal, sweet potatoes, and bread made from millet or cassava flour are eaten with a variety of vegetables.

Climate Located on a plateau that drops from approximately 5,000 feet in the south to about 3,000 feet in the north, Uganda is a tropical country with a moderate climate. Most areas of the country have distinct dry and wet seasons.





SUDAN



DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF
THE CONGO

Arua

Gulu

Lira

Masindi

Soroti

Hoima

Lake Kyoga

U G A N D A

Mbale

Fort Portal

Kalangalo

Iganga

Tororo

Mityana

Seta

Namaingo

Kajansi

KAMPALA

KENYA

Entebbe

Equator

LAKE
VICTORIA

Masaka

Mbarara

Kabale

RWANDA

TANZANIA

BURUNDI



UGANDA

KENYA

KAMPALA

Meru

Mt. Kenya

NAIROBI

Mombasa

TANZANIA

Zanzibar

DAR ES SALAAM

new peak of 19 Kingdom proclaimers shared in the ministry.

In the course of his secular employment, Brother Kilminster met George Kadu, an enthusiastic Ugandan in his early 40's who spoke good English as well as his mother tongue, Luganda. George's interest in Scriptural truth was aroused when he learned that God's name is Jehovah, and he began studying the Bible. Soon he was going along as an interpreter when Brother Kilminster preached from house to house. Then, in 1956, when the first baptism in Uganda took place in Lake Victoria near Entebbe, George symbolized his dedication to Jehovah.

Sadly, not long thereafter, the Kingdom work suffered a setback. Some foreign brothers returned to their home country when their work contracts expired. A few brothers were disfellowshipped, and several were stumbled by the unscriptural conduct of some in the congregation. Brother Kadu, though, loved Jehovah and knew he had found the truth. He stuck to it 'in favorable season and in troublesome season' and faithfully served as an elder until his death in 1998. —2 Tim. 4:2.

SERVING WHERE THE NEED IS GREATER

The field in East Africa was large, and the need for Kingdom preachers was great. There was also an additional challenge. The colonial government would not allow missionaries into the region. What could be done?

In 1957 a worldwide call went out for publishers to serve where the need is greater. Spiritually mature brothers were encouraged to move where there was a greater need for Kingdom publishers. The invitation

was similar to the one the apostle Paul saw in vision when a man entreated him: "Step over into Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:9, 10) How did this modern-day invitation affect the progress of the Kingdom-preaching work in Uganda?

Frank and Mary Smith responded to the call with an Isaiah-like spirit and immediately began preparing for their move to East Africa.* (Isa. 6:8) In July 1959 they set sail from New York to Mombasa via Cape Town. Then they traveled by train to Kampala, where Frank obtained a work contract as a government chemist in the Geological Survey Department. The Smiths settled about 22 miles south of Kampala in Entebbe, a beautiful city on the shores of Lake Victoria that was virgin territory as far as the Kingdom-preaching work was concerned. They regularly attended meetings with the small but growing congregation in Kampala.

Soon the Smiths introduced the truth to Peter Gya-bi, who held a responsible position in the Ugandan civil service, and to his wife, Esther. Earlier, Peter had



Mary and Frank Smith, just before their marriage in 1956

* A report on the life story of Frank Smith appeared in *The Watchtower* of August 1, 1995, pages 20-24. Frank's father, Frank W. Smith, as well as his uncle and aunt, Gray and Olga Smith, were among the first to preach in East Africa. Frank's father died of malaria when he was returning home to Cape Town, just two months before Frank was born.

received the book *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?** but did not pay attention to it because he was too busy with his secular employment and frequent job transfers. Then Peter was sent to mediate in a tense, complex land dispute between two tribal factions. He prayed, “God, if you help me, I will look for you.” When the situation was resolved peacefully, he remembered his prayer and started reading the book. He realized that what he was reading was the truth and began searching for the Witnesses. How happy he was to meet Frank Smith, who agreed to conduct a regular Bible study with him and his wife! As a result, this delightful couple were baptized, and they are still active Kingdom proclaimers after more than four decades of faithful service.

Other foreign brothers also responded to the call to serve where the need was greater. Some obtained work contracts that took them to places far away from the small nucleus of publishers in the Kampala Congregation. One couple stayed in Mbarara, a small town in the rolling hills of southwest Uganda, some 180 miles from Kampala. They arranged to have the *Watchtower* Study and book study in their house. From time to time, however, they traveled all the way to Kampala or Entebbe to enjoy warm Christian fellowship. They also stayed in contact with the branch office in Luanshya, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), which had oversight of the Kingdom-preaching work in East Africa at the time. Harry Arnott, who was then overseeing that branch, served as zone overseer and visited Kampala to encourage the handful of publishers in Uganda. They deeply appreciated his loving concern.

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses but now out of print.

Genuine Christian Love Touches Hearts

PETER GYABI

BORN 1932 **BAPTIZED** 1965

PROFILE An elder who helped translate publications during the ban. He and his wife, Esther, are parents of four grown children.



■ **WHEN** the first missionaries of Jehovah's Witnesses arrived in Uganda, there was much racial prejudice in the country, and most white people kept their distance from black Africans. The genuine Christian love of the missionaries touched our hearts, and they became very dear to us.

During the 1970's, our family enjoyed associating and preaching with the missionaries, who lived some 40 miles away in Mbarara. One day, on our way there, soldiers stopped our car. "You can continue, if you want to die," said one of the soldiers. It seemed advisable to turn around and go home. However, as the days passed, we became increasingly concerned about the missionaries. We wanted to get to the missionary home as soon as we could to find out how they were. Security was very tight, but I used my authority in the hospital administration along with a hospital sticker on the car to help me get through the road-blocks. How relieved we were to find that the missionaries were safe! We replenished their food supplies and spent a few days with them. After that, we kept visiting them each week until it was safe for them to move to Kampala. The more trialsome the conditions became, the more we experienced the loving bond of our precious brotherhood.

***Ann Cooke and her
children with Brother
and Sister Makumba***

Another couple with a strong desire to serve where the need for Kingdom preachers was greater were Tom and Ann Cooke from England. Tom applied for employment in a number of countries and obtained a post as an education officer with the Ministry of Education in Uganda. His employment initially took him and Ann and their four-year-old daughter, Sarah, to the small town of Iganga, about 80 miles east of Kampala. After the birth of Rachel, their second daughter, Tom and his family moved to Jinja, a town located at what is commonly called the source of the Nile. Later on, they moved to Kampala.



SACRIFICES AND BLESSINGS

What a fine contribution all these families made to the Kingdom-preaching work in Uganda! True, they had left behind a lifestyle and comforts to which they were accustomed. In return, though, they had the joy of seeing humble people change their way of life and respond to the Kingdom good news. They also experienced the strong bond of Christian love that formed

between their families and the local families as they gathered together for worship and happy association.

“We were impressed by the warm courtesy shown us in the ministry and the unassuming dignity of the people,” recalls Tom Cooke. “Being able to have a small share in seeing the congregation grow was a very special privilege.”

When asked how he felt about his move, Tom replies: “We could not have had a better environment in which to serve Jehovah with a young family. We had the fine example of brothers and sisters from many countries, the company of loving and loyal local brothers, rich privileges of service, freedom from the influence of television, and exposure to the marvels of the African countryside. These were just a few of the blessings we enjoyed.”

The deep appreciation that those who served where the need was greater had for Christian association was also evident in their willingness to travel all the way to Kenya to attend circuit assemblies. This involved a 500-mile journey each way by bus or train!

District conventions required even greater effort. In 1961, for example, delegates from Uganda and Kenya attended a district convention in Kitwe, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). “That meant a four-day trip of over 1,000 miles on some of the worst—mostly unpaved—roads in Tanganyika (Tanzania),” recalls one of the delegates, “and then another four days through sweltering and dusty African savanna to return to Uganda. It was quite an adventure, and our happy association with so many brothers and sisters was a great blessing.” This was an arduous undertaking

that required immense effort, but how spiritually refreshing it was!

MISSIONARIES DO A VITAL WORK

In 1962, Uganda gained its independence from Britain. The following year Brother Henschel visited Nairobi, Kenya, and discussed the possibility of sending missionaries to Uganda. Who would be assigned here?

Tom and Bethel McLain, from the 37th class of Gilead, had recently arrived to serve in Nairobi. How surprised they were when they were then assigned to Kampala! But they willingly accepted the

change and became the first Gilead-trained missionaries in Uganda. “Initially, we missed Kenya,” admits Tom, “but soon we thoroughly enjoyed Uganda—the friendly people and the eager response to the witnessing work.”

Tom and Bethel had been learning Swahili in Kenya, but now they had to learn a new language—Luganda. They had little more at their disposal than dogged determination, reliance on Jehovah, and the help of a “teach yourself” book. During



***Tom and Bethel McLain
were the first Gilead-trained
missionaries in Uganda***



The first missionary home in Jinja

their first month in Uganda, they devoted 250 hours to studying their new language, and during the second, 150 hours. This was in addition to the 100 hours they spent in field service. Gradually they mastered their new tongue and enjoyed fine results in their ministry.

In January 1964, Tom and Bethel were joined by Gilbert and Joan Walters from the 38th class of Gilead. Two other couples from the 38th class, Stephen and Barbara Hardy and Ron and Jenny Bicknell, had been assigned to nearby Burundi but because of visa problems, they too were assigned to Uganda. In short order, Kampala needed another missionary home.

The congregation in Kampala was unforgettable. It included Brother Kadu and his family; John and Eunice Bwali, a special pioneer couple from Northern Rhodesia, and their children; and Margaret Nyende and her young ones. The meetings were held in a place that was virtually in the open. "Passersby could



“I Felt I Could Not Say Anything”

MARGARET NYENDE

BORN 1926 **BAPTIZED** 1962

PROFILE The first Ugandan sister to accept the truth. Served as a regular pioneer for more than 20 years. Still an active publisher.

■ MY HUSBAND enjoyed the Bible studies that Brother Kilminster conducted with him and thought that I should study as well because of my deep love for the Bible. So arrangements were made for John Bwali’s wife, Eunice, to study with me.

I loved what I was learning, but I was afraid of preaching to others. I was timid by nature and felt I could not say anything. But Eunice was patient with me, first by helping me to read just one scripture. Then, as we walked between calls, she taught me to prepare some comments on the scripture. With Jehovah’s support, I overcame my fear.

Shortly before my baptism, I was stunned when my husband rejected the truth and left me and our seven children. Nevertheless, the brothers and sisters were wonderful; they provided practical and spiritual help to me and the children. A foreign couple who traveled to Kampala for the meetings would stop on their way and take the children and me in their car. I am very grateful that four of my children and their families have chosen to serve Jehovah.

Eventually, I was able to serve as a regular pioneer. When arthritis reduced my mobility, I set up a literature table outside my house and talked to passersby. In this way I was able to continue in the full-time ministry.

***Gilead missionaries
Barbara and Stephen Hardy***

see and hear us, few as we were,” recalls Gilbert Walters. “The Bwali family lustily led the singing of Kingdom songs in descent without accompaniment, all in public view. It gave us courage to continue.”

Before long, Gilbert and Joan Walters were assigned to open a missionary home in Jinja, where no organized preaching had yet been done. Later, two more missionary homes were opened—one in Mbale, near the border with Kenya, and the other in Mbarara. The missionaries in those homes worked along with a number of special pioneers from other countries. The field was clearly “white for harvesting.” (John 4:35) But what could be done to speed up the ingathering?

IMPROVED ORGANIZATION

The full-time servants in Uganda endeavored to cover their huge territory as systematically as possible. During the week, they would preach in the housing estates, where streets and plots are identified by names and numbers. How, though, could they methodically cover territories where streets had no names and houses were not numbered?

“We divided the territory into hills,” explains Tom McLain. “Two of us went around one side of the hill while two others went around the other side. We



followed the paths, working up and down the hill until the four of us met.”

The foreign brothers soon began to benefit from the growing number of Ugandan Witnesses who knew the territory and understood the local culture. In return, the local publishers gained valuable experience from the foreign brothers and sisters. In Jinja, for example, Ugandan brothers were already accompanying the missionaries in field service.

‘It was quite unusual to listen to a conversation between an American and a Scot on an African radio station’

On Sundays they began with house-to-house work from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Next, they spent an hour making return visits and then conducted a Bible study until

noon. In this way, all in the congregation benefited from an interchange of expertise and encouragement.

Jinja, then the second-largest town in the country, had the luxury of a hydroelectric power station and, as a result, was an attractive location for industrial development. The missionaries had great success witnessing at the bustling taxi and bus stations. Travelers from distant places eagerly accepted Bible literature to read on their journey. Thus, Kingdom seed was being scattered far and wide into surrounding rural areas.

The brothers also used radio broadcasts to convey the good news to as many people as possible. They obtained a regular weekly slot on national radio that was called “Things People Are Thinking About.” The brothers presented such thought-provoking subjects as “Facing the Crisis in Family Life” and “How to Pro-

tect Yourself From Crime and Violence” in the form of a dialogue between “Mr. Robbins” and “Mr. Lee.” One of the brothers recalls: “It was quite unusual to listen to the broadcast and hear this conversation between an American voice and a Scottish voice on an African radio station. We often had feedback about the program in our field ministry, showing that it did serve a useful purpose.”

HELP FOR NEWER PREACHERS

The Jinja group at that time held their meetings in the community center of the main housing estate, Walukuba. “Many of the brothers were new,” remembers Tom Cooke, “and had few publications from which to prepare their meeting assignments.” What could be done?

Mary Nisbet (center) with her sons Robert (left), George (right), and William and his wife, Muriel (rear)



“The missionaries put together a library in the home of a brother who lived in the middle of the housing estate,” recalls Tom. “Every Monday night those with assignments would go there to use the library and to get help with their talk assignments.” Now there are several congregations around Jinja that find that spiritual fishing is still successful at this primary source of the Nile.

TRAVELING OVERSEERS PROMOTE SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In September 1963, the preaching work in Uganda came under the supervision of the newly established Kenya branch, and William and Muriel Nisbet were assigned to visit Uganda as part of their Nairobi-based circuit. Remarkably, William was following in the footsteps of his older trailblazing brothers, Robert and George, who had preached in Uganda some 30 years earlier. The publishers now benefited from the hard work of a “second shift” of Nisbets.

Interest was growing, more groups were being established, and the publishers were scattered over a wide area. So, regular visits from traveling overseers rendered a vital service in providing training and encouragement and reassuring isolated brothers and sisters that “the eyes of Jehovah are upon the righteous ones.”—1 Pet. 3:12.

In 1965, Stephen and Barbara Hardy visited congregations in a circuit that extended from Uganda to the Seychelles, a group of islands 1,600 miles away in the Indian Ocean. At one point, they made a “scouting expedition” of Uganda to determine where pioneers might enjoy the best results. Using a Volkswagen Kombi lent to them by the Kenya branch for transport and accommodation, they traveled through most of Ugan-



Brother Hardy and his wife traveled through most of Uganda in six weeks

da in just six weeks, visiting the towns of Masaka, Mbarara, Kabale, Masindi, Hoima, Fort Portal, Arua, Gulu, Lira, and Soroti.

“The journey was thrilling,” recalls Brother Hardy, “and the preaching was a delight. Everyone, including the local authorities, was helpful and friendly. Many times when we called at a home to speak with a householder, the visit would develop into a ‘public talk’ as neighbors and passersby joined in to listen to our message. Even when we stopped at what we thought was a secluded spot, smiling people would soon begin to approach, feeling that we were their visitors. Literature supplies diminished quickly. We placed some 500 books and obtained many subscriptions to *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*”

The friendliness, curiosity, and spiritual inclination of the Ugandan people seemed to indicate that

there was great potential for spiritual growth. Most important, the Hardys were thrilled to experience Jehovah's blessing on the preaching work in this fertile field.

JEHOVAH MAKES IT GROW

A milestone in the history of Jehovah's people in Uganda was reached on August 12, 1965, when the International Bible Students Association was registered, giving legal recognition to our disciple-making work. Honesthearted Ugandans—such as George Mayende, Peter and Esther Gyabi, and Ida Ssali—formed a small but solid core of stalwart Witnesses during the 1960's. By 1969, Uganda reported 75 publishers scattered among a population of some eight million, a ratio of more than a hundred thousand people for every Witness. By 1970, the number of Kingdom proclaimers had increased to 97, and then to 128 in 1971. By 1972, there were 162 active Witnesses of Jehovah in Uganda.

Though the growth was encouraging, the brothers knew that their strength was, not in their growing numbers, but in "God who makes it grow." (1 Cor. 3:7) What they did not know was that the 1970's would bring dramatic changes in their lives and severe tests of faith. General Idi Amin's military coup in 1971 was followed by a dictatorship that caused turmoil for millions and resulted in many thousands of deaths. Increasingly, there were skirmishes between the government and factions that were opposed to the new political setup. From time to time, borders with neighboring countries were closed. Curfews were imposed. People began disappearing. Others came under surveillance. How would our peace-loving brothers and

sisters in Uganda respond to this upheaval, intimidation, and violence?

“DIVINE RULERSHIP” OR MAN’S RULERSHIP?

Right at that time, plans were being made to host the 1972 “Divine Rulership” District Assembly in Kampala, the first such convention to be held in Uganda. Delegates would be coming from Kenya, Tanzania, and faraway Ethiopia. How would they cope with the simmering tensions, escalating political and tribal clashes, and harrowing border crossings? Should the convention be canceled? The brothers made the convention a matter of fervent prayer, petitioning Jehovah’s guidance on convention arrangements and on the delegates who would be traveling.

Later, the situation appeared even more menacing when delegates arriving at the border saw large

***Tom Cooke delivering a talk at the “Divine Rulership”
District Assembly in Kampala***





George and Gertrude Ochola

groups of people fleeing the country! Most were leaving because of a government order expelling all noncitizen Asians—primarily Indians and Pakistanis. Many, such as foreign schoolteachers, were departing because they feared that the decree boded ill for other ethnic groups. Despite that, the conventioners kept arriving. What would they find in a city seething with political tension?

Surprisingly, they found Kampala very calm, with the brothers and interested people cheerfully waiting at the convention site for the arrival of their guests. They

were also amazed to find that the authorities had granted permission for an enormous banner to be suspended across Kampala's busiest street advertising the date and location of the convention. There, at this time of unprecedented turmoil, was the title of the public talk in bold letters: "Divine Rulership—The Only Hope of All Mankind"!

The program was presented successfully without disturbance, with a peak attendance of 937—a significant milestone in the history of pure worship in Uganda. Afterward, although the return of foreign del-

legates was hampered at the borders, their zeal remained undiminished, and all got home safely. In the midst of growing political uncertainty, Jehovah's people had courageously made known their allegiance to their Sovereign Ruler. And at this crucial time, God had made his people 'bold with strength.'—Ps. 138:3.

Among the Ugandans who attended were George and Gertrude Ochola. "That was my very first assembly," recalls Gertrude, "and the one where I was baptized!" George, though, was not yet a Witness. He was an avid soccer fan and was more interested in the stadium as a sports venue. Nevertheless, his wife's good conduct and his own study of the Bible eventually moved him to symbolize his dedication by water baptism in Kenya in 1975.

Gertrude recalls that she was among the first ones from northern Uganda to learn the truth. "In 1972, when I was baptized," she reminisces, "I thought my area was so remote. Now there is a Kingdom Hall here, as well as a missionary home and a translation office. This makes me even more excited than when I was baptized!"

A "TROUBLESOME SEASON"

Without any warning, on June 8, 1973, radio and television announcements declared that 12 religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, were banned. The new government had created a climate of public fear and suspicion, falsely portraying foreigners as spies. It became increasingly difficult for the missionaries to engage in the public ministry. Jehovah's Witnesses in Uganda had entered a particularly "troublesome season." (2 Tim. 4:2) What would happen to them?

Two missionary couples had already left the country that year because their applications to extend their residence permits were denied. By mid-July, the remaining 12 missionaries had all been expelled. Foreign brothers who had come to serve where the need was greater were able to remain a little longer because of their secular employment, but their freedom was short-lived. By the following year, they were all compelled to leave the country.

‘STEADFAST AND UNMOVABLE’

The remaining Ugandan publishers were understandably saddened by the departure of their dear foreign brothers and sisters. But with Jehovah’s strength they proved to be ‘steadfast and unmovable.’ (1 Cor. 15:58) Typical of their loyal spirit was the unhesitating response of one elderly brother, Ernest Wamala, when informed that Jehovah’s Witnesses had been banned. He asked, “How can they ban what is in *my heart*?”

How would Ugandan elders, such as George Kadu and Peter Gyabi, manage now that the foreign elders had all gone? Their deep spirituality and understanding of local culture proved to be a blessing. “For a person to come into the truth and serve Jehovah in Uganda,” explains Brother Gyabi, “much self-discipline is needed to abandon customs that conflict with Jehovah’s standards. Self-discipline was especially vital for responsible brothers who had to rely solely on written instructions from Jehovah’s organization.” The meticulous personal study of the local elders helped them to avoid being misled by

**“How can they
ban what is in
my heart?”**

faulty human wisdom. As a result, this trialsome period proved to be a time of spiritual progress for Jehovah's people, rather than a setback.

On the other hand, the population in general was feeling increasingly insecure. Many people were being harassed, and some lived in terror of the military. Corruption was rife, resulting in the collapse of the economy. A gorgeous land was suffering painful wounds. Would Jehovah's faithful servants in Uganda continue to find causes for rejoicing during this trialsome time?

JOYFUL GATHERINGS

The government did whatever it could to suppress all political meetings that seemed to pose a threat to their regime. While Jehovah's Witnesses maintained strict neutrality, they also respected the Bible's instruction not to forsake gathering together to encourage one another. (Heb. 10:24, 25) It took much courage and ingenuity to keep meeting together under the surveillance of suspicious authorities. How could God's servants avoid drawing attention to their innocent gatherings?

First, they reorganized most meetings into smaller groups in private homes. When they gathered in larger groups, they did so under the pretense of having a picnic. For example, once a month the whole congregation met together for a talk and the *Watchtower* Study. The brothers would arrange a picnic in a public park or in someone's garden. This tactic worked well among the gregarious Ugandans, who did not think it strange for a group of friends or relatives to gather to enjoy themselves. In addition to discreetly

bringing along their Bibles and study books, the brothers were adept at carrying everything needed for a full-scale picnic and cookout! Such meetings made them think of how the ancient Israelites must have enjoyed their religious festivals.—Deut. 16:15.

Throughout the time of the ban, abbreviated circuit assemblies were held in the same way. Despite government efforts to hinder them, the brothers never left off meeting together or preaching the good news. Some brothers were even able to

attend conventions in Nairobi and could share their heartwarming experiences when they returned.

In spite of the ban, our brothers continued to meet together



‘CAUTIOUS AS SERPENTS YET INNOCENT AS DOVES’

Responsible brothers had reason to believe that if they were as “cautious as serpents and yet innocent as doves,” the ban might not be strictly enforced and theocratic activities could continue. (Matt. 10:16) So with due caution, special pioneers continued in their assignments, and the publishers carried on with the house-to-house ministry.

Of course, some were not happy to see Jehovah’s Witnesses at their door. One day in the mid-70’s, Peter Gyabi was working in the ministry with teenager Fred Nyende. Fred had been an infant when his mother learned the truth in 1962. Since then, he had grown up, and his maturity was about to be tested.

An angry householder—evidently a plainclothes security officer—recognized the brothers as Jehovah’s Witnesses. He arrested them and forced them into his vehicle. They were understandably anxious because thousands of people who were apprehended like that had simply disappeared. Torture was also common, under any or no pretext. On the way to the security office, Peter and Fred had time to pray to Jehovah for strength to stay calm and faithful. The man took them to his chief officer, making accusations and

Fred Nyende



bombarding them with questions. However, Peter and Fred saw firsthand the truth of the words of Proverbs 25:15: “By patience a commander is induced, and a mild tongue itself can break a bone.” Fortunately, no literal bones were broken that afternoon. Peter’s calm explanation of our law-abiding position and our adherence to Bible teachings, along with the brothers’ respectful demeanor and answers, broke down the chief’s prejudice. What was the outcome?

Emmanuel Kyamiza



The chief not only released Peter and young Fred but also ordered the man who arrested them to drive them back to the territory! Their humiliated “escort” grudgingly complied, and the brothers thanked Jehovah for their escape.

Other encounters with the police were less stressful. For example, Emmanuel Kyamiza and his wife secretly held meetings at their home in Entebbe for their family and a small group of interested ones. To avoid establishing a pattern of activity, Emmanuel changed the places where he conducted Bible studies. After some time Emmanuel assumed that his methods of eluding the police were working well. One day, after Emmanuel concluded a Bible study in the Entebbe Botanical Gardens, a policeman approached him as he quickly tried

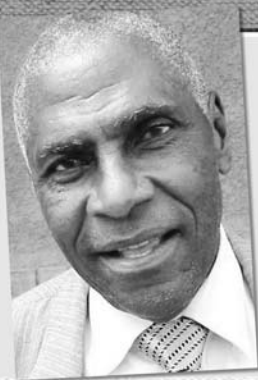
to slide his study material out of view. “Why are you hiding your books?” inquired the officer. “We know what you’re doing. We know you’re Jehovah’s Witnesses. We even know where you meet. If we wanted to, we would have arrested you long ago. But you can continue as you have been.” And Emmanuel did continue—very faithfully!

Later, when Emmanuel retired from secular work and moved back to his family’s village, he endured much opposition and ridicule. Like Jesus, he was ‘unhoned in his home territory.’ (Mark 6:4) Nevertheless, well into his 70’s, Emmanuel kept on “thriving during gray-headedness,” and he regularly rode his bicycle 18 miles to and from meetings. (Ps. 92:14) Today, in his late 80’s, he still serves faithfully as a ministerial servant, though he does not ride his bicycle as much as he would like to.

PERSEVERING PIONEERS

Despite the continuing uncertainty, there were always a few who found a way to share in the pioneer service. One largehearted pioneer during that time was James Luwerekera, a government surveyor who was baptized in 1974. Shortly after his baptism, he took up farming in order to preach the good news to those in the vicinity of his home village. His wife also studied for a while, but as time went on, she did more and more to oppose James.

For example, one morning while it was still dark, James and some brothers set out to attend a district convention in Nairobi. Later, when their vehicle was stopped at a police checkpoint, the brothers noticed something strange about James’ clothing—it was uncharacteristically mismatched and ill-fitting. Initially,



God Blessed Our Spiritual Harvest

SAMUEL MUKWAYA

BORN 1932 **BAPTIZED** 1974

PROFILE For many years Samuel represented the organization in legal matters, and he also served as an elder and a pioneer.

■ I WILL never forget what happened during a tour of the Kenya branch office in Nairobi.

“What are these colored pins for?” I asked, as I examined a map of Uganda.

“These are places with a lot of interest,” replied Robert Hart, a member of the Kenya Branch Committee.

“When are you sending pioneers *there*?” I asked, pointing to a bright pin at Iganga, my hometown.

“We are not sending anyone there,” he said. Then, looking straight at me with a twinkle in his eye, he continued, “*You* are going there.”

I was surprised at Brother Hart’s response because I was not a pioneer, and I was not living in my hometown. Somehow, though, this incident stuck in my mind, and after my retirement as a civil servant, I decided to move back home and become a regular pioneer. What a joy it was to see the handful of publishers increase rapidly to become a strong congregation with their own Kingdom Hall!

When Patrick Baligeya was assigned to Iganga as a special pioneer, he stayed with me, and we pioneered together. We also planted a field of maize to support ourselves.

We started each day with an early-morning discussion of the day's text followed by a few hours of work in our maize field. At midmorning we went into the territory and enjoyed the ministry for the rest of the day.

As our maize seedlings grew, some neighbors suggested that our preaching was causing us to neglect our maize field. We were well aware that maize needs protection against monkeys all the time the cobs are maturing. Still, we did not want to interrupt our spiritual harvest to chase monkeys.

Shortly thereafter, we noticed two big dogs loitering around our field. We did not know where they came from or who owned them, but rather than chase them away, we put some food and water out each day. Naturally, while the dogs patrolled our field, the monkeys were nowhere to be seen. Then, after four weeks, as suddenly as the dogs had arrived, they disappeared—but not a day before our maize

was out of danger! We thanked Jehovah for the bumper crop that served as food for us rather than for the monkeys. More important, how grateful we were that God had also blessed our spiritual harvest!



he joked that it was because he had dressed hastily in the darkness. But when his friends pressed him for an explanation, he admitted that his wife had hidden his dress clothes to stop him from attending the convention. He had thus been forced to grab whatever clothes he could find. James' travel partners kindly gave him some of their clothes, and he arrived at the convention suitably attired.

Sometimes the opposition in James' home and neighborhood was merely an inconvenience. At other times it was more intense. But it went on for years. Through it all, James endured with mildness and built a faithful record until his death in 2005. His faith is still admired by the brothers and, without a doubt, remembered by his God, Jehovah.

'A BROTHER BORN FOR WHEN THERE IS DISTRESS'

"A true companion is loving all the time, and is a brother that is born for when there is distress." (Prov. 17:17) The brothers in Kenya proved to be true companions during the distress and danger endured by the Ugandan Witnesses in the 1970's. Traveling overseers and branch representatives needed courage to cross the border into Uganda to provide support and encouragement for their dear brothers and sisters.

Political chaos erupted in 1978 when a faction of Uganda's army invaded Tanzanian territory. Tanzania's military responded by overthrowing the Ugandan government in April 1979, forcing Uganda's feared dictator, Idi Amin, to flee. Amin's hasty departure brought many changes to Uganda. "With Amin," says one brother, "went the ban." The *Uganda Times* announced: "Missionaries Are Free to Return."

Detained but Sustained

PATRICK BALIGEYA

BORN 1955 **BAPTIZED** 1983

PROFILE Entered full-time service shortly after his baptism. Serves in the traveling work together with his wife, Symphronia.



■ WHEN a new government came to power in 1979, everyone who had been connected to the former regime was “invited” to go into protective custody. Announcements were made that anyone not cooperating with the arrangement would be viewed as unfriendly toward the new government and would be treated as such. Because I had served as a musician in the armed forces, I had to go into detention.

I was grateful that in detention I was able to read the Bible daily to keep my mind active. Besides, I was looking for the truth, and I liked to talk with fellow inmates on Bible subjects. In the same detention facility was one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, John Mundua, who was there because he had been a civil servant and belonged to the tribe that was considered to have supported the former regime.

John eagerly shared the good news with me, and I readily responded. We had only 16 *Watchtower* magazines and the book *Good News—To Make You Happy*,* but I immediately realized that what I was learning was the truth. After I had studied the Bible for three months, John felt that I qualified to be a publisher. Shortly thereafter, he

* Published by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Now out of print.

was cleared of all allegations and was released. My only contact with Jehovah's organization had gone. Still, I kept conducting studies with interested ones in the detention center as best I could.

I was released in October 1981, and I returned to my village, where there were no Witnesses. My relatives tried to pressure me into joining them in their religious practices. Jehovah, though, saw my desire to serve him, and he sustained me. I knew that I should follow Jesus' example, so I began preaching on my own, and soon I had many studies. One day a householder brought out *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life* and remarked, "What you are saying resembles what I have read in this book."* The man had only a limited interest, and I was very eager to read his book as well as his stack of *Watchtower* magazines. So in this case the householder agreed to place literature with me!

But I had yet to find my fellow worshippers. Brother Mundua had mentioned that there were Witnesses in Jinja. Thus, I resolved to find the brothers there. After spending almost an entire night in prayer, I set off early the next morning without even having breakfast. The very first man I met as I started walking was carrying a clear plastic bag. I could barely believe my eyes when I saw that he had an *Awake!* magazine in it. I had found one of my brothers!

In 1984, I was thrilled to attend the first class of the Pioneer Service School in Uganda. And who should be with me in the class? None other than my dear brother John Mundua. Even now, at 74 years of age, he continues to serve faithfully as a regular pioneer.

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Now out of print.

Jehovah's people once again enjoyed religious freedom!

“EVEN IF THEY WANT TO KILL ME, I WILL GO”

In the confusion that followed the change in government, Uganda was looted as much as it was liberated. A climate of anarchy resulted in thievery and untold violence. Nevertheless, the brothers in the Kenya branch immediately arranged for Günter Reschke and Stanley Makumba to visit Uganda and begin holding circuit assemblies.

“Two weeks before going on this postwar visit,” recalls Günter, “we taught a pioneer school in Meru, near Mount Kenya. I remember reading in the newspaper about the many killings in Kampala, especially at night. After reading one excerpt aloud, I exclaimed: ‘And this is the place we’re supposed to visit next week!’ But then I thought, ‘Do I want to be like Jonah and run away from my assignment?’ Immediately, I lost my apprehension and told myself, ‘Even if they want to kill me, I will go. I will not run away like Jonah.’”

The brothers went as planned, with Stanley visiting congregations in the country’s interior, while Günter served the larger towns. “There was a lot to reorganize after the war,” they reported. “Only about 113 publishers were active in Uganda at the time. Everyone was happy to meet freely again and hold an assembly out in the open, and it was a joy to see 241 in attendance.” Though the seeds of truth had been badly trampled, it was evident they could still bear fruit.

DANGEROUS TIMES

At Mbale, near Uganda’s eastern frontier, the two visiting brothers, Günter and Stanley, parked their car

in front of their host's home for the night. During the night they heard thieves removing parts from the vehicle. Günter was about to shout at the burglars when he remembered that earlier in the week thugs had shot and killed a person who had tried to stop a burglary. On second thought, Günter concluded that the value of the car could not be compared with the value



Stanley Makumba with his wife, Esinala, in 1998

of life and decided not to intervene. When day dawned, they found that two tires and the windshield had been stolen. They reported the theft to the police, who advised, "Take the car away before the thieves come back to get more parts!"

As soon as they could, the brothers set off for Kampala. But without a windshield and with only

a blanket to cover Günter and a hat to protect Stanley, the wet and breezy 155-mile journey to Kampala was less than comfortable. They had replaced one of the stolen tires with the spare tire and had borrowed a leaky tire to replace the other. To add to their anxiety, they were informed that the borrowed tire had to be returned in two days! The brothers held their breath and hoped the tires would hold their air.

To complicate the trip, Günter and Stanley had to negotiate a stretch of forest road that was notorious for robbers. "Drive fast," their host advised, "and don't let anyone overtake you." The intrepid brothers were re-

lieved to arrive in Kampala safely—and in record time. They had just enough time, in fact, to find someone to take the borrowed tire back to Mbale.

NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In 1980, while visiting world headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, Brother Reschke was invited to give a report to the Bethel family on developments in Uganda. Afterward, members of the Governing Body expressed the hope that missionaries might be sent to Uganda once again. Everyone agreed that the time was certainly ripe for more missionary activity. Larger gatherings were again possible, and by 1981 the number of publishers in Uganda had already rebounded to 175. In fact, by July of that year, Uganda was thrilled to record a new peak of 206 publishers.

Sadly, though, the fighting over the past ten years had left discarded weapons and ammunition in the hands of many unscrupulous people. Random shootings and robberies were alarmingly common. With caution, preachers of the good news endeavored to distribute our comforting Bible literature throughout the territory, placing an average of 12.5 magazines per publisher during July. However, prudence dictated that field service, as with other activities, should be limited to daylight hours because nightfall greatly increased the risk of assault. Despite the dangers, though, the potential for growth was unmistakable.

MISSIONARIES WELCOMED AGAIN

Gilead graduates Jeffrey Welch and Ari Palviainen arrived in Kampala from Kenya in September 1982. From the outset, Jeff and Ari, as the two brothers became known, enjoyed gratifying results. “People at

that time were hungering for spiritual things,” Jeff recalls, “so the magazines with their appealing subjects virtually placed themselves.”

In December, Jeff and Ari were joined by Heinz and Marianne Wertholz from the Gilead Extension School in Wiesbaden, Germany. From the start, the Wertholzes were deeply impressed by the way their Ugandan brothers were able to thrive in Uganda’s damaged and dangerous communities.

“Many services,” recalls Heinz, “such as water supply and communication had broken down. The political situation remained tense. More than once there was rumor of a coup, and there were many military roadblocks. Shootings and robberies were common, especially at night. When darkness fell, not one person was to be found out on the streets. Everyone remained at home hoping—and often praying—that the night would pass without uninvited visitors.”

Heinz and Marianne were invited to stay with Sam Waiswa and his family while looking for a house to use as a missionary home. Although Sam was a professional educator, economic conditions in the country had severely limited his resources, making his family’s hospitality truly remarkable.

“It was difficult to find a house in a safe area,” says Heinz, “so we ended up staying at Sam’s home for five months. In that time we got to know each other very well. Sometimes his large family had only one meal a day, but they were always happy; and the children were obedient and respectful. Because the city water supply was not functioning properly, the children had to carry home five-gallon plastic jerricans full of water on their heads. When we came back from the ministry,

there was always fresh water for us. Of course, we learned to economize. For example, we bathed with just a few quarts of water and saved the rinse water in a basin for flushing the toilets.”

In April 1983, some ten years after the earlier missionaries had been compelled to leave Uganda, the four new missionaries found a home in a reasonably safe area. The general insecurity and the scarcity of provisions presented many challenges, but the love of the local brothers more than compensated for those inconveniences.

“We always enjoyed sharing the good news with the people,” explains Marianne. “They were religious, most had a Bible, and they were open to discussion. They were very easy to approach and well mannered. And despite the economic and other hardships, they always wore a happy smile.”

***Heinz and Marianne Wertholz attended the first class
of the Gilead Extension School in Germany***



TIME LINE

Uganda

1931 Robert Nisbet and David Norman preach in East Africa.



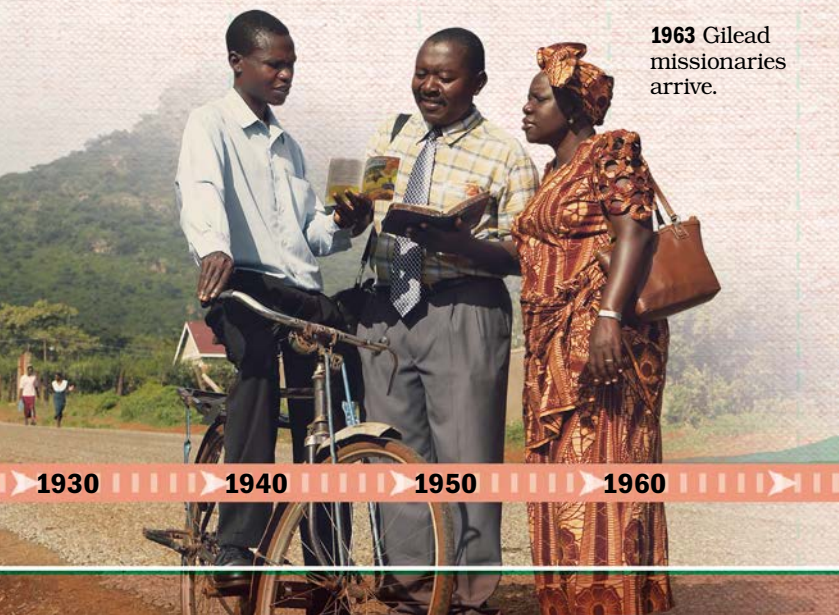
1950 Kilminsters move to Uganda.

1952 First congregation is formed.

1956 First baptism takes place.

1959 Foreign brothers provide spiritual help.

1963 Gilead missionaries arrive.



1930

1940

1950

1960

1972 First district convention is held.

1973 Jehovah's Witnesses are banned and missionaries expelled.

1979 Ban is lifted.

1982 Missionaries once again allowed into the country.



1987 *The Watchtower* is translated into Luganda on a regular basis.

1988 First permanent Kingdom Hall is dedicated.

2003 Branch office is established.

2007 New branch facilities are dedicated.



 Total Publishers
 Total Pioneers



OLDER ONES WANT TO DO MORE

Many older ones, held in high regard in Ugandan culture, have responded to the good news and have used their advancing years to serve Jehovah. For example, Paulo Mukasa, a former teacher, was 89 years old when he learned the truth. Having lived through two world wars, colonial rule, a violent dictatorship, and other political upheavals, Paulo was eager to learn about God's Kingdom. He was delighted when he found out that the Messianic King, Jesus Christ, 'will deliver the poor one and the afflicted one from oppression and from violence.'—Ps. 72:12, 14.

When Paulo qualified for baptism two years later, the brothers wondered, 'Can we really dip a person this old completely under the water?' But they need not have worried. While an anxious youthful candidate was hesitating to go into the water, 91-year-old Paulo was baptized and emerged all smiles. Although somewhat limited in his ministry, Paulo zealously shared the Kingdom good news with any who would visit him, until his death some years later.

Lovinca Nakayima was another one who had to deal not only with advancing age but also with poor health. Sickness left her legs so swollen that she was unable to go anywhere without assistance. Still, when the congregation was encouraged to auxiliary pioneer for one month during the Memorial season, Lovinca wanted to try. By taking interested people to Lovinca's home to study the Bible, the congregation helped her to pioneer. The missionaries also taught her to write letters to people in the villages, which she could do at her own convenience. Then, on Saturdays, an elder took Lovinca to a busy public area in Kampala, where

she could sit comfortably on a low wall and witness to passersby all day long. Happy and satisfied at the end of the month, Lovinca said, "Now I see that I can do it—and enjoy it!" Not only did she auxiliary pioneer for that one month but, with the kind support of the congregation, she did so for 11 consecutive months!

"HOW DO YOU SAY . . . ?"

During the 1980's, the hardworking publishers in Uganda warmly welcomed a steady influx of eager missionaries. Some were new Gilead graduates, and others had been compelled to leave missionary assignments in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo). The increase in missionaries in Kampala and Jinja made it possible to cover those densely populated territories more thoroughly, and the missionaries were thrilled to find the Ugandan field ripe for harvesting. Actually, the challenge was not just finding interest but cultivating it.

Full of momentum from his months of Gilead training, Mats Holmkvist was eager to master the local language in order to cultivate people's interest in the truth. By this time, Fred Nyende was a special pioneer in Entebbe, and his translating and interpreting skills were put to good use teaching the new missionaries to speak understandable Luganda, a language full of potential tongue twisters. In fact, Mats found the challenge of learning his new language quite daunting.

**"How do you say
'God's Kingdom' in
Luganda?"
"Obwakabaka bwa
Katonda"**

"How do you say 'God's Kingdom' in Luganda?" asked Mats in one of his first language classes.

“Obwakabaka bwa Katonda,” came Fred’s rhythmic reply.

‘That sounds impossible,’ thought Mats, regretting that he had even asked the question. Nevertheless, Mats made remarkable progress and gained a good command of Luganda.

THE INGATHERING PROSPERS

Despite the difficulties Ugandans experienced through most of the 1980’s, the response to Bible truth was extraordinary. The number of publishers mushroomed by more than 130 percent—from 328 in 1986 to 766 in 1990. New groups were springing up all over the country. In Kampala the number of congregations doubled. The congregation in Jinja rejoiced to see the number of publishers more than triple, while the group in Iganga quickly became a full-fledged congregation.

“The growth was so rapid,” recalls an elder in Jinja, “that we wondered where all the new publishers were coming from. For a while we had to schedule time nearly every Sunday to meet with those who wanted to become unbaptized publishers.”

HARVESTING A BIGGER FIELD

One of the factors contributing to the remarkable growth was the outstanding pioneer spirit of the brothers. Just like the first-century preachers Paul, Silas, and Timothy, full-time servants in Uganda ‘offered themselves as an example to imitate.’ (2 Thess. 3:9) With the growing need in the field and such fine examples, many zealous publishers were motivated to expand their ministry. Young and old, single and married, male and female, and even some with families

He Finally Found the True Religion

A sister asked a missionary, Mats Holmkvist, to meet with Mutesaasira Yafesi, who had been a pastor in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Now he was interested in Jehovah's Witnesses and had prepared a list of 20 neatly printed questions. When he met Mats, he presented the list to him.

After a two-hour Bible discussion, Mutesaasira stated: "I think I have finally found the true religion! Please come and visit me in my village. There are other people who want to know more about Jehovah's Witnesses."

Five days later, Mats and another missionary set out on a motorcycle to visit Mutesaasira in Kalangalo—a 70-mile trip over difficult and muddy paths through tea plantations. They were surprised when Mutesaasira took them to a thatched hut that had a sign saying "Kingdom Hall." Yes, he had already prepared a structure that could be used for Bible study and meetings!

There were ten others who were interested as a result of the truths Mutesaasira had shared with them. Bible studies were started, and Mats, undeterred by the long distance, conducted them twice a month. The Bible studies progressed well. More than 20 people have become publishers in Kalangalo, and a congregation is flourishing in the nearby town of Mityana. In the meantime, Mutesaasira made rapid progress and was baptized. He is now well into his 70's and serves as a congregation elder.



to support reinforced the ranks of hardworking pioneers. On average, more than 25 percent of all publishers shared in some form of pioneer service during the late 1980's. Some have been able to continue in full-time service up to now.

The pioneers readily supported special annual preaching campaigns that were fondly called Macedonia campaigns. (Acts 16:9, 10) Such campaigns have continued over the years. Congregations preach in unassigned or seldom-worked territory for up to three months. Additionally, some regular pioneers are appointed as temporary special pioneers in territories where there is greater need. The results have been very encouraging. Many sincere people have expressed appreciation for these campaigns, which introduced them to the truth, and numerous new groups and congregations have been formed.

In one campaign, missionaries Peter Abramow and Michael Reiss preached in the town of Kabale and contacted Margaret Tofayo, who had previously studied the Bible. She was convinced that what she had been taught was the truth, and she had already been sharing her beliefs informally. To provide whatever help they could, the missionaries gave her their only copy of *Reasoning From the Scriptures*. When the brothers visited Margaret one last time before their departure, she surprised them with a specially prepared meal. They were overwhelmed by her kindness and generosity but felt uneasy because they realized that she had cooked her only chicken. They knew that the eggs she used to get from this fowl had supplemented her family's meager diet. "Don't worry," she said, "you have given me more during your visit than I am giving you with

this meal.” She was eventually baptized and continued as a zealous publisher until her death.

The rapid growth can also be attributed to the way the brothers used the excellent publications. “Although we try to improve our skills as teachers,” says Mats, mentioned earlier, “it is the Bible and the publications that make an impact on people and move them to make changes in their lives. Even those who cannot read well but who thirst for the truth can have their hearts touched by our practical brochures.”

CONTENDING WITH OBSTACLES

The exciting progress during the late 1980’s, however, did not come without challenges. A coup d’état staged in July 1985 saw the military once again take over the government. Security deteriorated as before, and guerrilla warfare intensified. Fleeing troops went on the rampage, looting property and shooting people at random. For a while, the battle raged around the area where the missionaries lived in Jinja. One day their home was raided by soldiers, but when the intruders learned the identity of the missionaries, they did not destroy anything and took very little. Then, in January 1986, yet another regime came to power and made an effort to restore some stability to the country.

The new government soon had to come to grips with a new and devastating foe—AIDS. When the pandemic struck during the 1980’s, Uganda was one of the nations most affected. A million people are thought to have died, possibly more than those killed in 15 years of political turmoil and civil war. How did the disease affect our brotherhood?

“Some new brothers and sisters came into the truth with much zeal and energy,” explains Washington

Ssentongo, a regular pioneer, “only to be consumed by AIDS. They had been infected with the HIV virus before learning the truth.” Others were infected by unbelieving mates.

“Sometimes it seemed that hardly a month would go by without hearing about the burial of someone we knew and loved,” says Washington, “and everyone was losing family members. Also, there was a lot of superstition about AIDS. Many people linked it to witchcraft and being cursed. This misguided outlook made people fearful, stirred up unfounded prejudices, and undermined reasoning ability.” Nevertheless, our brothers and sisters loyally comforted one another with the resurrection hope and with reassurances of their genuine Christian love.

As the 1980’s drew to a close, there was a great deal of optimism in Uganda. Security was being restored, and the country was making an economic recovery. Infrastructure improved, and social programs were renewed or implemented.

As more people placed greater emphasis on political ideals, however, the neutrality of Jehovah’s Witnesses was at times misunderstood. In one instance, authorities arbitrarily stopped the construction of a Kingdom Hall. Permission for some assemblies was denied, and some missionaries had to leave the country when their permits expired. By the end of 1991, only two missionary brothers remained. What could be done to improve the situation?

Eventually, a delegation of brothers met with authorities to explain our neutrality. Once the authorities understood our position, missionaries were permitted to return to Uganda. The work progressed

unhindered, and in 1993, Uganda was happy to report 1,000 publishers. Then, it took only five more years to reach 2,000 Kingdom proclaimers. Presently there are about 40 missionaries doing fine work throughout the country.

TRANSLATION SPEEDS UP THE INGATHERING

The English language is used throughout the country. Luganda is, however, the most widely used local language, while more than 30 languages are spoken by various ethnic groups. Thus, a key factor that has contributed to faster growth in recent times has been the progress of translation work.

“Although my mother was a faithful witness,” said Fred Nyende, “she found the meetings far more meaningful when I translated study articles from English to Luganda. What I didn’t realize was that I was getting practice for a much greater translation work.” What did Fred mean?

Shortly after he began pioneering in 1984, Fred was asked to teach a Luganda-language course to the missionaries. The following year he was invited to become a member of the Luganda translation team. Initially, he and the other translators did their work at home during their free time. Later, the team was able to do their translation work together full-time in a small room attached to a missionary home. Interestingly, during the ban in the mid-1970’s, some issues of *The Watchtower* had been translated into Luganda and mimeographed. After a while, though, this project was discontinued. It was only in 1987 that *The Watchtower* was once again published in Luganda. Since then, the translation team has been enlarged, and the translators have worked hard to

Translation Teams

Luganda



Acholi



Lhukonzo



Runyankore



translate many more publications for the growing number of Luganda-language congregations. Presently, almost half of all congregations in the country are Luganda speaking.

In time, our publications were also translated into other languages. There are now permanent full-time translation teams for Acholi, Lhukonzo, and Runyankore. In addition, individual publications have been translated into Ateso, Lugbara, Madi, and Rutoro.

The Acholi and Runyankore teams operate from translation offices in Gulu and Mbarara respectively, where those languages are predominantly spoken. This helps the translators to keep up their mother tongue and to produce a translation that is easily understood. At the same time, the local congregations enjoy the support of the translators.

Without a doubt, translation work requires much effort and considerable resources. The diligent Ugandan translators, together with other translation teams worldwide, have benefited from advanced training in language comprehension and translation skills. The results have been well worth the effort and expense—more people in Uganda, from various “tribes and peoples and tongues,” are benefiting from reading Bible truth in their own language than ever before. (Rev. 7:9, 10) As a result, by 2003, there were more than 3,000 Kingdom preachers in Uganda, and just three years later, in 2006, there were 4,005.

NEEDED—MORE PLACES FOR WORSHIP

In earlier years the brothers gathered together for meetings in private homes, community centers, and school classrooms. The first buildings to be used exclusively for Christian meetings were thatched-roof

adobe structures in the rural areas of Namaingo and Rusese. The initiative and efforts of the brothers in these two areas were clearly blessed, and congregations became firmly established there.

In the towns, however, even a modest building represents a large investment, and economic conditions in Uganda made hopes for Kingdom Halls seem unrealistic. It was not until March 1988 that the first permanent Kingdom Hall was dedicated in Jinja. And what effort that construction required—felling trees in a nearby forest, trucking logs out on muddy roads, and constructing the hall! Later, the brothers in Mbale, Kampala, and Tororo also built Kingdom Halls using their initiative and expertise.

Kingdom Hall construction gained impetus in 1999 when a construction group was established with support from the Regional Engineering Office at the South Africa branch. That branch appointed a crew of nine, which included two international servants and their wives. The eager crew quickly learned the job, and they were also able to train local brothers. The building program gained momentum, and 67 halls were completed, on average, within a month and a half each—a remarkable pace considering that power tools are few, water is often scarce, and the supply of construction materials is erratic.

Most congregations in Uganda now enjoy their meetings in their own Kingdom Hall and experience the benefits of having a hall in their community. Interested people are more inclined to come to a proper place of worship than to a school classroom, so meeting attendance has mushroomed and congregations have experienced rapid growth.

COPING WITH RAPID EXPANSION

The phenomenal growth in the congregations, however, was putting a strain on the limited venues available for assemblies and conventions. What could be done to find suitable places that did not require the brothers to travel long distances, especially from rural areas? A happy solution was found when approval was given to build expandable Kingdom Halls. These are regular-size halls with a large, open-air extension that has just a roof and a floor. When the rear wall of the Kingdom Hall is opened for an assembly, the larger audience can be accommodated using the covered area. Such halls have already been completed in Kajansi, Rusese, and Lira, and a fourth is under construction in Seta.

Jehovah's blessing on the spiritual growth in Uganda has also required adjustments in organization. Before 1994, there was just one circuit for the whole country. Later, more circuits were formed to care for the increasing number of congregations and groups and the diversity of languages. Today, with 111 congregations and about 50 groups, Uganda has eight circuits, three of which are Luganda speaking.

Apollo Mukasa, one of Uganda's circuit overseers, was baptized in 1972. In 1980 he entered full-time service instead of pursuing higher secular education. Does he regret his decision?

"Far from it," says Apollo. "I have had so many rewarding experiences as a special pioneer and as a traveling overseer visiting congregations and, in the early days, groups. I particularly enjoyed the advanced spiritual and organizational training at the Ministerial Training School."

In addition to Apollo, more than 50 brothers from Uganda have received valuable education at the Ministerial Training School since 1994, when classes were first held at the Kenya branch. Many of these willing brothers provide vital assistance as special pioneers in smaller congregations and groups, while others serve their brothers and sisters as traveling overseers.

In 1995 a Country Committee was appointed in Uganda to serve under the direction of the Kenya branch. One of the Kampala missionary homes became the home for a fledgling family of eight full-time volunteers, which included the Luganda translation team. In September 2003, Uganda became a branch.

“WE ARE NOW IN PARADISE”

For some time the Country Committee had been trying to keep pace with the growth of the translation teams and care for other increasing office functions. Two properties adjacent to the office in Kampala were purchased to fill the need. Eventually, though, larger facilities were required to organize further expansion. In 2001 the Governing Body gave approval for a ten-acre piece of land to be bought for new branch facilities on the outskirts of Kampala, close to the shore of Lake Victoria.

Initially, the company best equipped to do the construction did not respond to our request because they were too busy to take on more work. But suddenly they changed their mind and, amazingly, submitted the most economical offer to build the new branch. Apparently they had unexpectedly lost a large contract,

prompting them to agree to build the branch as soon as possible.

In January 2006 the Bethel family was delighted to move into the attractive, new two-story, 32-room residence. The complex included an office building, a spacious dining room, a kitchen, and a laundry. The property also has an ecologically friendly sewage system, a warehouse for the shipping and literature departments, and buildings for a maintenance workshop, water storage, and an electric generator. "We are now



Modern Kingdom Halls are quite different from earlier structures (left)





Uganda Branch

Branch Committee: Mats Holmkvist, Martin Lowum, Michael Reiss, and Fred Nyende; office building (below) and residence (right)



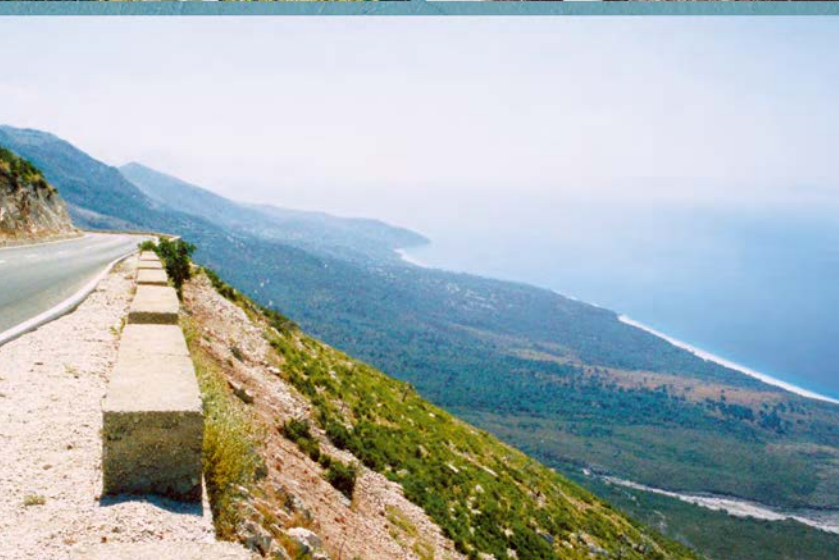
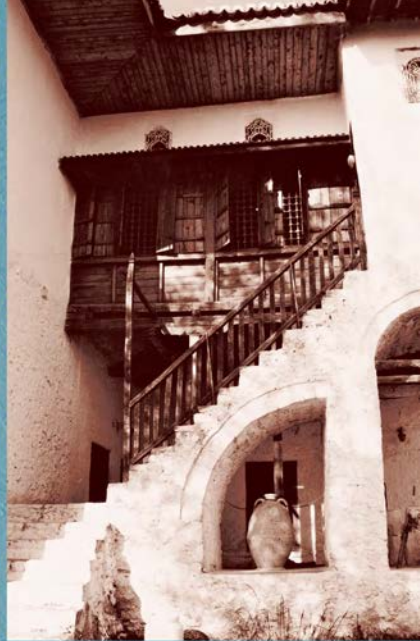
in paradise,” stated one brother enthusiastically, “only everlasting life is missing!” The dedication talk was given on Saturday, January 20, 2007, by Anthony Morris, a member of the Governing Body.

TRUE KNOWLEDGE BECOMES ABUNDANT

Throughout recent decades, in times both turbulent and tranquil, Jehovah’s people in Uganda have learned what it is like to ‘preach the word in favorable season and in troublesome season.’ (2 Tim. 4:2) In 2008 the 4,766 publishers rejoiced to be conducting 11,564 Bible studies and to have 16,644 in attendance at the Memorial of Christ’s death. Those figures, and the ratio of 1 publisher to 6,276 of the population, indicate that the fields here are still “white for harvesting.”—John 4:35.

At the same time, our brothers and sisters in Uganda have learned from bitter experience how suddenly circumstances can change and how quickly tests of faith can be thrust upon us. Nevertheless, their experiences have taught them to trust in Jehovah as well as in the guidance of his Word and the support of our worldwide brotherhood.

An angel told the faithful aged prophet Daniel that in ‘the time of the end, true knowledge would become abundant.’ (Dan. 12:4) With Jehovah’s blessing, true knowledge has certainly become abundant in Uganda. No doubt, in this region where the mighty Nile has its source, abundant waters of truth will continue to bubble forth to satisfy all those who are thirsting for spiritual truth. As Jehovah continues to bless the work throughout the earth, we eagerly anticipate the time when everyone will be united in giving a mighty shout of praise to Jehovah—for all eternity!



Albania

ALBANIA is a small land with a rich, complex story. It has been traversed by tribes and nations, buffeted by world powers, and subjected to decades of radical isolation. While Jehovah's Witnesses here have faced many challenges and much adversity, Jehovah God has sustained and blessed them with delightful spiritual prosperity. The following pages briefly portray their exciting history and show how "the hand of Jehovah" has supported his humble servants in this land.—Acts 11:21.

For centuries, foreign powers struggled for control of Albania, and with their struggle they brought religious conflict. By the early 1500's, the area was religiously divided, with some people professing to be Muslim, others Orthodox, and still others Catholic.

The late 1800's saw the rise of Albanian nationalism and the formation of many patriotic societies. Most people in Albania were peasants, and many blamed years of foreign intervention for their poverty. By 1900, autonomy and independence were burning issues that sparked wars with Greece, Serbia, and Turkey. Eventually, in 1912, Albania declared itself an independent country.

Later, government policy virtually eliminated the practice of organized religion. After World War II, Communist authorities abolished all religion and hailed Albania as the world's first atheist state.

‘TAKING HOLD OF THE TRUTH WITH JOY’

Before 56 C.E., the apostle Paul reported that he and his companions had thoroughly preached the good news “as far as Illyricum,” a Roman province that included part of what is today Albania. (Rom. 15: 19) It is quite likely that some in the region became true Christians at that time, for secular history reports that Christianity took root in Albania in the first century.

The first modern record of true worship in this general area was in 1921, when John Bosdogianis wrote to Brooklyn Bethel from Crete about visiting the Bible study “class” in Ioannina, now a part of northern Greece. At about the same time, many Albanians settled in New England, in the United States, including Thanas (Nasho) Idrizi and Costa Mitchell. When they learned the truth, they immediately got baptized. Brother Idrizi went back to Gjirokastër, Albania, in 1922—the first Albanian to return

to his country with Bible truths. Jehovah blessed his self-sacrificing spirit, and people began to respond. Soon other believing Albanians living in America followed him back home. In the meantime, Costa Mitchell continued preaching in the Albanian field in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

***After learning the truth
in New England, U.S.A., Thanas
Idrizi took the good news to
Gjirokastër, Albania***





Sokrat Duli taught his brother the truth

Sokrat and Thanas Duli (Athan Doulis) were born in Albania but were taken to Turkey as boys. Sokrat returned to Albania in 1922. The following year, 14-year-old Thanas also went back, looking for his brother. "On arrival at our old home," he wrote, "I did not immediately find my brother, for he was working some 125 miles away. But I did find *The Watch Tower*, the Bible, and seven volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*, as well as other pamphlets on Bible topics. Evidently, even in that remote mountain district, there were active Bible Students who had been to America and brought back with them a familiarity with the Bible and a love for it." When the two finally met, Sokrat—by then a baptized Bible Student—did not hold back from teaching his brother, Thanas, the truth.

In 1924, the Romania office was assigned to oversee the newly opened field in Albania. Although the

witness work was still limited, *The Watch Tower* of December 1, 1925, reported: “*The Harp of God*, also *The Desirable Government* and *The World Distress* booklets were translated and printed in the native tongue . . . A goodly number [have been] placed in the hands of the people, and the Albanians are taking hold of the truth with much joy.”

During that time, Albania was torn apart by political strife. What, though, about Jehovah’s servants?

**The title was
first translated
*The Guitar
of God***

“In 1925 there were three organized congregations in Albania, as well as isolated Bible Students,” wrote Thanas. He also noted that the love among them was in sharp contrast to the strife, egotism, and

competition of the people around them. While many Albanians were leaving the country, others who had learned the truth were returning, eager to teach their relatives about Christ’s newly established Kingdom.

Meanwhile, back in Boston, public talks were being delivered in the Albanian language on Sunday mornings to audiences of about 60 people. Those in attendance were serious students who loved to pore over the volumes of the *Studies in the Scriptures*. The book *The Harp of God* was also thoroughly studied, despite some translation errors. (For example, the title was first translated *The Guitar of God*.) Nevertheless, this book helped scores of Albanians learn Bible truth and build a strong faith.

“DON’T BOTHER THEM!”

In 1926, *The Watch Tower* reported that in Albania 13 had attended the Memorial of Christ’s death. “There are only about fifteen consecrated brethren in

Albania,” said the *1927 Yearbook*, “and these are doing their best to spread the message of the kingdom.” The *Yearbook* stated: “In America there are about thirty consecrated Albanian brethren, and these are anxious to assist their fellow countrymen to get a knowledge of the Truth.” The 15 brothers in Albania rejoiced to have 27 at the Memorial in 1927, more than twice the number that had attended the previous year.

During the late 1920’s, there was still much political turmoil in Albania. A government led by Fan Noli, an Orthodox bishop, briefly seized power, only to be toppled by President Ahmed Bey Zogu. He proclaimed Albania a kingdom in which he, as King Zog I, had the final word.

During 1928, Lazar Nasson, Petro Stavro, and two other brothers traveled from the United States to Albania to show the “Photo-Drama of Creation.” At the same time, a Catholic priest and an Orthodox priest from the United States were also in Albania, visiting King Zog I.

“Beware!” the Catholic priest cautioned Zog. “Men have come from America to cause you trouble.”

The Orthodox priest, however, disagreed. He knew the brothers because not long before this, they had left his very church in Boston. “If everyone in Albania were like these men,” he told Zog, “you wouldn’t have to lock your palace doors!”

“Then leave them alone,” replied Zog, “and don’t bother them!”

During that same year, *Songs of Praise to Jehovah* was printed in Boston in Albanian, and as a result, the brothers in Albania eventually learned the melodies and words of the songs it contained. Two favorites were

Albania Overview

Land Albania is located in southeastern Europe, north of Greece and east of the heel of Italy's boot. It covers 11,100 square miles, and its 225-mile coastline stretches along the Adriatic and Ionian seas. White sandy beaches and turquoise waters with a backdrop of tall mountains adorn Albania's riviera, which extends from Vlorë to Sarandë. The north and the interior of the country are filled with jagged mountain ranges, whereas the southwest has fertile lowlands used for farming.

Population The population is estimated at 3,600,000 and is mostly made up of ethnic Albanians, with a small percentage of Roma, Greek, and Serbian ethnic groups.

Climate Along southern coastal flat areas, summers average 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Yet, in the northern mountains of Dibër in the winter, temperatures drop to as low as minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit.

Food A pie with a flaky crust filled with spinach, cheese, tomatoes, and onions or with a variety of other vegetable or meat fillings is called *byrek*. Chicken or lamb baked in a savory yogurt-and-dill sauce is *tava e kosit*. Albanians love eating with a spoon, as soups and stews are common. Often on special occasions when lamb is on the menu, the honored guest will be served the head. Among Albania's many desserts are baklava (pictured right) and *kadaif*, which are baked pastry dough covered with syrup or honey and nuts. For an Albanian, bread is a staple. If you want to tell someone that you have eaten, you simply say, "*Hëngru bukë*," meaning "I ate bread."





MONTENEGRO

KOSOVO



MACEDONIA

A L B A N I A

GREECE

Early Conventions

Aside from the Albanian Public Meetings on Sunday, the Albanians in New England, U.S.A., generally associated with English or Greek congregations. During the 1920's and 1930's, the Albanians enjoyed attending conventions held in the Greek language. Still, they were happy to have their own language badge, which read: "Albanian Bible Students' Three-Day Convention."

Badge (at right) worn by Albanian brothers (below) at a Boston convention in the late 1920's



“Fear Not, O Little Flock” and “To the Work!”—songs that fortified the brothers in the difficult years that followed.

Albanians in general do not mince words, and they appreciate frank speech. What others may consider to be a sharp conversation is to Albanians often normal, animated communication. Albanians who feel strongly about a certain matter not only eagerly share their opinions but also often speak and act on them with strong conviction. These traits have certainly influenced their reaction to the good news.

DIFFICULTIES PRODUCE POSITIVE RESULTS

On account of increasing political and economic problems, more Albanians were leaving the country, and some of them were learning the truth in New England and New York. Wherever there was a concentration of Albanians, the truth flourished. Eager for more literature, the brothers rejoiced to receive the booklets *Kingdom* and *The Crisis* in Albanian.

At the same time, authorities in Albania had confiscated some of our literature. In 1934, however, the *Bulletin* (now *Our Kingdom Ministry*) reported from Albania: “With great joy we write to you that an order has just been issued from the Secretary of Justice to all the provinces to the effect that all our literature is from now on free for circulation . . . All books and booklets which have been seized by the different prefects have been restored to the brethren . . . Now seven brethren have hired an automobile [and are] visiting the distant cities with books while the other brethren are working in places near by.” As a result, in 1935 and 1936, the brothers placed over 6,500 pieces of literature!

“BELIEVED TO BE THE MOST WIDESPREAD BROADCAST IN HISTORY”

“What is believed to be the most widespread broadcast in history will be attempted,” announced the British newspaper *Leeds Mercury* in early 1936. “The occasion will be a speech at Los Angeles by Judge Rutherford, the evangelist.” J. F. Rutherford, who took the lead among Jehovah’s Witnesses at the time, was to deliver a discourse that would be transmitted throughout the United States and Great Britain by radiotelephone and relayed to a number of European countries. “There is one European Country in which the speech will certainly not be heard,” concluded the *Mercury* article. “That is Albania, which has no telephone service.”

A few weeks after the discourse, however, Nicholas Christo in the Albanian congregation in Boston wrote to the world headquarters: “We wish to inform you that from communications recently received from Albania Judge Rutherford’s speech on ‘Separating the Nations’ was heard in that land, thus adding another country to the already long list of those that heard it. It was picked up at two different places . . . , apparently by shortwave transmission. . . . The friends were thrilled beyond expression at hearing Judge Rutherford’s voice.”

How were the Albanian publishers conducting their meetings before *The Watchtower* was published in Albanian? Most Albanians who embraced the truth were men who had attended Greek schools in southern Albania. So they had no difficulty studying the Greek *Watchtower*. Others studied it in Italian or French. While the meetings were held in Alba-

**Nicholas Christo
shared the good news with
Albanian dignitaries**

nian, the brothers translated the literature as they went along.

In Boston too the Monday-night Albanian Watchtower Study was conducted with a Greek edition of the magazine. Nevertheless, many brothers taught their children well, and years later their sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, grandchildren and great-grandchildren became full-time servants. In fact, the Albanian brothers became so well-known for their zealous witnessing that people began calling them *ungjillorë*, meaning “evangelizers.”

THOSE IN HIGH PLACES GET A WITNESS

In 1938, one year before King Zog's monarchy was overthrown, two of his sisters traveled to Boston. In December the magazine *Consolation* (now *Awake!*) reported: “When the Albanian princesses came to Boston, two of us from the Albanian unit of the Boston company of Jehovah's witnesses called at their hotel and presented them with a message of God's kingdom. They received us very kindly.”



The two Witnesses were Nicholas Christo and his sister, Lina. They met not only the princesses but also five other dignitaries, including the then Albanian ambassador to the United States, Faik Konitza [Konica]. Prior to the meeting, an Albanian testimony card was read to the group explaining how extensively the truth was being preached among Albanians. "We are glad to inform you," it stated in part, "that this message has also been proclaimed in Albania for many years and tens of thousands of books have been placed in the hands of the officials and the people of Albania for their enlightenment and comfort."

Ambassador Konitza said to the princesses: "It is their wish that you use your influence that their preaching go on unmolested in Albania. Theirs is a 'new' faith, and they believe that the world [present world organization] will soon come to an end and after that Christ shall reign and then even the dead will be resurrected."

How did Mr. Konitza know so much about the Kingdom message? *Consolation* explained that it was "because a witness, prior to . . . coming into the truth years ago, knew him well . . . and had on several occasions discussed the truth with him."

WORLD WAR II BRINGS TESTS

During the 1930's, Italy took control of Albania, and King Zog and his family fled the country in 1939. The invading Fascist military from Italy banned our literature and made it illegal for the 50 publishers to preach. In the summer of 1940, some 15,000 pieces of literature were confiscated. On August 6, in Këlcyrë, the Fascists arrested nine of the brothers and confined them in a 6-by-12-foot cell. Later they were

moved to a prison in Tiranë. They were detained for eight months without a trial and then received sentences ranging from ten months to two and a half years.

Under these circumstances, prisoners had to get food from their families. But in this case the bread-winners who usually provided for their families were in jail. How would they provide for themselves?

"We got 30 ounces of dry bread, seven pounds of coal, and a bar of soap every 15 days," remembers Nasho Dori. "Jani Komino and I had enough money for two pounds of beans. We used the coal to boil the beans, which other prisoners then offered to buy by the spoonful. Pretty soon we had five big pots of beans going. We eventually had enough money to buy some meat."

In the winter of 1940/1941, Greek armies invaded southern Albania and forced men there to join them. In one village when a brother refused, saying that he was neutral, the soldiers dragged him by the hair and beat him until he passed out.

"Are you still disobedient?" snapped the commanding officer when the brother regained consciousness.

"I am still neutral!" said the brother.

Frustrated, the soldiers let him go.

Several days later, the officer went to the home of the brother whom he had tortured and commended him for his courage. "A few days ago, I killed 12 Italians and received a medal," he said. "But I have a guilty conscience, and I am ashamed to wear it. I keep the medal in my pocket because I know that it is a sign of criminal activity."

NEW RULERS—THE SAME TESTS

Amid the battles and turmoil of the war, the Albanian Communist Party was stealthily gaining a foothold, despite the Fascist struggles to keep control. In 1943, soldiers fighting against the Communists captured a brother, threw him into a truck, took him to the battle lines, and handed him a rifle. He refused it.

“You are a Communist!” screamed the commander. “If you were a Christian, you would fight just like the priests do!”

The commander ordered the soldiers to kill the brother. Just as the firing squad was about to shoot, another officer came by and asked what was going on. Learning about the brother’s neutral stand, he gave a counterorder not to shoot, and the brother was set free.

In September 1943, the Fascists withdrew and the German armies invaded, killing 84 people in Tiranë in just one night. Hundreds were sent to concentration camps. Meanwhile, the brothers typed out messages

**“If you were a
Christian, you would
fight just like the
priests do!”**

of hope and encouragement from the Bible. When a person finished reading the typewritten message, he was asked to return it so that it could be offered to someone else. Then, using the few booklets they had hidden, the brothers just kept preaching. They preached with only parts of the Bible and did not have a complete Bible translation until the mid-1990’s.

Fifteen brothers had served prison sentences by 1945. Two of them had been sent to concentration camps, where one of them was tortured to death. Iron-

ically, while the brothers in Albania were being persecuted for not joining the Axis forces, some Albanian brothers in the United States were imprisoned for not fighting *against* the Axis forces.

In war-torn Albania, confiscated literature was being held at a customs house. In the fury of a battle nearby, the building collapsed, flinging much of our literature into the street. Afterward, curious passers-by picked up books and booklets and started reading them! The brothers did not waste any time collecting the remaining literature.

In 1944, German forces withdrew from Albania, and the Communist army established a provisional government. Immediately, the brothers applied for permission to reprint booklets, but their request was denied. "*The Watchtower* attacks the clergy," the brothers were told, "and in Albania we still recognize the clergy."

THE WAR ENDS BUT PERSECUTION CONTINUES

The new Communist administration imposed high taxes and took over property, factories, businesses, shops, and cinemas. People were not allowed to buy, sell, or rent land, and all produce had to be turned over to the State. On January 11, 1946, Albania declared itself the People's Republic of Albania. The Communist Party won elections and established its government with Enver Hoxha as chief of state.

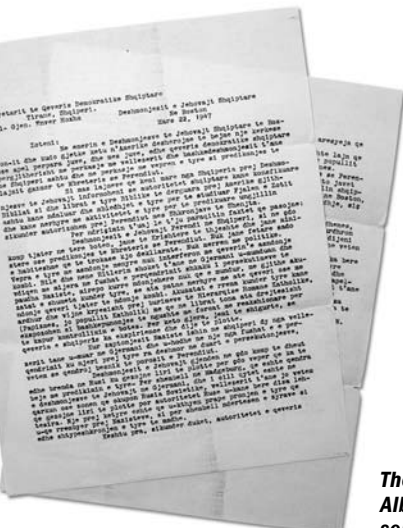
More schools were opened, and children were being taught to read, though the government did not want anyone to read any literature that did not promote Communism. Our publications were seized, and the government also confiscated the small supply of paper and the few typewriters that the brothers had.

Each time the brothers made attempts to get approval to publish literature, they were rebuffed and threatened. But they stood firm. "Jehovah has given us the responsibility to inform the Albanian people about his divine purpose," they told the authorities, "and you are prohibiting us. Now the responsibility rests on your head."

The implicit response from the government was: 'Here in Albania we are the lords! We do not permit theocracy, and we cannot be bothered with you or your God, Jehovah, whom we do not acknowledge!' Undaunted, the brothers continued sharing the good news wherever and whenever they could.

Voting became compulsory in 1946, and anyone who dared to abstain was considered an enemy of the State. Laws were passed that prohibited meetings, and it was a crime to preach. How did the brothers respond?

The brothers in Tiranë, who numbered about 15, organized a preaching campaign in 1947. Immediately they were arrested. Their Bibles were ripped up, and they were tortured. When released, they were ordered not to travel anywhere without police authority. Newspapers ridiculed Jesus and Jehovah.



**The two-page letter that
Albanian brothers in Boston
sent to Enver Hoxha**

The Albanian brothers in Boston learned about this, and on March 22, 1947, they wrote a respectful two-page letter to Enver Hoxha in behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses in Albania. They explained that Jehovah's Witnesses are no threat to the government and pointed out that religious opposers had fomented false accusations because our publications rightly expose their unchristian practices. The letter concluded: "When the Albanian delegation to the United Nations under the direction of Mr. Kapo made a visit to Boston, we visited his hotel. Mr. Kapo graciously and genuinely received us and without bias listened to our message." Hysni Kapo was for years one of the highest-ranking authorities in Albania. Despite this appeal, problems in Albania only increased.

In 1947, Albania became allied with the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and had conflicts with Greece. The following year, Albania cut ties with Yugoslavia and drew closer to the Soviet Union. Anyone who did not support the government's ideology was ostracized. The brothers' neutral stand elicited increased opposition and antagonism.

For example, in 1948, six brothers and sisters were gathered for the Memorial in a small village. The police burst into the meeting and beat the publishers for hours before they let them go. A couple of weeks later, the police arrested the brother who had given the Memorial talk and kept him standing for 12 hours. At midnight, the chief of police snapped, "Why did you break the law?"

"We cannot put the State's law above the law of the Lord!" responded the brother.

Incensed, the chief slapped the brother, asking, "What are you doing?" when he saw the brother turning his head to the side.

"I told you before that we are Christians," replied the brother. "Jesus taught us that when someone hits you, you should turn the other cheek."

"Because your Lord thus commands," snarled the infuriated chief, "I will not obey him, and I will not hit you anymore! Get out of here!"

"I WILL KEEP PREACHING"

Sotir Ceqi was a devout Orthodox who lived in Tiranë. As a child he had tuberculosis of the bone and suffered excruciating pain in his legs. When he was 17 years old, he became so depressed that he decided to kill himself by jumping in front of a train. Shortly before he was about to do so, Leonidha Pope, a relative, visited him. Not knowing what Sotir was planning, Leonidha told him that Jesus cured the sick and that the earth would be a paradise. He also gave Sotir a copy of the Greek Scriptures, which Sotir immediately began to read.

"It was like water poured into me," said Sotir. "I had found the truth!"

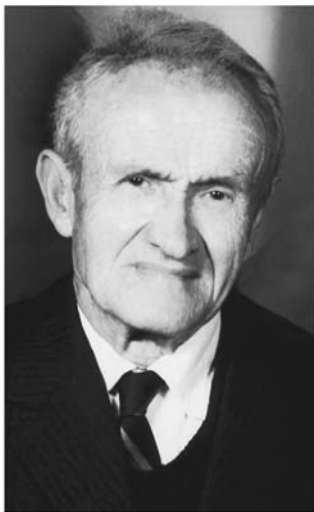
Within a few days and without further contact with Leonidha, Sotir reasoned: 'The Bible says that Jesus preached. The apostles and disciples all preached. Obviously, that is what I must do.'

So, Sotir set out to preach. With the Greek Scriptures in one hand and his crutch in the other, he courageously went from door to door.

During those years the *Sigurimi*, or Directorate of State Security, was responsible for protecting the nation's security. Ever alert to any apparent threat to

Communism, they could hardly fail to notice Sotir's bold preaching. They arrested him, held him for hours, beat him, and ordered him not to preach.

When Sotir was released, he contacted Leonidha, who took him to Spiro Karajani, a doctor who had learned the truth some years earlier. Besides medical attention, Spiro helped Sotir get a better understanding of the truth.



Leonidha Pope

"If you are arrested again," Spiro advised Sotir, "before you sign anything, count every word and every line. Draw a line after their words. Don't leave a space. Read everything carefully. Be sure that what you sign is what you said."

Just two days later, the police caught Sotir preaching again. At the police station, the officers ordered him to sign a statement. As he was about to sign, he remembered Spiro's advice. Despite pressure from the police to sign quickly, Sotir took the time to read every word.

"I am sorry," he said, "I cannot sign this. I did not say these words. If I signed this document, it would be a lie, and I cannot lie."

The police responded by making a whip out of a rope, which they used to beat Sotir for several hours.

When he still would not cooperate, they forced him to hold two wires and repeatedly gave him excruciating electric shocks.

“When I could hardly stand the pain,” Sotir later recalled, “I prayed with tears. Suddenly, the door swung open. There stood the chief officer. He glanced over and quickly turned his head away. ‘Stop!’ he ordered. ‘You’re not supposed to do that!’” They were all fully aware that torture was against the law. The police stopped the torture, but they did not stop putting pressure on Sotir to sign the document. Still, he refused.

“You win!” they eventually said. Reluctantly, they wrote down the statement that Sotir himself had made in which he gave a fine witness. They handed him the document. Despite hours of beatings and shock treatment, Sotir read every word carefully. When a sentence ended halfway across the page, he drew a line at the end of the sentence.

“Where in the world did you learn that?” asked the amazed officers.

“Jehovah taught me not to sign what I did not say,” replied Sotir.

“OK, so who gave you this?” asked an officer, handing Sotir a piece of bread and a piece of cheese. By then it was 9:00 p.m., and Sotir was ravenous, not having eaten all day. “Was it Jehovah? No. We did.”

“Jehovah has many ways of providing,” Sotir replied. “He just softened your hearts.”

“We’ll let you go,” said the frustrated officers, “but if you preach again, you know what will happen.”

“Then do not let me go, because I will keep preaching.”

“You’d better not tell anyone what happened here!” commanded the officer.

“If they ask,” responded Sotir, “I cannot lie.”

“Just get out of here!” barked the police.

Sotir was one of many who were tortured that way. It was only after this faith-testing incident that Sotir was baptized.

For years, mail was censored and only sketchy reports trickled out of Albania. As travel and meeting attendance became increasingly risky, brothers around the country started to lose contact with one another. With no central organization, it was difficult to get a clear picture of what was happening. Nevertheless, the number of those who embraced the truth continued to grow. In 1940 there were 50 brothers and sisters in Albania, and in 1949 there were 71.



*“Jehovah taught me not to
sign what I did not say.”
—Sotir Ceqi*

THEOCRATIC INCREASE AMID POLITICAL TENSION

The 1950’s saw even tighter controls enforced on all aspects of life. Political tensions between Albania and Greece were mounting. Diplomatic relations with England and the United States were nonexistent. Even links with the Soviet Union were strained. Albania was withdrawing into an isolationist shell, closed to the outside world with all communications closely monitored.

Nevertheless, two of the brothers had limited success sending letters and postcards to the brothers in Switzerland. The Swiss brothers replied in French or Italian, using coded language. By means of these postcards, the Albanian brothers learned about the Nuremberg convention that had been held in 1955. News of the freedom enjoyed by the German brothers after the end of Hitler's regime encouraged the Albanian brothers to remain steadfast in the faith.

By 1957, Albania was reporting 75 publishers. Although exact figures were not available, the Memorial was commemorated "by a goodly number," reported the *1958 Yearbook*, and "the Albanian brothers are still preaching."

The *1959 Yearbook* reported: "These faithful witnesses of Jehovah are continuing to do what they can. They have spoken the truth plainly to others and have even tried to publish some things. They are grateful for the meat in due season that has reached them on occasions, but evidently the communistic rulers have closed down all communications from the outside world." The report concluded: "While the rulers of the land may separate the brothers in Albania from the rest of the New World society, they cannot cut off the operation of God's holy spirit upon them."

STRUGGLES CONTINUE

At that time everyone was expected to carry a military identity card. Those who refused would lose their job or be imprisoned. As a result, Nasho Dori and Jani Komino again spent some months in prison. Although a few feared losing their jobs and compromised, a solid core of loyal brothers observed the Memorial in 1959, and many brothers and sisters



***Helen and John Marks before
he returned to Albania***

were still preaching fearlessly.

In 1959 the Ministry of Justice was dissolved, and lawyers were no longer allowed to practice. The Communist Party itself made and applied all laws. Those who did not vote in elections were considered to be the enemy. Fear and suspicion abounded.

The Albanian brothers sent out messages indicating how trying things were but expressing their determination to remain loyal. In the meantime, the world headquarters in Brook-

lyn kept trying to make contact with the brothers in Albania. John Marks, who was born in southern Albania but was living in the United States, was asked to try to obtain a visa for Albania.

A year and a half later, John succeeded in getting a visa to enter Albania, although his wife, Helen, did not. John arrived at Durrës in February 1961 and traveled to Tiranë. There he met his sister, Melpo, who had shown interest in the truth. She helped John make contact with the brothers the very next day.

John talked with the brothers at length and gave them some literature that he had concealed in a

secret compartment of his suitcase. The brothers were thrilled. They had not had a visit from brothers outside of Albania in over 24 years.

John calculated that there were 60 brothers in five towns and a few others in smaller villages. In Tiranë, the brothers were trying to meet secretly once a week on Sundays to review the publications they had kept hidden since 1938.

With so little contact with the organization for so long, the Albanian brothers had to be brought up-to-date on organizational matters and current truths. For example, both brothers and sisters were conducting meetings, and sisters even offered prayers. John later wrote: “The brothers were rather skeptical and concerned about how the sisters would accept the adjusted arrangements, so they asked me to explain them to the sisters privately, which I did. I was glad to see that they accepted them.”

Despite their poverty, these faithful servants zealously supported the Kingdom work. For instance, John took note of two elderly brothers from Gjirokastrë who had saved “from their very little money and had accumulated a certain amount for donations to the Society.” Each one had saved over 100 dollars in gold coins.

The brothers in Tiranë appreciated receiving the booklet *Preaching and Teaching in Peace and Unity*, which provided direction on how the congregations were to function, even under ban. Then, in March, John held the Memorial in Tiranë at the home of Leonidha Pope with 37 present. Right after the talk, John took a boat back to Greece.



“Jehovah Never Left Us!”

FROSINA XHEKA

BORN 1926 **BAPTIZED** 1946

PROFILE She learned the truth as a teenager. Although her parents opposed her, and the authorities isolated her, she always felt close to Jehovah and his organization. She died faithful in 2007.

■ FROSINA learned the truth from her brothers in the 1940's. Her non-Witness parents threw her out of their home because she refused to enter an arranged marriage. A brother, Gole Filloko, took her into his family and treated her like a daughter.

“Once I was arrested because I refused to vote,” Frosina said. “I was alone in a room when about 30 officers surrounded me. One screamed, ‘Do you have any idea what we can do to you?’ I felt that Jehovah was with me and said, ‘You can do nothing that the Sovereign Lord Jehovah will not permit you to do!’ They thought I was crazy, so they said, ‘Get her out of here!’ You see, I was right. Jehovah was with me!”

In 1957, Frosina married Luçi Xheka, and in time they had three children. In the early 1960's, Luçi was made a member of the newly formed Country Committee, which was to

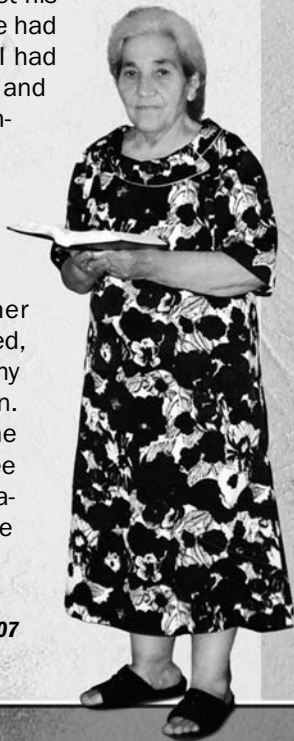


oversee the work in Albania. Soon he was sentenced to five years of *internim* (internment) in Gramsh, far from Frosina and the children. There Luçi continued to preach and talk about the organization. People in Gramsh remember him to this day.

With Luçi in *internim*, the Communist Party blacklisted Frosina, so she could not officially buy food. Frosina says: "It didn't matter. The few brothers shared what they had. We got by because Jehovah never left us!"

After Luçi's death, meetings with the brothers were rarer. Yet, Frosina still preached. She recalls: "John Marks visited us in the 1960's. When I finally met his wife, Helen, in 1986, it felt as though we had known each other for years! Luçi and I had secretly sent messages to the Marks, and they had passed them on to the brothers in Brooklyn."

When the ban was lifted in 1992, Frosina was one of the nine baptized Witnesses left in Albania. She was regular at meetings and was out in the service the very day of her death in 2007. Shortly before she died, Frosina said: "I love Jehovah with all my heart! Compromise was never an option. I knew I had a large family around the world, but now I'm overwhelmed to see how big our theocratic family is in Albania. Jehovah was always with us, and he is still holding us in his loving hands!"



Frosina Xheka in 2007

After the brothers at headquarters considered John's report on his visit to Albania, they assigned Leonidha Pope, Sotir Papa, and Luçi Xheka to care for the Tiranë Congregation and the work in Albania. Spiro Vruho was appointed as a circuit overseer. He was to visit congregations and meet with the brothers every evening, giving talks and discussing the publications. The organization was making every effort to help the brothers in Albania grow spiritually stronger and be brought up-to-date.

Needless to say, with mail being carefully censored, the organization could not send a formal letter providing this direction. Instead, John conveyed the information to the brothers in Albania little by little, using a code that referred to pages in the publications. Soon, reports came back showing that the brothers had got the point precisely. The three brothers in Tiranë were functioning as a Country Committee, and Spiro was visiting congregations regularly.

The Albanian brothers had to find novel ways of sending field service reports to headquarters. One way was on postcards sent to specific brothers abroad. Then, using a fine-tipped pen, the reports were written in code under the stamp. For example, they would write the page number in the *Preaching and Teaching* booklet where the subject "publishers" was considered. Next to that they would write the number of publishers who reported for the month. For many years the brothers abroad used similar methods to communicate with the brothers in Albania.

A GOOD START—THEN A BLOW

Though the Country Committee was working hard to promote pure worship, trouble was soon to come.



***Spiro Vruho served
as a traveling
overseer***

In 1963, Melpo Marks wrote her brother John that two of the three brothers who made up the Country Committee, Leonidha Pope and Luçi Xheka, were “away from their families” and that meetings were not being held. Later came word that Spiro Vruho was in the hospital and that Leonidha Pope and Luçi Xheka were sick, referring to Acts 8:1, 3, where Saul of Tarsus sent Christians to prison. What was happening?

Leonidha Pope, Luçi Xheka, and Sotir Ceqi worked in a factory where members of the Communist Party held talks for all the workers, promoting Communist ideals. One day during a talk about evolution, Leonidha and Luçi stood up and said: “No! Man did not come from monkeys!” The next day both were taken away from their families and sent to work as exiles in distant cities, a punishment Albanians called *internim* (internment). Luçi was sent to the mountains of Gramsh. Because they considered Leonidha to be “in charge,” he was sent to the rugged, cold mountains of Burrel. It would be seven years before he returned to his home in Tiranë.

By August 1964, meetings had essentially stopped. The little information that trickled out indicated that the brothers were under strict surveillance by the *Si-gurimi*. One message beneath a stamp read: “Pray to

the Lord for us. Seizure of literature house to house. They do not allow us to study. Three persons in *internim*." At first, it was thought that brothers Pope and Xheka had been released, since they were the only ones who knew about writing under stamps. However, it later turned out that Luçi's wife, Frosina, had communicated that message.

The brothers who took the lead had been sent away. The vigilant eye of the *Sigurimi* did not let the others communicate with one another. Nonetheless, the brothers in *internim* gave a remarkable witness to whomever they met. The people of Gramsh would say: "The *ungjillorë* [evangelizers] are here. They don't go into the military, but they build our bridges and fix our generators." These loyal brothers gained a glowing reputation that remained for decades.

AN ATHEISTIC STATE IS BORN

On the political front, Albania severed ties with the Soviet Union and became more closely allied with China. Communist ideology was gaining such momentum that some Albanians even dressed in outfits similar to those worn by Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Tse-tung. By 1966, Enver Hoxha abolished military ranks, and in a climate of mistrust, no opposing opinions were tolerated.

State-run newspapers began printing articles against religion, calling it "a dangerous element." Then, in Durrës, a group of students used a bulldozer to destroy a church. In quick succession, in city after city, other religious buildings were destroyed. In 1967, with the government fanning the flames of antireligious sentiment, Albania became the first completely atheistic country. Whereas other Communist states

kept religion under control, Albania did not even tolerate it.

Some Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic priests were imprisoned because of their political activities. Numerous priests fared better because they capitulated and simply stopped being religious. A few historic religious buildings were turned into museums. No religious insignia were permitted—no crosses or icons, no mosques or minarets. The word “God” was used only in a derogatory way. These developments made the situation difficult for the brothers.

During the 1960’s, some of the brothers fell asleep in death. The remaining scattered publishers still spoke up in defense of the truth as much as they could. But even people who had some interest were too afraid to listen.

LOVE FOR THE TRUTH NEVER GREW DIM

In 1968, Gole Flloko wrote to John and Helen Marks about his failing health. It was illegal to preach, and meetings were banned. But Gole, now in his 80’s, described how he regularly spoke to friends and to people he met in the market, the park, or coffee shops. Not long thereafter, Gole died faithful. Like so many others in Albania, nothing could extinguish his irrepressible love for Jehovah and the truth.

With advancing age, Spiro Vruho could no longer make circuit visits as he had. Then, early in 1969, he was found dead at the bottom of a well. The *Sigurimi* reported that he had committed suicide. But was this true?

Although Spiro supposedly left a suicide note saying that he was depressed, the note was not in his handwriting. Also, before his death, Spiro was con-

firmed to be in good spirits. In addition, there were tell-tale black marks around his neck, indicating some kind of assault. No ropes were found at the well on which he could have hung himself, and there was no water in his lungs.

Years later, it came to light that Spiro had been told that if he did not vote, he and his family would be put in prison, and their food supplies would be cut off. The brothers in Tiranë found out that Spiro was killed the day before elections, then thrown into the well. This was not the last time false reports of suicides were used against Jehovah's Witnesses.

A DECADE OF ENFORCED ISOLATION

In 1971, Jehovah's Witnesses around the world rejoiced when more members were added to the Governing Body in Brooklyn, New York. Great was the anticipation when the arrangement for appointing elders and ministerial servants was announced. It was

Llopi Bllani



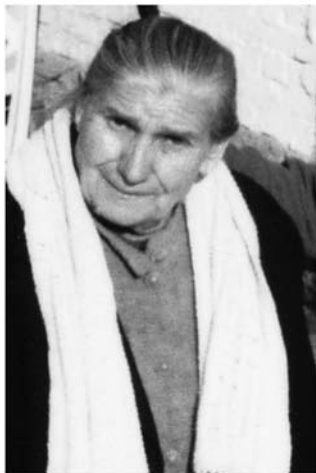
years, though, before our brothers in Albania heard about these organizational adjustments. When they did, it was because tourists from the United States made brief contact with Llopi Bllani, a sister in Tiranë. They learned that no meetings were being held, and they were told that there were only three active Witnesses in the city, though there were actually many more.

Kosta Dabe had been in Greece since 1966 trying to get a visa permitting him to return to his native Albania. At 76 years of age, he wanted to teach the truth to his children. Unable to get a visa, Kosta handed in his U.S. passport at the Albanian border and entered the country, knowing that he might never be able to leave.

In 1975, an Albanian couple from the United States visited Albania as tourists. They wrote that the surveillance was “tighter than ever” and that Jehovah’s Witnesses were being closely watched. Foreigners were accompanied everywhere by official tour guides, many of whom were part of the *Sigurimi*. After the foreigners left, the *Sigurimi* would focus attention on those who were contacted. Tourists themselves were regarded with suspicion and were unwelcome. People were fearful of foreigners.

In November 1976 a letter from Kosta Dabe reported that five attended the Memorial in Vlorë. He knew that in Përmet and Fier, one Witness in each city held the Memorial alone. In Tiranë, two joined at one location and four at another. So, from what he knew, at least 13 were at the Memorial in 1976.

Years later, Kulla Gjithari remembered how she observed the Memorial: “In the morning I made bread and took out



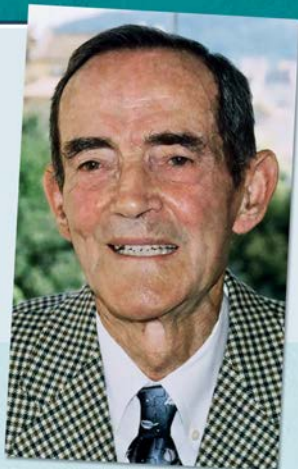
Although alone, Kulla Gjithari still observed the Memorial

From Little Literature to an Abundance

VASIL GJOKA

BORN 1930 **BAPTIZED** 1960

PROFILE He took a firm stand for the truth amid totalitarian rule. Today he serves as an elder in Tiranë.



■ I REMEMBER seeing the Greek *Watchtower* in my village of Bar-mash in the 1930's. My father pointed at the magazine and said, "Those people have it right!" I did not know what his words meant until years later. I loved reading the Bible, though it became dangerous to have one. At an in-law's funeral, I met a brother from Tiranë. I asked about the sign of the "last days" in Matthew chapter 24. He explained it, and right away I told everyone I could what I was learning.

In 1959, I attended a private meeting with the brothers at Leonidha Pope's home. I had been reading the book of Revelation and asked about the identity of the wild beast and Babylon the Great. When the brothers explained them to me, I knew this was the truth! I got baptized a year later.

I was zealous in preaching, and because of that, I was fired from my job. So I got a rickety old wooden cart and delivered goods in Tiranë. Though I had limited contact with the brothers and no literature, I kept preaching.

In the early 1960's, before Leonidha Pope was sent into *internim*, he managed to get a couple of Greek publications that were smuggled into Albania. He translated out

loud, and I wrote down what he said in a notebook. Then, at his direction, I made copies and sent them to a few brothers in Berat, Fier, and Vlorë.

What changes have come about since the 1990's! I am thrilled to see the abundance of literature that Jehovah has given us. From 1992 until today, we have placed over 17 million magazines in Albanian! The new publications are translated into Albanian, and we have the entire *New World Translation* in our language! When I think of the years without literature, I cannot hold back my tears of joy. Having so little for so long has made us very appreciative!



wine. That evening I closed the curtains and got out the Bible I had hidden behind the toilet. I read in Matthew chapter 26 how Jesus instituted the Memorial. I prayed, held up the bread, and then put it down. I read some more from Matthew, prayed again, held up the wine, and then put it down. After that, I sang a song. I was alone physically, but I knew I was united with my brothers all over the world!”

Kulla had little family. Years earlier Spiro Karajani had adopted her when she was young, and she lived with him and his daughter Penellopi in Tiranë. He died about 1950.

INCREASING ISOLATION FOR ALBANIA

A new era of isolation began in 1978 when Albania cut ties with China. A new constitution aimed to make Albania completely self-sufficient, with strict guidelines governing all aspects of life, including the theater, the ballet, literature, and art. Classical music that was considered seditious was banned. Only authorized writers were permitted to own private typewriters. Anyone caught tuning in to television programs from other countries would be interrogated by the *Sigurimi*.

In this climate of severe repression, brothers from Austria, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States entered as tourists in an effort to contact the local brothers. The few who were contacted truly appreciated those efforts. Yet, the brothers in general remained isolated from one another, so that few knew if a visitor was coming.

In 1985, Albanians mourned the death of the long-term dictator Enver Hoxha. Government and social

changes were soon to be made. By the following year, John Marks had died and his widow, Helen, in her mid-60's, decided to visit Albania. "If anything happens to you while you're there," the authorities told her when she picked up her visa, "do not expect help from the outside world."

Helen's two-week trip was a landmark for the handful of publishers in Albania. Helen finally met Melpo, John's sister, who had heard about the truth from her brother 25 years earlier. Though still not baptized, Melpo was a key contact for the organization for many years.

Helen also met with Leonidha Pope and Vasil Gjoka, who was baptized in 1960. She learned about seven Witnesses who were still alive in various parts of the country. She gave the brothers in Albania up-to-date facts about the organization and how the work was moving forward in other Communist lands. Helen cautiously preached informally to those she met. She noted, though, that economic problems abounded in Albania.

"To get a small ration of milk," she said, "it was normal to wait in line from three o'clock in the morning. Many stores had no supplies."

In 1987 the branches in Austria and Greece combined efforts to get other visitors into Albania. In 1988 a couple from Austria, Peter Malobabic and his wife, traveled in as tourists and gave Melpo a blouse, which she was delighted to receive. She was far more thrilled, though, to find the book *"Things in Which It Is Impossible for God to Lie"* hidden inside the blouse.

Later that year, another couple contacted Melpo with more literature, but they had to be extremely

I Found Real Work Back Home

ARDIAN TUTRA

BORN 1969 **BAPTIZED** 1992

PROFILE He learned the truth in Italy and thereafter returned to Albania. He is a member of the Albania Branch Committee.



■ I WAS 21 years old in 1991 when I left Albania with thousands of refugees. We had hijacked a ship headed for Italy. Albania was destitute, so I was thrilled that I could escape. I thought this was a dream come true.

After two days in Brindisi, Italy, I sneaked out of the refugee camp to look for work. A man gave me a small photocopied Bible message in Albanian and invited me to a meeting that afternoon. I quickly thought: 'Hey, why not? Maybe someone will give me a job!'

I never expected the friendly reception I received. After the meeting at the Kingdom Hall, everyone came up to me, and they were warm and loving. A family invited me to dinner. What kindness and dignity they showed me—a scruffy, illegal Albanian refugee!

At the next meeting, Vito Mastroso offered me a Bible study. I accepted and soon recognized that this was the truth. In August 1992, I got baptized in Italy.

My residency documents were finally in order. I had secured a good job and was sending money to my family in Albania. However, I started thinking: 'Now that the work is open in Albania, there is a great need. Should I go back

and serve there? But how will my family react? They need the money I send them. What will people say?’

Then I got a phone call from the office in Tiranë, asking if I would be willing to go there and teach Albanian to a group of Italian special pioneers who were moving to Albania that November. Their example made me think seriously. They were heading off to the territory I had left. They didn’t know the language and were thrilled to go. My language and culture were Albanian. What was I doing in Italy?

I made my decision and got on the boat with those special pioneers. Right away, I began serving at the small Beth-el. I taught Albanian in the morning and worked with translation in the afternoon. At first, my family was not happy. But when they understood why I had moved back to Albania, they began to listen to the good news. Soon my parents, two sisters, and a brother got baptized.

Do I regret having given up work and money in Italy? Not for a minute! I found *real* work in Albania. As far as I’m concerned, the work that really matters and brings lasting joy is serving Jehovah with everything you have!

Ardian with his wife, Noadia



cautious because the *Sigurimi* was watching them like hawks. Within the few minutes that the visitors were unaccompanied by their so-called official guides, they could make only brief contact. They learned that Leonidha was ill and that many other brothers in Albania had grown old and could not move about freely.

CONDITIONS BEGIN TO CHANGE

The political scene was changing in 1989. The death sentence for attempting to escape from Albania was abolished. Helen again visited that summer. She spent hours transmitting information and instructions entrusted to her. Vasil Gjoka made brief visits to the brothers as well as he could.

The *Sigurimi* heard that Helen was visiting there and paid her a visit. Instead of causing problems, they said that they wanted a gift from America. How quickly people changed!

The Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, and it took no time for the effects to ripple into Albania. In March 1990 a riot against Communism broke out in Kavajë. Thousands of people flooded foreign embassies in Tiranë, trying to leave the country. Students demanded reforms and went on hunger strikes.

In February 1991, a massive crowd toppled the 30-foot-high statue of Enver Hoxha, which had dominated Tiranë's Skanderbej Square for years. As far as the people were concerned, the dictator was gone. During March, some 30,000 Albanians hijacked ships from Durrës and Vlorë and sailed to Italy as refugees. That month, multiparty elections were held for the first time in years. Even though the Communist Party won, it was clear that the government was losing its grip.

Helen Marks made a final visit to Albania in August 1991, but this time she found that conditions had changed. Just one month earlier, the government had opened an office of the secretary of religion, legalizing religious activities once again after 24 years. The brothers lost no time in increasing their preaching activity and organizing congregation meetings.

Vasil Gjoka traveled to Greece and spent time at the branch office learning how to organize the preaching work. Because his Greek was limited, the brothers who knew a little Albanian taught Vasil as best they could. Back in Tiranë, Vasil conscientiously applied what he had learned and tried to organize the two weekly meetings better, one of which was a study of the recently released Albanian edition of *The Watchtower*.

“Previously, the meetings were opened with song and prayer,” recalls one brother, “using the songs the older brothers had taught us. We enjoyed the study, then closed with a song—or two, or three, or more! Eventually, we closed with prayer.”

In October 1991 and February 1992, Thomas Zafiras and Silas Thomaidis brought literature to Albania from Greece. They met with the brothers in Tiranë and with unbaptized publishers in Berat and compiled lists of the many interested persons who needed help. After decades of spiritual isolation, the populace was spiritually famished. In Berat, for instance, interested ones were holding meetings, even though there were no baptized brothers in the city. What could be done to fill this spiritual need?

AN UNEXPECTED ASSIGNMENT

Michael and Linda DiGregorio were missionaries serving in the Dominican Republic. Michael’s grand-

parents were among the Albanians who got baptized in Boston in the 1920's, and he had a working knowledge of Albanian. So when the DiGregorios decided to visit relatives in Albania in 1992, they asked the Governing Body if it was advisable for them to meet with brothers during their three-day visit.



To their surprise, the Governing Body asked them to stay in Albania for three months to help organize the preaching work.

At the branch in Rome, brothers from Greece and Italy briefed the DiGregorios on the situation in Albania and showed them photographs of some of the Albanian brothers, including Vasil Gjoka. When the DiGregorios flew to Tiranë in April 1992, Albanians from abroad were once again welcome in the country. Nevertheless, there was still much civil unrest, and people were anxious about the future.

As Michael and Linda walked out of the airport, Michael's family rushed up to greet them. At the same time, Michael recognized Vasil Gjoka, who had also been advised that the DiGregorios were arriving that day.

"You go with the family," Michael said to Linda, "and I'll be right back."

After embracing Linda, the relatives grabbed the DiGregorios' luggage and hurried toward the automobiles, while Michael went quickly to Vasil.

"I will be back in Tiranë on Sunday," Michael said hastily to Vasil, "and then I will find you."

Koço, a member of Michael's family in Albania, who did not know that Michael and Linda were Jehovah's Witnesses, rushed up to him and said: "What are you doing? We do not talk to strangers!"

Winding their way through the country to Korçë, the DiGregorios realized how different this was from the Caribbean. "Everything was old, brown or gray, and covered with dust," recalls Michael. "Barbed wire was everywhere. People looked dejected. There were hardly any automobiles around. Windows were broken. Farmers worked the land by hand. Not much had changed from my grandparents' day! It felt as if we had stepped back in time!"

"YOUR TRIP WAS GUIDED BY GOD"

Koço had something that he had kept hidden for years, and he wanted to show it to Michael. When Michael's grandmother died, the family in Boston wrote a long letter to the family in Albania. The first ten pages covered mostly family matters, but near the end of the letter, the family had explained about the resurrection.

"The police checked the letter," Koço told Michael, "and read the first few pages. Then they got bored and said: 'Take it! It's only family stuff!' When I read the last part, I was so happy to hear something about God!"

Michael then revealed that he and Linda were Jehovah's Witnesses, and he gave Koço a thorough witness.

As people did in Bible times, Albanians feel an obligation to care for and protect their guests. So Koço insisted on accompanying Michael and Linda to Tiranë.

"In Tiranë, we could not find Vasil's home," Michael remembers, "because there were no street signs. So Koço suggested that we ask at the post office."

"When he returned from the post office," continues Linda, "Koço seemed stunned, and we drove straight to Vasil's apartment."

Later, Koço explained: "When I went into the post office and asked about Vasil, they said: 'That man is a saint! Do you know what he has been through? There is not a more noble man in Tiranë!' When I heard that, I knew that your trip was guided by God! I cannot stand in the way!"

GETTING ORGANIZED IN TIRANË

Vasil was delighted to see the DiGregorios, and they spoke for hours. Only at the end of the evening did Vasil reveal that Jani Komino, who had been imprisoned with Nasho Dori, had died that very morning. Why had Vasil stayed at home and missed the funeral of this dear brother and close friend? "Because," he explained, "someone sent by the Governing Body was coming."

Michael and Linda needed to stay in Tiranë, but the government in power at that time did not allow foreigners to live in the city. What could they do?

“We put the matter in Jehovah’s hands,” said Michael, “and eventually we found a small apartment and moved in.”

“The owners kept the key,” remembers Linda, “and came in and out at will. In addition, we had to go through someone else’s apartment to get to ours. But at least our place was out of the way, and we preferred not to be in the public eye.”

The DiGregorios listened for hours as the older brothers in Tiranë told about the trials they had endured. One of the problems, though, was that some of the older ones were suspicious of one another.

“Individually they were loyal,” recalls Michael, “but they wondered if the others had been faithful. Nevertheless, even though some kept their distance from one another, they did not keep away from us. After calmly discussing the matter, they agreed that the most important thing was to make Jehovah’s name known. They were united in their love for Jehovah and were excited about the future.”

The lack of a functioning congregation was evident. For example, when Kulla Gjithari and Stavri Ceqi first saw the booklet *Examining the Scriptures Daily*, they flipped through the pages with no idea what it was.

“Oh, *Manna!*” Stavri suddenly exclaimed, referring to the book *Daily Heavenly Manna for the Household of Faith*, which was used back when Stavri learned the truth.

“By the way,” asked Kulla, “how’s the president, Brother Knorr, doing? Is his friend Fred Franz OK?” That showed how many years had slipped by since they became isolated!

WHAT A MEMORIAL THAT WAS!

The 9-by-12-foot room where the brothers normally held their meetings in Vasil Gjoka's home was too small for the Memorial. Instead, the 105 in attendance gathered in a room that used to be headquarters for the Communist Party's newspaper. This marked the first time in Tiranë that the Memorial was not held in a private home. Though there were only 30 publishers in Albania in 1992, they rejoiced to have 325 at the Memorial.

The group of interested persons in Tiranë was increasing steadily, with meeting attendance in Vasil's apartment up to 40. Some new ones wanted to become unbaptized publishers, and others wanted to get baptized. The brothers spent many hours meeting with those who wanted to get baptized. Because the book *Organized to Accomplish Our Ministry* had not been published in Albanian, each question had to be translated orally for the baptism candidates. Intensive study was conducted with some newer ones to be sure they understood the truth. Though none had ever had an actual Bible study, it was amazing how good their Bible knowledge was.

LEGAL RECOGNITION AT LAST!

Over the next weeks, the brothers spent many hours with lawyers and officials, trying to get the Kingdom-preaching work legally registered. A group of brothers and interested persons in Tiranë had already submitted a formal request, but a new government had come to power, so persistence was needed.

"Everything was done on foot," recalls one brother. "While walking in the city, we would happen to

meet the minister of human rights, the minister of the interior, the minister of justice, the chief of police, members of the constitutional court, and other influential men. These men were kind and were pleased that things were loosening up. Most of them already knew about the *ungjillorë*. There was no doubt that Jehovah's Witnesses were alive and active in Albania."

For weeks, officials had said that the government would grant legal recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses, but nothing materialized. There was a breakthrough, though, when Angelo Felio, a brother from the United States with Albanian background, visited his family in Tiranë. While in Albania, Angelo went with the brothers to meet with the legal adviser of the government minister who was authorized to grant legalization. The adviser was happy to learn that Angelo's family was from her region of Albania.

"What village is your family from?" she asked Angelo. Amazingly, it was her own village.

"What is your family's name?" she asked.

Surprisingly, Angelo turned out to be her relative, but their families had lost contact many years earlier.

"I was already impressed by your charter and planned to help," she said. "But now, I am obliged to help because you are family!"

A few days later, the legal adviser handed the brothers Order No. 100, granting legal recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses in



Order No. 100 granted legal recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses

An End to Secret Meetings

ADRIANA MAHMUTAJ

BORN 1971 BAPTIZED 1993

PROFILE She was invited to a secret meeting, and then things changed dramatically. Currently she is serving as a special pioneer.



■ WHEN my cousin died in 1991, I overheard a woman named Barie encourage my aunt with Bible thoughts. Right away I asked questions and was invited to meet her friend Rajmonda at her place of work. Rajmonda's family was meeting at the "class." Rajmonda told me that I would have to have Bible discussions for a while, because new ones were not let into the class right away. I loved what I was learning, and soon I was allowed to attend.

That class was made up of unbaptized people who had originally begun meeting with Sotir Papa and Sulo Hasani. Years earlier, the *Sigurimi* had infiltrated classes and had turned the brothers in to the police. So all were cautious, and they were careful about who was invited to meetings!

At my first meeting, I learned that we were supposed to make a list of our friends and tell them what we were learning. Right away I talked to Ilma Tani. Soon she was allowed to come to the class. Our little class of 15 grew quickly.

In April 1992, Michael and Linda DiGregorio visited Berat. It was recommended that we openly invite people to his talk. As a result, 54 persons came. None of us were

baptized. After that meeting, we bombarded the DiGregorios with questions for hours. We finally learned how our group was supposed to function.

Soon Jehovah's Witnesses were legally recognized. Ilma and I, along with two brothers, went to Tiranë to learn how to go from door to door. We were asked to show others in Berat what we had learned. We tried our best. When four Italian special pioneers were assigned to Berat in March 1993, the congregation really got going, with two open meetings a week.

That March, Ilma and I got baptized at the first special assembly day in Tiranë. There were 585 people present. We became regular pioneers and were soon invited to become the first local special pioneers. Nothing was secret anymore. We were assigned to Korçë.

Ilma later married Arben Lubonja, who had been preaching alone in Korçë just a few months earlier. Eventually, they went into the circuit work, and they now serve at Bethel. I'm happy that I invited Ilma to that class!

Recently, when I was sitting at a district convention with over 5,500 present, I thought of our secret class.

What changes Jehovah has made! Meetings and assemblies are wide open now. Though hundreds of brothers have left Berat on account of the economy, our little class has now turned into five bustling congregations!



Ilma (Tani) and Arben Lubonja

Albania. At last, the worship of the true God, Jehovah, which had been under ban since 1939, was now legally recognized and unrestricted! “There are no words to describe the feelings we had in our hearts that day,” the DiGregorios said.

A couple of weeks later, the branch in Greece, which had oversight of Albania, sent Robert Kern to visit Tiranë. Robert announced to the local brothers the registration of the work and the formation of the Tiranë Congregation. He also informed them that their congregation’s territory was “the whole country of Albania.” Organized door-to-door preaching needed to proceed in real earnest. In Tiranë, a three-bedroom house was rented for a missionary home and office, with a large adjoining room that could be used as the first Kingdom Hall.

AN ISOLATED SHEEP IS FOUND

“Are there any Witnesses in Vlorë?” the brothers asked when discussing the advancement of the preaching work in Albania. Some knew

Congregation meeting in the first Kingdom Hall, 1992, Tiranë



TIME LINE **Albania**

1920-1922 Albanians learn the truth in the United States.

1922 Thanas Idrizi returns to Gjirokastër with the truth.

1925 Three small Bible study classes are functioning in Albania.

1928 The "Photo-Drama of Creation" is shown in many cities.

1935-1936 An extensive preaching campaign is carried out.

1939 Jehovah's Witnesses are banned.

1940 Nine brothers are imprisoned for neutrality.

1946 Communist government begins.

1960 A Country Committee begins to oversee the work in Albania.



▶ **1930**

▶ **1940**

▶ **1950**

▶ **1960** ▶

1962 Members of the committee are sent to labor camps.

1967 Albania officially becomes atheistic.

1992 Jehovah's Witnesses are legally recognized.



1996 Milton Henschel attends the first Bethel dedication.

1997 The *trazira* begins.



2005 The complete *New World Translation* is released in Albanian.

2006 The branch office is dedicated in Mëzez, Tiranë.

 Total Publishers
 Total Pioneers

1980

1990

2000

2010



***Areti Pina preached faithfully
on her own***

only of an old woman who was reportedly senile. Then a woman came to the office saying that she and her family were *ungjillorë* and that someone named Areti had taught them the truth in Vlorë. So brothers from Tiranë made a trip to Vlorë to find Areti.

Areti Pina, a short elderly lady, invited the visitors into her home, but she seemed somewhat reserved. When they explained that they were

her spiritual brothers, it produced absolutely no reaction.

“Can I ask you some questions?” Areti suddenly said after a few minutes. Then she started firing questions at them: “Do you believe in the Trinity? What is God’s name? Do you believe in hellfire? What happens when we die? What about the earth? How many will go to heaven?”

The brothers answered each of the questions.

“Do you preach?” Areti then asked.

“Yes,” said one brother, “we preach.”

“But,” she responded, “*how* do you preach?”

“We preach from house to house,” replied the brother.

Areti burst into tears, leaped to her feet, and embraced the brother.

“Now I know that you are my brothers!” she exclaimed. “Only Jehovah’s people preach from house to house!”

Protestant groups in Vlorë had heard that Areti was a religious person and had asked her to join them. “But I did not want anything to do with Babylon the Great!” she explained to the brothers. “So I needed to make sure that you were my real spiritual family!”

Areti was baptized back in 1928 at the age of 18. She traveled up and down mountains on foot, preaching with Bible in hand. Although Areti had lost contact with the brothers for years, she kept preaching faithfully on her own.

“Jehovah is wonderful,” said Areti through her tears. “He never forgot me!”

People thought Areti was crazy for keeping faith in God under Albania’s ironclad totalitarian rule. Yet, Areti was anything but senile. Her mind was as clear as ever!

SO MUCH TO DO!

Now that our work was legally registered, there was much to do to develop Kingdom interests in Albania. The brothers needed to be brought up-to-date and strengthened spiritually. Publications were needed in Albanian for the brothers and for the field. And there was an urgent need for more preachers. Who could help?

In 1992 special pioneers arrived from Italy and Greece and attended an Albanian-language course. At the same time, a small team began translating our literature. Even though at times there was no electricity for as long as 21 days in a row, the brothers kept a

good sense of humor and busied themselves with the work at hand.

There was much menial work too. When it was cold, the missionary home needed to be heated. But it was not possible to buy wood in Albania. How were the brothers going to keep warm? Brothers from Greece came to the rescue by sending a supply of large pieces of wood and an electric saw. There was still a problem, though, because the opening in the woodstove was tiny, and there was no electricity to operate the saw. Fortunately, one of the brothers had a friend on the other side of Tiranë who owned an ax. Because there were no buses, it took two hours to get the ax to the missionary home, and it had to be returned before dark. “We all took turns chopping wood while we had the ax,” recalls one of the missionaries, “but we managed to keep warm!”

In the midst of all the wood chopping and the language courses, the Albanian translation team enjoyed the first of many visits by Nick and Amy Ahladis from Translation Services, now in Patterson, New York. Their kind and balanced approach was an enormous help to the new translators, who learned quickly and did good work. The Italy branch printed the literature and shipped it into Albania.

All the hard work was more than worth it in view of the wonderful response the publishers were enjoying in the field ministry. New publishers too were ablaze with zeal. Lola, for example, had just begun publishing, yet she spent 150, 200, or even more hours each month in the ministry! When advised to be careful and to pace herself in service, Lola replied: “My life has been a waste until now! What else is worth my time?”

THE WORK FORGES AHEAD

March 1993 was a historic month for Albania. The special pioneers began new assignments in Berat, Durrës, Gjirokastrë, Shkodër, Tiranë, and Vlorë; *The Watchtower* of March 1 was the first issue prepared by the Albanian translation team; the brothers had their first Theocratic Ministry School, thus all five meetings were held for the first time; the first Albanian edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry* came out; and the first special assembly day was held in Tiranë's Skanderbej Square at the Ballet-Opera Theater.

Delegates arrived from Greece and Italy to enjoy this historic special assembly day. Nasho Dori opened the assembly with prayer, thanking Jehovah for all the blessings they were enjoying. The attendance reached 585, and 41 were baptized! Among them were children and grandchildren of brothers who had served Jehovah faithfully in Albania.

Great was the excitement in 1993 over having a district convention in Albania for the first time. There were more than 600 people in attendance, with delegates from Austria, France, Greece, Italy, and Switzerland. How thrilled the Albanian brothers were that after having been isolated for so long, they could associate freely with so many brothers from so many lands!

For the sake of better organization, the Governing Body appointed a Country Committee made up of Nasho Dori, Vito Mastroso, and Michael DiGregorio to serve under the supervision of the Italy branch. One of their first priorities was to find property to house the office and the growing translation team.

Among the next group of special pioneers who started learning Albanian was Stefano Anatrelli from Italy. After five weeks of language training, he was called into the office and told: “We’d like you to visit the special pioneers and groups as a circuit overseer.”

“But I can’t even speak Albanian properly!” was Stefano’s first reaction. Yet, he viewed this assignment as a wonderful privilege. After getting some help preparing a couple of talks, Stefano set off to the far-flung corners of Albania. About 30 years had elapsed since Spiro Vruho had visited the brothers as circuit overseer during the ban. In 1995, Stefano was appointed as a member of the Country Committee.

In 1994, a third group of pioneers, from Italy, came to Albania. The new Albanian publishers were stirred up by the zealous spirit of all those pioneers. At the end of the 1994 service year, there were 354 publishers engaging in the preaching work.

However, many publishers had emotional challenges. Changing from an extremely oppressive system to a completely free society was not easy. In order to survive under totalitarianism, they had to be careful that they never openly expressed their feelings to others—especially not to foreigners. Nevertheless, the foreign brothers and sisters understood this and patiently worked to gain the trust of the newer ones.

That same year the elderly brothers and sisters as well as the new publishers were delighted to meet Theodore Jaracz, the first member of the Governing Body to visit Albania. Over 600 gathered for a talk he gave in Tiranë.

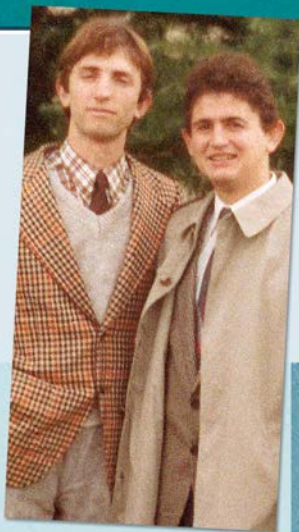
“OK, Let’s Go!”

ALTIN HOXHA AND
ADRIAN SHKËMBI

BORN Both in 1973

BAPTIZED Both in 1993

PROFILE They left university to pioneer, and they now serve as congregation elders.



■ EARLY in 1993, they were university students in Tiranë. A friend talked to them for hours about what he was learning from Jehovah’s Witnesses. Everything was supported by the Bible. Later they learned more, applied what they learned, and were baptized the same year. That summer, they went to preach in Kuçovë, where there were no publishers.

After returning to Tiranë, Adrian said to Altin: “What are we doing in school? Let’s really get the work going in Kuçovë!”

Altin’s response was, “OK, let’s go!” Seven months after their baptism, they were back in Kuçovë.

Jehovah richly blessed their efforts. Today over 90 publishers are active in Kuçovë. Some 25 Witnesses have left there to serve as pioneers or to serve at Bethel. Adrian and Altin conducted studies with many of them.

Thinking about the university, Altin smiles and says: “The apostle Paul decided not to pursue a worldly career, and in 1993, I made a similar decision. Never have I regretted saying, ‘OK, let’s go!’ ”



An old villa was converted into modern offices

In the meantime, property had been purchased in Tiranë for an office. In less than six months, a team of hardworking foreign brothers remodeled an old villa into modern offices and constructed a residence for 24 people. The dedication was held on May 12, 1996, when Milton Henschel of the Governing Body visited Albania.

THEY PREACHED ALONE

A young man in Korçë, named Arben, read the Bible literature his sister had sent him and recognized the ring of truth. He wrote to the Albania office, and for a while he continued to learn the truth by means of correspondence with the brothers. To provide further spiritual assistance, two brothers made a special trip to meet him. During the course of the conversation with Arben, it became evident that he qualified to be a publisher. The two brothers then took him to the center of Korçë and let him watch as they preached to passersby.

Arben relates: "Then they gave me magazines and said, 'Now it's your turn.' They told me to go alone, and I did."

It was a few months before special pioneers came to help him. In the meantime, though, people responded to his preaching. Not long after the special pioneers arrived, a group was formed.

Toward the end of the year, the pioneers in Vlorë called the office, saying that Areti Pina was ill and wanted to meet with one of the responsible brothers. When the brother arrived, Areti dismissed everyone else from the room so that she could talk to him privately.

"I do not have long to live," she said, gasping for air. "I have been thinking, and I need to ask you something. I cannot absorb all the details, but I need to know, Has the book of Revelation been fulfilled?"

"Yes, Areti, most of it has," responded the brother, who then outlined a few things that are still awaiting fulfillment. Areti paid rapt attention to every word.

"Now I can die in peace," she said. "I needed to know how close we are."

For many years Areti had been an enthusiastic publisher—whether preaching alone in the mountains or from her bed when she was sick. Shortly after that conversation, Areti faithfully finished her earthly course.

HIS FAITH WAS STRONG TO THE END

Nasho Dori, in his 80's, was ill, and his strength was failing. But one group of brothers in particular needed his encouragement—the young brothers who were being called up for military service. The Orthodox clergy in Berat, who envied the rapid

growth among Jehovah's Witnesses, pressured the authorities to prosecute these young men.

Six young brothers there who refused to join the military faced the prospect of several months in prison. Recognizing their need for encouragement, Nasho sat up in bed and videotaped a message for them.



"Do not be afraid," Nasho urged the young brothers. "We have been through this before. Jehovah will be with you. If you go to prison, do not worry. It will turn out for the good of Jehovah's name."

"If you go to prison, do not worry."—Nasho Dori

As Nasho's health continued to fail, he called brothers to his bedside and said: "I had to pray for forgiveness. Last week I was in so much pain that I prayed to die. Then I thought, 'Jehovah, you are the Author of life. Everything you stand for is life. I was asking for something that goes against your will. Please forgive me!'"

When Nasho learned that the number of publishers in Albania had grown to 942, he said: "We have finally got a great crowd in Albania!" A few days later, he died, finishing his earthly course.

THE TRAZIRA—A TIME OF ANARCHY

By 1997 there was much exploitation, bribery, and corruption. Many Albanians sold everything they had

and invested all their money in get-rich-quick pyramid schemes. When their investments failed, embittered citizens took their protests to the streets.

At that very time, while the special assembly day program was in progress, a sister who worked for a high-ranking official told the brothers that the prime minister was about to resign. She learned that there was going to be an outbreak of unprecedented violence. The special assembly day program was cut short so that the brothers could get home quickly. Two hours after the program ended, the country was in a state of emergency and a curfew was enforced.

No one knew exactly what was happening. Rumors were rampant. Was it foreign intervention or local politics? The pyramid schemes had collapsed, and most people had lost everything they had invested. Rioting erupted in Vlorë. People broke into national armories and plundered all the weapons and ammunition. As newscasts reported what was happening, people in city after city resorted to violence. The country was in an uproar, and the police lost control. Albania disintegrated into armed revolt and anarchy.

Most of the 125 foreign full-time servants in Albania went to Tiranë for safety. Many Albanians blamed foreigners for what was happening, so it was prudent for the foreign pioneers to leave the country. Because the airport was closed, some of the pioneers from Italy were taken to Durrës, where the port was in the hands of local armed men. After a tense wait of 12 hours, the pioneers boarded a boat for their home country.

The Country Committee was in daily telephone contact with brothers in various parts of the country.

During the early part of the day, there was an eerie calm on the streets. But by the afternoon, people began firing their weapons and continued doing so right through the night until dawn. Some even had anti-aircraft artillery. The struggle became known as the *trazira*, or turmoil.

“FOR THE GOOD OF JEHOVAH’S NAME”

Arben Merko, one of the six brothers from Berat who was imprisoned for neutrality, relates: “In my cell there was a small hole in the wall. A man in the next cell asked who I was.” Arben witnessed to him for weeks. One day the voice was no more.

After Arben was released from prison, a young man came to his door. Arben did not recognize the man’s face, but his voice was familiar—it was the man who had been in the prison cell next to his.

“I came to give you this,” he said to Arben, handing him an amplifier.

“During the *trazira*,” he told Arben, “I stole this amplifier from your Kingdom Hall. But what you told me in prison touched my heart. I want to have a clear conscience before God, so I have brought it back to you.”

Arben could not help but recall Nasho Dori’s final message to the group of young integrity-keepers: “It will turn out for the good of Jehovah’s name.”

TAKING CARE OF JEHOVAH’S SHEEP

The departure of the foreign elders left most congregations and large groups in the care of 19- and 20-year-old ministerial servants. One day, at great risk to themselves, three of these young brothers traveled from Vlorë to Tiranë. Concerned about the food short-

age, the Country Committee asked if the brothers needed any material provisions in particular.

“We’ve just run out of field service report slips,” the young men answered. Like elderly faithful ones from years ago, they were more concerned about spiritual needs than physical needs. They then related that many people were responding positively to the good news because of all the fear and uncertainty.

Soon after the Memorial, the office received a phone call. “We are a group of your sisters in Kukës,” said one of them, “and we have been holding meetings alone since the pioneers left.”

As a result of the turmoil, the brothers in Tiranë had lost communication with the publishers in Kukës. Nevertheless, a group of seven unbaptized publishers had held the Memorial in two places. Although they were concerned that they may not have conducted the Memorial perfectly, they were happy to report that 19 had attended at the two venues. Amazingly, despite the curfew and difficult conditions in 1997, there were 3,154 present at the Memorial throughout Albania. And despite the anarchy,

“We’ve just run out of field service report slips”

the publishers kept preaching, giving comfort while also being careful.

When the Country Committee found out that the brothers in Gjirokastrë needed food and literature, they discussed whether it would be safe to send a truckload of provisions there. However, their discussion was interrupted by a sister who said that a news broadcaster who might have some helpful information had come to see the brothers.

Without knowing what the committee was discussing, the news broadcaster advised: “Whatever you do, do not go down south tomorrow. We have received reports that something dangerous is being planned in Tepelenë.” Because the truck to Gjirokastrër would have to go through Tepelenë, the brothers decided to cancel the trip.

The next day, shortly after 11 o’clock, a special news bulletin reported that an extremely violent and bloody clash had taken place in Tepelenë and that the bridge in the city had been blown up. How grateful the brothers were to Jehovah that they had been prevented from going there that day!

For weeks the Bethel family heard gunshots throughout the night, and they often conducted morning worship with the sound of machine-gun fire and bombs in the background. Guns were being fired into the air at random, and there was always the risk of stray bullets. For safety’s sake, the Bethel family stayed indoors, and the translators sat on the floor away from the windows while they continued with their work.

In April 1997, a force of 7,000 United Nations troops arrived to restore order to the country. By August the UN forces had left Albania, and it was possible for the brothers to arrange a district convention. The publishers were delighted; for months they had been able to meet only in small groups.

Armed robbers held up some of the buses chartered by the brothers to bring them to the convention. However, when they found out that the passengers were Jehovah’s Witnesses, they said: “You people are different! We cannot harm you.”

A Teacher of Atheism Now Teaches the Truth

ANASTAS RUVINA

BORN 1942 **BAPTIZED** 1997

PROFILE He taught atheism to subordinates in the military before learning the truth from his children. Today he serves as an elder and special pioneer.



■ IN 1971, after graduating from the military academy, I became a political brigade commissioner. That term was used because the government had abolished military ranks in 1966. Among my responsibilities was indoctrination of those in my command with the ideology that God does not exist. I expounded on the philosophy that religion is the opium of the people.

I had a wife and three children. In 1992 my son, Artan, started attending religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tiranë. Then he took his sister Anila along. I considered that to be a waste of their time and very stupid. Consequently, many arguments broke out at home.

One day, out of curiosity, I picked up a copy of *The Watchtower*. Oddly enough, it sounded reasonable. Yet, even though Artan and Anila kept encouraging me, I would not study the Bible. I reasoned that you can't study the Bible if you don't believe in God. In 1995 the book *Life—How Did It Get Here? By Evolution or by Creation?* came out in Albanian. Artan and Anila gave me a copy. That's all it took to convince me. God does exist! I no longer had an excuse;

I had to study. Soon my wife, Lirie, joined me, and we were convinced of the truth.

To be honest, my progress took time. I was 53 years old. It was not easy to let go of my political and military way of thinking. I have to say it was the Creator, Jehovah, who helped me move forward.

I did not want to become a publisher because I worried about preaching to the very people I had taught atheism. What would they think? One day at our study, Vito Mastorosa read me the account of Saul of Tarsus. That did it! Saul persecuted Christians, learned the truth, and then preached. With Jehovah's help, I knew I could do the same.

I still laugh at myself sometimes as Jehovah continues to help me become less strict, more reasonable, and less of a commanding officer. I'm slowly getting there.

I don't argue with my children about the truth anymore. On the contrary, I am proud of them. Artan serves as a special pioneer and elder. My daughters, Anila and Eliona, both serve at Bethel in Tiranë.

Lirie and I serve as special pioneers. We feel privileged to teach people the truth about our Grand Creator and watch the changes in their lives. What a joy it is to offer real hope based on the promises of the only living and true God, Jehovah!

***Left to right: Artan, Anila, Lirie, Anastas, Eliona,
and her husband, Rinaldo Galli***



What effect did the *trazira* have on the preaching work in Albania? Rather than hinder the growth, the danger and anxiety seemed to make many people more conscious of their spiritual need. As a result, in just 15 months, 500 new publishers started in field service, bringing the total of publishers to over 1,500.

KOSOVO IN THE SPOTLIGHT

After the *trazira*, the guns seemed to disappear, and the congregations kept growing. However, problems were erupting in neighboring Kosovo. The war there was felt in Albania, as waves of refugees streamed over the border. The Albanian publishers lost no time in providing the refugees with a message of hope and with comforting literature. They also cared well for a group of 22 made up of Jehovah's Witnesses and their little children.

In August, when the war ended, the Kosovar brothers returned to their homes, but not alone. They were accompanied by Albanian and Italian brothers, including ten special pioneers, who wanted to provide needed spiritual help. By the end of the 1999 service year, there were 1,805 publishers in Albania and 40 in Kosovo.

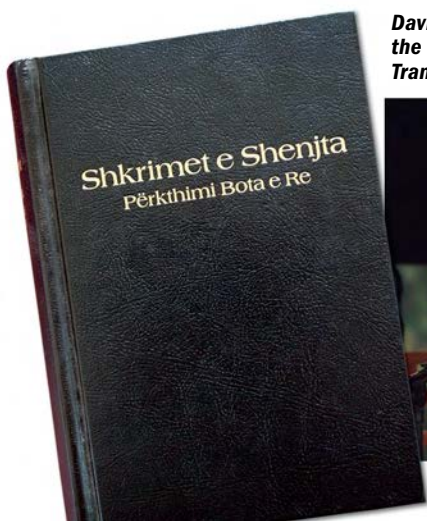
INCREASED SPIRITUAL STABILITY

"I'm glad we are translating so much," Nasho Dori had said before he died, "but what we really need is the *New World Translation*—a good-quality Bible on which to build our faith!" Just three years after Nasho's death, in 1999, the Governing Body gave approval for the translation of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* into Albanian.

At the convention in 2000, a wonderful surprise awaited the Albanian audience—the release of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* in Albanian! The hardworking translation team poured their heart and soul into the project and completed it in just under a year. A regular pioneer who was formerly a Communist member of the parliament wrote: “How wonderful! Only after studying this translation have I been able to appreciate how beautiful the Bible is, with its prose, poetry, and flowing accounts. When I read how Jesus performed miracles and was rebuked and mocked, I felt deep emotions that I had never felt before. I could imagine each touching scene so clearly!”

By now, there were 2,200 publishers in Albania and the Bethel family had grown to 40. Apartments had been rented, but more room was needed. Consequently, the Governing Body approved the purchase

**David Splane releasing
the complete “New World
Translation” in Albanian**



of a seven-acre piece of land on the outskirts of Tiranë in Mëzez. To help oversee the growing field in Albania and in Kosovo, the Country Committee began functioning as a Branch Committee in 2000.

In September 2003, when construction began on the new branch facilities, Albania reported 3,122 publishers. At the same time, translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Albanian was well under way. Not only was the preaching work advancing rapidly but the publishers were making commendable spiritual progress. Many of the 20 young men who made up Albania's first class of the Ministerial Training School in August 2004 had been teenagers when they cared for congregations during the *trazira* a few years before. How happy they were now to have received further theocratic training!

‘THE DEVIL WAS ANGRY’

“Jehovah Teaches People to Kill Themselves!” read the newspaper headlines in February 2005. News reports on television and in newspapers carried false rumors that a teenage girl who had committed suicide was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact, the girl had neither studied nor attended meetings. Nevertheless, opposers used the incident to launch an all-out attack.

Teachers ridiculed Witness children. Brothers lost their jobs. People clamored for our work to be banned. Though brothers tried to reason with the media, the news reports only got worse.

It was clear that Jehovah's servants needed guidance and support to cope with this new attack. So the branch arranged for a special talk to be presented

to show the value of continuing to preach the truth in order to counter the venomous lies. The brothers were encouraged to reason with people and not give in to fear of man. They could point out to honest-hearted ones that the number of Jehovah's Witnesses had increased phenomenally over the past few years, which would not have been the case if Witnesses had been killing themselves. This type of attack was nothing new. The brothers were reminded of the false suicide reports about Spiro Vruho back in the 1960's. The present reports would fail miserably, and fail they did!

Just a few months later, in August, David Splane of the Governing Body joined the 4,675 delegates from Albania and Kosovo at their district convention. The audience could barely contain their delight when Brother Splane released the complete *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in Albanian!

"No wonder Satan was trying hard to hinder us!" said one old-timer. "He was angry because so many good things were happening to Jehovah's people."

Despite negative reports in the media, God's servants in Albania continued to grow stronger. Many unbelieving husbands and relatives who saw through the untrue news reports began to study the Bible and became publishers. In the face of Satan's most vicious onslaughts, Jehovah's will was being accomplished. The Bethel family moved into the new branch, and the second class of the Ministerial Training School got under way.

BRANCH DEDICATION

In June 2006, Theodore Jaracz and Gerrit Lösch, both of the Governing Body, were among the 350 delegates from 32 countries present for the dedication of the new branch facilities. Also at the dedication was Sotir Ceqi, who had been tortured with electric shocks in the 1940's. Now in his late 70's, he continues to serve with joy.

"I only dreamed of this day," said Frosina Xheka, still serving loyally despite decades of intense hardship. Polikseni Komino, Jani's widow, was there to tell about her daughters and granddaughter, who were serving as regular pioneers. Also in attendance was Vasil Gjoka, now hunched over after years of suffering. His eyes filled with tears as he reminisced about visiting Leonidha Pope and being baptized secretly in 1960.

The former branch in Tiranë was turned into a Kingdom Hall complex and missionary home for

Missionaries currently serving in Albania



14 missionaries. Six classes of the Ministerial Training School have produced a crop of faithful, self-sacrificing special pioneers who are an enormous asset to the Albanian field. More than 950 local regular and special pioneers reflect a similar glowing evangelizing spirit.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Our brothers and sisters in Albania deeply appreciate the Bible and the literature that has been translated into their mother tongue. Jehovah's work in this part of the field continues to progress steadily. In addition to the eager and capable men who are being trained to take on theocratic responsibility, "the women telling the good news are a large army."—Ps. 68:11.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Albania are living testimony to the truthfulness of the inspired words: "Any weapon whatever that will be formed against you will have no success, and any tongue at all that will rise up against you in the judgment you will condemn. This is the hereditary possession of the servants of Jehovah." (Isa. 54:17) Because of Jehovah's undeserved kindness and strength, they remained unbroken by totalitarian rule, torture, isolation, malicious media publicity, and personal problems.

Jehovah's people in Albania face the future absolutely certain of God's loyal love and blessing. Regardless of difficulties, they rejoice in the privilege of making their heavenly Father's heart glad and in the hope that is set before them. (Prov. 27:11; Heb. 12:1, 2) If one thing has echoed through Albania's theocratic history, it is this: Jehovah never forgets the sacrifices, great and small, made by his loyal servants, young and old. —Heb. 6:10; 13:16.



Albania Branch

***Branch Committee: Artan Duka, Ardian Tutra,
Michael DiGregorio, Davide Appignanesi, Stefano Anatrelli***





Belize

SITUATED on the Yucatán Peninsula and bounded by Mexico, Guatemala, and the Caribbean Sea is the tropical gem known as Belize. This little country, formerly called British Honduras, is a melting pot of cultures, languages, customs, foods, and religions.

With a population of about 300,000, Belize is uncrowded compared with the rest of Central America. Its lush, tropical jungles are home to gorgeous birds and fascinating animals, including the elusive jaguar. Here, too, you will find many ancient Maya ruins and majestic mountains adorned with towering palms and cascading waterfalls. A fascinating feature of the land is its huge network of caverns, some of which are connected by clear, winding rivers. The Belize Barrier Reef, which stretches the full length of the coastline, contains a spectacular array of corals and is dotted with cays—low islands covered with white sandy beaches and coconut palms.

EARLY HISTORY

The Arawak and the Carib, who migrated from South America, were early settlers in Belize. Centuries before the Europeans came to what was called the New World, Belize is thought to have been the heart of the Maya civilization, with flourishing ceremonial centers and magnificent temples.

Early efforts by Europeans to colonize Belize are not well documented. What is known is that Spain's attempts to subjugate the Maya failed. In 1638, British pirates settled on the coast of Belize. By the middle of

the 17th century, settlements for exploiting logwood (from which a valuable dye was extracted) had been established.

The British brought slaves to the country from markets in Jamaica and the United States, as well as directly from Africa, to harvest logwood and mahogany. Even though whip-wielding slave drivers were not as common in the timber industry as they were elsewhere in the Americas, living conditions were deplorable and ill-treatment was common. Many slaves revolted, committed suicide, or escaped and established independent communities within Belize. In 1862, Belize was proclaimed a British colony, and in 1981 it gained independence.*

SEEDS OF TRUTH TAKE ROOT

One of the first Witnesses, then called International Bible Students, to arrive in Belize was James Gordon, who was baptized in Jamaica in 1918. In 1923 this slightly built, soft-spoken young man left Jamaica to live in Belize. He settled in a remote Maya village called Bomba, where he married and began to raise a family. Although far from his Christian brothers, he shared the good news with his friends and neighbors.

How did the Kingdom good news reach the rest of this British colony? In 1931, Freida Johnson, a small woman in her late 50's from the United States, began preaching in parts of Central America. Traveling alone, sometimes on horseback, she preached in towns, villages, and scattered banana plantations on the Caribbean Coast.

* Although Belize was called British Honduras until 1973, we will refer to the country as Belize unless the context demands otherwise.

Arriving in Belize City in 1933, Freida rented a small room from Mrs. Beeks. She heard Freida reading from the Bible and singing a hymn before going out each morning. Many could not help noticing Freida's unflagging zeal, such as when she did not stop for the usual afternoon rest as did most others in the Tropics. During her six-month stay in the country, she stirred the interest of a Jamaican baker named Thaddius Hodgeson. Although concentrating her efforts in Belize City, Freida also visited some rural areas, where she made contact with James Gordon in Bomba. Freida's fine work enabled those who shared the same beliefs to become acquainted with one another and begin meeting together.

MORE HELPED INTO THE TRUTH

Though communication was very difficult at the time, James and Thaddius maintained contact as they carried on the preaching work in their respective regions. As early as 1934, Thaddius wrote to the world headquarters in Brooklyn requesting a transcription machine and recorded Bible talks.

On Saturday nights Thaddius played recorded talks in front of the Supreme Court building, in a small park that had been used as an exercise ground for the army garrison. Known as "the Battlefield," the park became just that. Thaddius played recordings of Brother Rutherford's talks on one side, and the Salvation Army band played on the other side, accompanied by the booming of a large drum played by Beaumont Boman. Soon, though, Beaumont responded to the Kingdom message and joined Thaddius on his side of the battlefield. "I give thanks to my God,

Jehovah,” said Beaumont, “for making me put down that drum!”

Another good place for public preaching was a small area in front of the open market known as Mule Park, where there was a hitching post for mule carts used to transport goods into and around town. Thaddius—who was tall, brown-skinned, and good-looking and was known as a very dynamic speaker, could often be heard there. Despite the strong hold of Christendom’s churches on the Bible-loving people of Belize, many honesthearted ones, such as James Hyatt and Arthur Randall, both from Jamaica, responded to the good news.

On the north side of Belize City, Thaddius began conducting meetings in his bakery. To do so, he had to push aside the serving counter and place boards on chairs to create crude benches. On the south side of the city, meetings were held at the home of Cora Brown. In addition, Nora Fayad recalled that when she was a young girl, the few Witnesses in her area used to meet in Arthur Randall’s yard, next to her home.

VIGOROUS PREACHING YIELDS RESULTS

The hallmark of many of those early Witnesses was their tireless preaching. For example, James (Jimsie) Jenkins, though blind, walked all over Belize City, feeling his way with his stick. Molly Tillet says she could hear him preaching at the market, even when she was two blocks away! James was also remembered for paying rapt attention at the meetings, where he sat leaning slightly forward on his stick to catch every word. He memorized many Bible texts, which he used in the preaching work.

Meanwhile, James Gordon was known in the villages around Bomba for preaching to everyone he met, carrying his literature in a portable mahogany case in one hand and a transcription machine in the other. Every Sunday in the predawn darkness, he paddled upriver in his hollowed-out log canoe and then walked for many miles in the territory throughout the day. At day's end he could be seen trudging up the path from the river in the fading light. After supper, James conducted a Bible study with his six children until he was just too tired to hold up his book.

At that time, Brother Gordon's wife was not yet a Witness. In fact, one day when he was away, she burned much of his Bible literature. When James returned and saw what she had done, he stayed calm. With a firm voice, he simply said, "Don't ever try that again!" His children were impressed by his self-restraint because they knew what a painful loss his wife had inflicted on him.

DRAWN BY JEHOVAH'S SPIRIT

One Sunday morning James preached to Derrine Lightburn, a devout Anglican, who accepted the book *The Harp of God*. She could not hear everything the soft-spoken man said, but she wondered what he was talking about. Later, during a stay with her aunt Alphonsena Robateau in Belize City, a man stopped at the gate and asked permission to enter the yard.

"He looks just like the man who brought me that nice book I told you about," Derrine told her aunt.

It turned out to be, not James Gordon, but James Hyatt. He played his transcription machine for

***Alphonsena Robateau and
Amybelle Allen along with three
special pioneer brothers***

the two women and placed *The Harp of God* with Alphonsena. Although very involved in politics, Alphonsena and her sister Octabelle Flowers had been searching for the truth. What Alphonsena heard that day moved her to exclaim to Octabelle: "You know, a man came here talking about the Kingdom of God. I think this is what we're looking for!"

Octabelle made a point of being there when the brother returned. All three women—Alphonsena, Octabelle, and Derrine—embraced the truth and were baptized in 1941.

The mother of Alphonsena and Octabelle had recently passed away, and Amybelle Allen, their younger sister, prayed to God that she too would die and go to heaven to be with her mother. Octabelle invited Amybelle to hear the talk "Where Are the Dead?" Amybelle accepted the invitation and never stopped attending meetings.

"Those people were drawn by Jehovah's spirit just by reading the publications and going to the meetings," says Olga Knight, Derrine's daughter. "They were so excited about the truth that they soon started telling others what they had learned."



For example, Olga's father, Herman Lightburn, accepted the truth after reading the book *Children* during a stay in the hospital. He was so enthusiastic about what he was learning that he rented a truck every Friday to take the small band of publishers to witness in the surrounding villages. He also did extensive preaching in the rural area of Black Creek, where he had a farm.

"My parents preached along the Belize River," recalls Olga, "and the people would come with lanterns in the evening to listen. Every morning when we were on vacation at the farm, my parents, my aunt Amybelle, her daughter Molly Tillet, and I—all mounted on my father's horses, one behind the other—would ride along the trail until we got to Crooked Tree. There, while the horses were let out to graze, we studied the Bible with interested ones. As a result, some of those families came into the truth."

In 1941 the first group of new publishers was baptized in the waters of the Caribbean in Belize City. Included in this group was George Longworth, who pioneered from that year until he died at the age of 87 in 1967. He did much of his

**Herman and Derrine Lightburn
with Stephen, their son**



Belize Overview

Land A low coastal plain rises to the Maya Mountains in the south. The forests are home to jaguars, pumas, black howler monkeys, peccaries, green iguanas, and crocodiles, as well as up to 60 species of snakes, such as the very poisonous fer-de-lance, locally known as the yellow-jaw tomygoff. There are almost 600 species of birds, including the endangered scarlet macaw and the gorgeous keel-billed toucan. The kaleidoscope of marine life ranges from corals, sponges, and parrot fish to manatees, barracuda, and whale sharks.

People Inhabitants include Maya (Kekchi, Mopan, and Yucatec), Creoles (people of mixed African and European ancestry), Mestizos (mixed Spanish and Maya), Garinagu (mixed African and Carib), East Indians, Lebanese, Chinese, and Europeans, including German and Dutch Mennonites.

Language English is the official language, but Belize Creole, Spanish, Garifuna, Kekchi, Maya, German, and Mandarin are also spoken.

Livelihood Much of the population is employed in growing and exporting cane sugar and tropical fruit. Fishing and tourism also provide income for many.

Food The country's varied cultures contribute to a deliciously diverse cuisine. Rice and beans cooked together in coconut milk is a traditional favorite, often served with fried or stewed chicken, beef, or fish and fried ripe plantains. Delectable seafood is abundant and very popular.

Climate Located on the Caribbean Coast of Central America, Belize has a hot, humid, subtropical climate and is vulnerable to hurricanes.



preaching in the interior, where he opened up new territories, riding on horseback for miles between towns and villages. George's consistent zeal for the ministry and his regular meeting attendance were especially encouraging to newer ones. Jehovah was using these zealous and faithful servants in a powerful way to draw honesthearted ones into his organization.

THE FIRST MISSIONARIES ARRIVE

October 5, 1945, saw the arrival of Elmer Ihrig and Charles Heyen, graduates of the first class of Gilead. Just the day before, however, a hurricane had struck about 100 miles south of Belize City. The ten-mile stretch of road from the airport to the city was under water, so the two missionaries were transported in large army trucks. Thaddius Hodgeson placed cement blocks and wooden boxes in the water in front of his home so that when the two arrived, they could enter without getting their feet wet.

The brothers in Belize eagerly anticipated the arrival of the first missionaries. James Gordon, León

***A group of Witnesses with sound cart, Belize City, 1940's;
(1) Thaddius Hodgeson, (2) George Longworth***



Requeña, and Rafael Medina were willing to travel from the north of the country to Belize City to meet the new missionaries—quite a challenge at that time! “There was no highway connecting the north of the country and Belize City,” explains Ismael Medina, Rafael’s grandson. “There were only *picados*, rutted trails used for mule carts. There were no houses along the way, so they slept wherever night found them, despite the snakes. When they had met the missionaries and received instructions and literature, the three brothers walked all the way back again. It took days!”

The missionaries were introduced to the public in Mule Park in a most unusual way. James Hyatt began the program with a scathing attack on the clergy for their false teachings, which provoked an outburst of profanity from some of the onlookers. At the end of his talk, he abruptly pointed to the two new missionaries and said, “I hand these two over to you!” That was about as much as the public was going to find out about the two new brothers on that occasion!

There was no doubt that those early brothers had an outstanding love for Jehovah and Bible truth, as well as an abiding hatred for false religious teachings. It was clear too that the missionaries had valuable experience to share with the eager publishers that would help them become more effective preachers.

The two missionaries started their work in Belize City, which had a population of about 26,700 at the time. It was built on fill, which brought it to the height of just one foot above sea level, and it had poor drainage. Added to that, the climate was hot and humid. The homes had no city water supply, but in

almost every yard, there was a large wooden vat to collect rainwater during the rainy season. Sometimes, though, the rain came with a vengeance, such as in 1931 when a hurricane demolished the city and killed more than 2,000 people.

PROGRESS DESPITE RESTRICTIONS

Although there was never a ban against the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Belize, the government imposed a ban on our publications for some time during World War II. Shortly before the arrival of the missionaries, though, these restrictions had been lifted.

Nevertheless, *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1946, reporting on the activity of the two missionaries in Belize, stated: "In the interior a Roman Catholic priest still tries to have the ban enforced against the literature received by mail. The Roman Catholic clergy resent the presence of these two missionaries of Jehovah's witnesses; and one Irish-American priest . . . grew indignant that the British Colonial Government should let them into the country. . . . The two [missionaries] reminded the priest that he claimed to be an American himself, and they sent him scurrying away by showing him from American prison statistics that the Roman Catholic system was no real guardian of the morals of the people of the United States."

The first accurate record of publishers in Belize was in 1944 when seven publishers reported. To give a more effective witness, the publishers began using testimony cards in the door-to-door work. Within a year of the arrival of the missionaries, the number of publishers rose to 16.

In 1946, Nathan H. Knorr and Frederick W. Franz, from the world headquarters, visited the country and established a branch office here. Brother Knorr gave a talk on organization, explaining the need to report field service on the printed forms provided. Brother Franz urged the congregation to show mercy to others by continuing to preach the Kingdom message. Later in the week Brother Knorr explained to an audience of 102, which included many interested persons, why the interested ones should be glad to be with Jehovah's people. He invited them to study the Bible regularly with the Witnesses.

That same year, Charles and Annie Ruth Parrish and Cordis and Mildred Sorrell arrived. Truman Brubaker and Charles and Florence Homolka followed them in 1948. They were most welcome, for much work lay ahead.

MUCH WORK TO DO

"There was only the one small congregation then," wrote Elmer Ihrig, "there being no congregations in the outer districts. I used to go to these places and spend a couple of weeks at a time, sowing seed by placing books, taking subscriptions and giving talks." During that first year, Charles Heyen traveled by truck to Orange Walk,

Elmer Ihrig expanded his ministry to the outer districts



where he worked the territory and encouraged the brothers to hold regular meetings.

The only link with the southern towns was by boat. So Elmer and Charles traveled on the *Heron H* to reach the coastal towns of Stann Creek (now Dangriga) and Punta Gorda, two Garifuna settlements,



Charles Heyen encouraged the brothers to hold regular meetings

with the goal of opening up the preaching work there. Back then, Punta Gorda could only be reached by a 30-hour boat trip from Belize City. Elmer made the trip and then gave a public talk to about 20 people in the lobby of the hotel where he was staying.

Olga Knight remembers Elmer accompanying her family to the remote village of Crooked Tree, where her father conducted meetings along the tree-lined

river. The local brothers appreciated the hard work and humble attitude of the missionaries.

By 1948, there was an average of 38 publishers, and four new congregations were formed outside of Belize City. These small congregations were made up of a handful of publishers in rural communities, such as the Lightburn family in Black Creek, the Gordon family in Bomba, the Humes and Aldana families in Santana, and Brothers Requeña and Medina

The Garinagu Respond to the Truth

BEVERLY ANN FLORES

BORN 1961 **BAPTIZED** 1993

PROFILE A Garifuna who accepted the truth and now helps her people learn about Jehovah.



■ THE Garinagu (plural of Garifuna) trace their ancestry to the early 17th century, when slaves intermarried with indigenous Carib. Garifuna is an Arawakan language with elements of French and Swahili.

Garinagu religion is a mixture of African and Amerindian traditions, with strong Catholic influences. The *dugu*, for example, is an elaborate ceremony to appease dead ancestors by offering them food and drink. “My mother did not believe in the *dugu* ceremony,” says Beverly. “She couldn’t see how God could approve of all that food being buried. She used to say, ‘Food is for people to eat! And if the dead are loved ones, why would they come back and do you harm?’”

Beverly goes on to explain what happened when she learned the truth. “Being a Garifuna motivated me to go to Dangriga to preach to my people. I knew that most Garinagu would respond better to one of their own people. Many stop and listen when I speak Garifuna, and several have begun to associate with the congregation. They have seen that they can break away from unscriptural traditions and not be killed by evil spirits.”

in Orange Walk. The missionaries and special pioneers were concentrating their efforts on Belize City, as they had been encouraged to do. Jehovah blessed their diligent efforts, and an ever-increasing number of sincere people were becoming Jehovah's servants.

Brother Knorr's next visit, in December 1949, was timely and encouraging. He spent one evening in the missionary home talking about the challenges of missionary work. Many new publishers wanted to serve Jehovah but did not appreciate the need to dedicate their lives to him and symbolize it by baptism. Brother Knorr reminded the missionaries that patience, endurance, and love for people were needed. He also reminded them that they had enjoyed good results.

NO MORE MISSIONARIES ALLOWED

By 1957 the brothers sensed that the government was keeping a close check on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Belize. For example, at a presentation of one of the Society's films in Orange Walk, a police officer questioned the brothers from the branch about their time of arrival in the village and the time they would be leaving. He said that this was for a report to the superintendent of police and pointed out that a plainclothes officer was present at a recent assembly to make a similar report.

Between 1951 and 1957, ten more missionaries had been granted permission to enter the country. Suddenly, in June 1957, the brothers received a letter from the police and immigration headquarters, stating: "The Government of British Honduras [now Be-

lize] has decided that, with immediate effect, no further Ministers of your Society will be permitted to enter British Honduras from overseas." A request to meet with the governor to ascertain the reason for this decision was denied.

Although some other religious groups were not permitted to bring in new missionaries, they were allowed to replace missionaries that left. This provision was not extended to Jehovah's Witnesses, who needed to replace two missionaries. In 1960 the brothers wrote to the authorities in Belize as well as in London pointing out that they were not applying for new missionaries but, rather, requesting replacements.

The curt reply was: "The Governor-in-Council has reached a firm decision not to permit the entry into British Honduras of any further missionaries of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society."

When the brothers requested an interview, they were told: "The Governor-in-Council reached a firm decision in 1957 not to permit the entry into British Honduras of any further missionaries of your Society; and in these circumstances His Excellency does not consider that it would serve any useful purpose for him to see you on this matter." It seemed that the brothers had come up against a stone wall.

Finally, after almost five years of continual requests, the branch received a letter in October 1961 from the Secretariat in Belize, which said: "I am to inform you that your most recent representations have been considered by the British Honduras Government which has decided that, for the time being, it will permit further foreign missionaries to enter this



“Jehovah Always Took Care of Us”

LILLY MILLER

BORN 1928 **BAPTIZED** 1960

PROFILE She raised six children on her own and has been in full-time service for 47 years.

■ “IN 1959, Amybelle Allen talked to me about the Bible,” recalls soft-spoken Lilly. “We had been warned in church about all these ‘false prophets’ who were going from door to door. I agreed to a study using only the Bible, accepted the truth, and was baptized the following year.

“At first, it was difficult for me to preach. My hands were trembling so much I could hardly hold my Bible. But my desire to share what I was learning was ‘like a burning fire shut up in my bones,’ as Jeremiah said, and I had to speak, whether people listened or not.”—Jer. 20:9.

How did Lilly raise her six children by herself and manage to pioneer? “I prayed to Jehovah, and he made it possible,” says Lilly. “Three times a week, I got up at 3:30 a.m. to make biscuits. My daughters and I baked them in a wood-stove, and people lined up to buy them hot out of the oven. After all the biscuits were sold, my children left for school and I went out in field service. Jehovah always took care of us.”

Since 1969, Lilly has been pioneering in Corozal. Her eldest son and two of her daughters have entered the full-time service, and she has had a share in helping 69 people to baptism.

country as replacements for the existing foreign missionaries who are already here.” As a result, in 1962, Martin and Alice Thompson from Jamaica were permitted to enter the country as missionaries.

THE WORK WAS UNHINDERED

It was obvious that religious opposers had tried to slow down our work, but had they succeeded? The report for the 1957 service year showed a peak of 176 publishers in seven congregations. Belize had a population of 75,000 people at the time, which means the ratio was about 1 publisher to every 400 people. The 1961 service year report showed 236 publishers, a 34 percent increase, bringing the ratio to 1 publisher to every 383 people! Jehovah’s promise to his people proved true: “Any weapon whatever that will be formed against you will have no success, and any tongue at all that will rise up against you in the judgment you will condemn.” (Isa. 54:17) The preaching work continued unhindered.

Many couples who studied the Bible were living together without being legally married, and some drifted from one partner to another. But as soon as they learned of Jehovah’s high standards, many went to great effort and expense to become properly married. Some of them were over 80 years of age!

A NEW KINGDOM HALL IS NEEDED

In December 1949 the brothers paid in advance to use Liberty Hall in Belize City for a series of four special talks to be held in January 1950. The day before the final talk, an announcement was aired on the radio that the hall was going to be used the next day for the funeral service of a prominent person.

Despite several appeals by the brothers to the owners of the hall, the special talk was interrupted by a group of people who entered the hall and loudly started making preparations for the funeral. Eventually, the brothers had to ask the police to intervene. Clearly, the brothers needed a Kingdom Hall of their own. Available halls were all used as clubs and dance halls, and rent was expensive.

“Last Sunday night at the *Watchtower* Study there were 174 present,” relates Donald Snider, serving then as branch overseer. “The hall is not able to accommodate nearly that many, so quite a few have to stand. Because it’s very crowded, it’s hotter than ever.” The branch office and missionary home were moved to various rented locations several times.

In September 1958 construction began on a two-story structure. The first floor housed a small branch office and missionary home, while the entire second floor was an auditorium. In 1959 construction was completed, and the Belize City Congregation finally had its own Kingdom Hall!

GROWTH IN THE SPANISH FIELD

One outstanding area of spiritual growth among Jehovah’s people in Belize has been among Spanish-speaking people. In 1949 there were places where Spanish was spoken, but none of the missionaries then spoke the language. Later, however, some were sent who could speak Spanish. One of these was Leslie Pitcher, who came in 1955. He was assigned to work in Benque Viejo, a town with a Spanish-speaking population, located in western Belize next to the Guatemalan border. When he arrived, some of the locals were already waiting for him. Why was that?



Branch office, missionary home, and Kingdom Hall in Belize City

About a year before, in the town of San Benito, farther west in Guatemala, Natalia Contreras had learned the truth and was baptized. She crossed the border into Belize to witness to her relatives living in Benque Viejo. One of these, Serviliano Contreras, took special note of Natalia's Scriptural comments about idol worship, and he accepted the truth. He was a faithful Witness until his

death in 1998 at the age of 101. Many of his children and grandchildren are Witnesses. The territory of the small band of publishers in Benque Viejo in those early days extended across the Guatemalan border to the town of Melchor de Mencos, where they conducted meetings. Eventually, a congregation was formed in Melchor de Mencos, and the Benque Viejo Congregation is still known for its zealous spirit.

As early as 1956, portions of the district and circuit assembly programs were presented in Spanish. But it was not until February 1968 that a complete circuit assembly program was presented in Spanish at the Kingdom Hall in Orange Walk. There were 85 in attendance, and 4 were baptized.

Marcelo Dominguez and Rafael Medina, two Spanish-speaking brothers, along with other Spanish-speaking Witnesses, such as Dionisio and Catalina Tek, faithfully attended the meetings and assemblies in English, even though their understanding of the language was limited. It was not until October 1964 that a Spanish-language congregation was formed in Orange Walk with 20 publishers, who had been associating with the English congregation.

During the 1980's, civil wars were raging in nearby El Salvador and Guatemala, causing many people to flee to Belize. Among them were several Spanish-speaking Witness families that included elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers. These boosted the expansion in the Spanish field, as did some bilingual missionaries from other Spanish-speaking countries.

“TRUE CHRISTIANS PREACH FROM DOOR TO DOOR”

One day, two strangers knocked on Margarita Salazar's door in Orange Walk and asked, “Do you know one of Jehovah's Witnesses by the name of Margarita Salazar?” The callers, 23-year-old Teófila Mai and her mother, were from August Pine Ridge, a village 21 miles southwest of Orange Walk. Why were they looking for Margarita?

“About a year before,” explains Teófila, “my nine-month-old son was very ill. So I took him to the village of Botes to dedicate him to a virgin saint known as Santa Clara. I was traveling in the front seat of a truck, and the driver, who lived in our area, began to witness to me. After asking why I was taking my baby to Botes, he told me that the Bible did not



The first complete Spanish circuit assembly, at the Kingdom Hall in Orange Walk, 1968

approve of image worship. This interested me very much. Over time, this man shared many Scriptural truths with me, which he had learned from Jehovah's Witnesses.

"On one trip," continues Teófila, "the truck driver told me that true Christians preach from door to door. He explained that Jehovah's Witnesses did and that they would read scriptures such as Zephaniah

1:14 and 2:2, 3 to people. So, taking my small son by the hand and my baby on my arm, I went from door to door in August Pine Ridge, reading these verses to my neighbors. Later, the man suggested that if I really wanted to know the truth, I should study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. He told me about the Salazars and said where in Orange Walk I could find them. I had never been to Orange Walk, so with my mother, I went to look for them."

Margarita remembers the morning that Teófila and her mother first visited her. "They asked many Bible questions," she recalls, "and we had a lengthy discussion. They wanted to know if it was true that Jehovah's Witnesses help people understand the Bible, no matter how far they must travel to teach them. I assured her that it was true and promised that we would go to their village every two weeks to study the Bible with them."

"The truck driver told me that true Christians preach from door to door"

When Margarita and her husband, Ramón, arrived at August Pine Ridge, Teófila had gathered six adult members of her family for the Bible study. Subsequently, other pioneers from Orange Walk regularly traveled the 21 miles of narrow, unpaved, bumpy road with the Salazars to preach in the village while Teófila and her family had their Bible study. Often Amybelle Allen stayed overnight in the village so that she could conduct Bible studies there. Teófila was baptized in 1972, five months after her first Bible study. A congregation was formed in August Pine Ridge in 1980, and over the years, 37 members of Teófila's family have embraced the truth.

BUSH TRIPS YIELD FRUITAGE

Although Belize City and the largest towns in Belize were being worked thoroughly, rural territory was not being covered regularly. Early missionaries had made trips by boat to the southern towns, but later a road was built that connected the southern districts of Stann Creek and Toledo with the rest of the country. Then, early in 1971, the branch organized annual preaching excursions, called bush trips, to take the Kingdom message to the Mopan and Kekchi Maya in remote parts of the Belize rain forest.

Using rented vehicles and dugout canoes, the brothers and sisters were able to reach villages and towns from Dangriga to Punta Gorda and as far south as Barranco, near the border with Guatemala. Some trips were made by a group in a van accompanied by two to four motorcyclists. Each night they stopped at a different village, and during the day, while the larger group worked the village, the motorcyclists went in pairs up trails to isolated farms.

In the Punta Gorda area, the brothers backpacked from village to village. They often had to speak to the *alcalde* (chief) in the *cabildo*, the meeting place for the older men of the village, before preaching to the rest of the villagers.

"At one village," relates missionary Reiner Thompson, "the brothers arrived when the men were in a meeting in the *cabildo*, discussing the procedure for the corn harvest. After the meeting, the men asked the brothers to sing a Kingdom song for them. The brothers were tired and hungry, and they did not have a songbook." Brother Thompson adds, "They sang with all their hearts, much to the delight of the men."

In time, congregations were formed in Mango Creek and later in San Antonio, one of the largest Maya villages.

“Sometimes we walked between villages at night to keep up with our schedule,” explains Santiago Sosa. “We learned to walk in single file in the middle of the road, not at the sides, because the bushes along the road were sure to harbor snakes. We also learned to drink from a water vine when we were out of water.”

Sometimes the group was divided into twos or fours to preach in different parts of the village. Then, they all met up again in the evening. Two would stay behind to do the cooking. “That could be a disaster,” recalls Santiago with a chuckle, “because some didn’t really know how to cook. I remember looking at one meal and asking, ‘What is it?’ The cook said, ‘I don’t know, but it’s food.’ If the cook couldn’t identify the food, we thought we had better test it first on a skinny stray dog. But even the hungry dog wouldn’t eat it!”

KEKCHI ACCEPT THE TRUTH

Rodolfo Cocom and his wife, Ofelia, moved from Corozal to a remote Kekchi village in the south called Crique Sarco. Ofelia had grown up in this village, which the Witnesses visited only on the annual bush trips. When she was about 14 years old, Ofelia found the book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life* under an orange tree and began to read it. She wanted to know more, but it was not until she was married and living in Corozal that she and her husband, Rodolfo, studied the Bible with two special pioneers, Marcial and Manuela Kay.

When the Cocoms moved to Crique Sarco in 1981, they wanted to renew contact with the Witnesses,

Bush Trips —Preaching in the Rain Forest

“In March 1991, a group of 23 brothers and sisters from all over the country gathered at Punta Gorda for a ten-day preaching adventure in the depths of the rain forest,” relates Martha Simons. “Included in our load of clothing, blankets, and hammocks was literature in English, Spanish, and Kekchi. We also carried food, which included 200 journey cakes, or biscuits.

“The following morning we set out into a choppy sea in a wooden dugout, made by hollowing out a large ceiba (cotton) tree. At the village of Crique Sarco, we off-loaded and set up camp. As the brothers put up the hammocks, the sisters cooked one of our favorite dishes—pigtail boilup—a stew made from cassava, yams, green plantain, coconut, boiled eggs and, of course, a pig’s tail. Word got around that we had arrived, and soon a steady stream of Kekchi villagers stopped by to greet us. In this way we were able to witness to the entire village within two hours. That night, the brothers slept in hammocks underneath the police station, which was raised on stilts, while the sisters slept inside a thatched cabildo, the meeting place for the older men of the village.

“The next day we loaded up the boat again and went farther up the creek, which in some places was overgrown with mangrove roots that made it dark and eerie. After about half an hour, we disembarked and hiked another hour and a half through the bush to the village of Sundaywood. The people there were small with dark olive skin and straight black hair. Most of them were barefoot, and the women were dressed in native skirts and wore bead

jewelry. The thatched-roof houses had dirt floors, no inner partitions, and no furniture, other than hammocks. To one side of the houses was a communal cooking hearth.

“The people were very friendly, and we found much interest. They were especially impressed with the fact that we had literature in Kekchi and could show them scriptures in our Kekchi Bibles.

“The next morning we were awakened by the roosters, forest birds, and howler monkeys. After a hearty breakfast, we made return visits on all those who had shown interest the day before. We started several Bible studies and encouraged all of them to continue studying on their own until we returned to study with them next year. Subsequent days followed a similar pattern as we penetrated deep into the rain forest to reach remote villages.

“After ten happy days in the forest, our minds went over the long distances we had traveled, the many villages we had reached, and all the people we had met. We prayed that Jehovah would protect the seeds of truth we had planted until we returned the following year. Our feet were sore, and our bodies were tired; but our hearts were overflowing with thankfulness to Jehovah for the joy of sharing in this year’s bush trip.”



***Special pioneers Marcial
and Manuela Kay***

so Rodolfo went to Punta Gorda to look for them, a trip that took at least six hours on foot and by boat, on both river and sea. In Punta Gorda he met Donald Niebrugge, a pioneer, who arranged to study with the couple by correspondence. However, there was a problem. There was no post office in Crique Sarco.

“At the post office in Punta Gorda, I asked how I could send mail to Crique Sarco,” explains Donald, “and I was told that the priest went there once a week.” So, for about six months, the priest carried the Bible study correspondence back and forth without realizing that he was acting as a courier for Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“When the priest found out what he was carrying,” says Donald, “he was quite upset and refused to carry our letters any longer.”

During those months Donald made several trips to Crique Sarco to study with the Cocoms. When the next bush trip was made, Rodolfo started out in field service. “We took him with us for four days,” continues Donald, “preaching in several villages, and the association with the brothers on that trip really helped him make progress.”

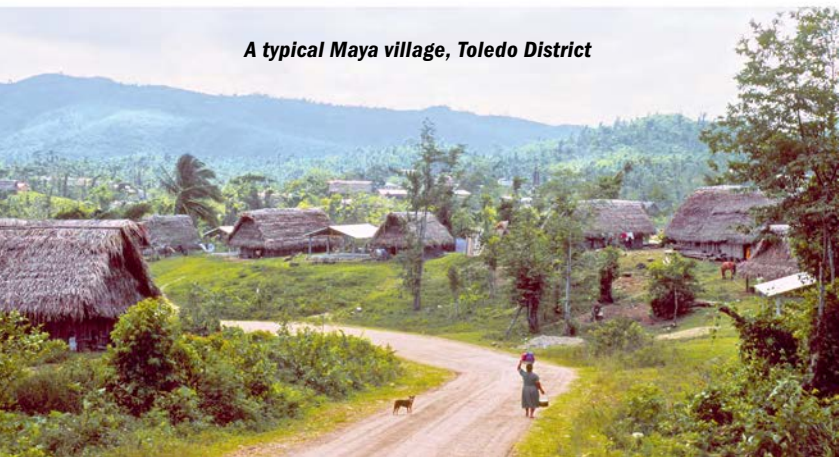


“Ofelia and I would go out to preach in our village,” explains Rodolfo, “just the two of us sharing what we had learned. The people I studied with faced more opposition than we did. Some were denied access to the medicine, food supplies, and clothing that were donated to the village. My mother-in-law was also very opposed to what we were doing. Ofelia and I realized that we wouldn’t be able to progress spiritually in Crique Sarco. We needed to attend meetings. Hence, we moved to Punta Gorda to continue studying. There we made spiritual progress, and we were baptized in 1985.” Today the Cocomas associate with the Ladyville Congregation, where Rodolfo serves as a ministerial servant.

SEA TRIPS BRING IN A SPIRITUAL CATCH

Sea trips were arranged each year to preach to people on the cays and in villages along the coast. Such villages as Hopkins, Seine Bight, Placencia, and Punta Negra, as well as Monkey River Town, were inaccessible by land at the time. Polito Bevens captained his lobster boat in the off-season and took four pioneers

A typical Maya village, Toledo District



and missionaries on a two-week trip from north to south, stopping at every place along the way.

Donald Niebrugge, who participated frequently in the annual bush and sea trips, remembers with fondness the time they borrowed Ambroncio Hernandez' sailboat for a sea trip. As a result, Ambroncio, affectionately known as Bocho, began to study the Bible.

"The following year four of us planned a two-week sea trip all down the coast," recalls Donald, "but by this time, Bocho had sold his boat. He recommended another fisherman, who was willing to take us, along with his partner and Bocho. There we were, two special pioneer couples with these three fishermen. During that trip Bocho started in field service. When we got to Placencia harbor, there were a lot of yachts moored there, so we preached from yacht to yacht. The two unbelievers were very supportive during those two weeks. One day when we returned after preaching all day in a village, the two fishermen had bought chicken and cooked a meal for us on a little kerosene stove." By the time of the next sea trip the following year, Bocho was baptized. He has been serving as an elder in Belize City for the past 18 years.

UNASSIGNED TERRITORY PRODUCES GOOD FRUIT

Toledo District, in southern Belize, is an area of rolling hills and dense rain forest, peppered with Mopan and Kekchi Maya villages of thatched-roof houses with dirt floors. For the most part, the villagers lead hard lives doing heavy farmwork with simple hoes. During dry spells they have to carry water to the fields by hand to grow corn, beans, and cacao. Many of the women do traditional Kekchi embroidery and make baskets for the souvenir shops throughout

the country. Increasing numbers of young people are leaving the villages to study or work in the more populated centers of the country.

In 1995, Frank and Alice Cardoza were invited to serve as temporary special pioneers during April and May to help distribute *Kingdom News* No. 34, "Why Is Life So Full of Problems?," in the Toledo District. "I had taken part in one of the annual bush trips in this area," recalls Frank, "and I saw that the Maya people could be better helped to learn the good news if someone would move into the area. The branch recommended that I rent a place to stay, start a Bible study group, and give the special talk in San Antonio. We were to distribute the *Kingdom News* there, as well as in eight other villages."

The Cardozas conducted a weekly group study in their rented one-room basement, and within a few weeks, three to four families started attending. These interested ones also joined the Cardozas for their hour-long drive in a well-worn pickup truck on a rutted dirt road to Punta Gorda for the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting. That first month, Frank delivered the special talk in San Antonio. Jesús Ich, one of those attending for the first time, paid rapt attention. As a member of the Nazarene Church, he was particularly impressed to learn that the teaching of hellfire is rooted in paganism and that the Biblical hell is the common grave. He took Frank aside after the meeting, plying him with more questions on the subject. As a result, he began to study the Bible and was baptized a year later.

At the end of their two-month assignment as temporary special pioneers, the Cardozas had to make an

important decision. “We had started many studies,” remembers Frank, “more than we could handle. Our hearts and consciences just wouldn’t let us go back to our comfortable house in Ladyville. If we decided to stay in San Antonio, we could have better living conditions by renting the upstairs of the house we were in rather than the basement. I could install a little sink, a water gutter to pick up rainwater and, in time, maybe a flush toilet and electricity. We prayed to Jehovah about it, confident that with his blessing a congregation could be formed in this area. Then we wrote to the branch, informing them that we were willing to stay in San Antonio as regular pioneers.”

Jehovah’s blessing on the Cardozas’ decision was quickly apparent. Within just six months, in November, they held their first Public Meeting in their rented house. And by April of the following year, they began holding the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting in San Antonio. How relieved the little group was not to have to make the weekly 40-mile round trip to Punta Gorda for the meetings.

“HIS THREATS COULD NOT STOP ME”

The group of sincere Bible students in San Antonio soon began to progress, and their love for the truth was truly moving. “In these villages,” explains Frank, “the women in particular are very shy, and by tradition they are submissive to their fathers and husbands. It is not their custom to talk to strangers. It was very difficult for them, therefore, to participate in the door-to-door ministry.”

Priscilian Sho, who was 20 years old at the time, was an unbaptized publisher who really wanted to preach to her neighbors in the area. On one occasion,

Priscilian was making some return visits with a sister-in-law, Amalia Sho, when they suddenly faced a crisis.

Priscilian remembers: “I hadn’t told my father I was going out to preach publicly because he had forbidden me to do it and I was afraid of him. That Sunday morning when we were out preaching, we suddenly saw my father in front of the Baptist church he attended. At first, we crouched in the grass because we didn’t want him to see us. But then I said, ‘You know, Amalia, Jehovah is watching us. It’s not right for us to be afraid of my father. It is Jehovah we must fear.’”

“It’s not right for us to be afraid of my father. It is Jehovah we must fear”

Priscilian’s father was furious, but an even bigger issue lay ahead because he was violently opposed to her becoming one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. After praying about the matter until the day before the assembly where she was to be baptized, Priscilian finally mustered up the courage to tell her father.

“Tomorrow,” she said to her father, “I’m going to Belize City.”

“What are you going to do?” he inquired.

“I’m going to be baptized,” replied Priscilian. “I’m going to do what Jehovah wants me to do. I love you, but I have to love Jehovah too.”

“Are you really going to do that?” he responded angrily.

“Yes,” said Priscilian. “Acts 5:29 says I must obey God rather than man.”

Priscilian’s father stormed off in a rage. “I didn’t feel safe until I was in the truck, ready to leave for the



Maya Who Love Jehovah

JORGE AND NICOLAS SHO
(WITH THEIR SISTER, PRISCILIAN)

BORN 1969 and 1971 **BAPTIZED** 1997

BACKGROUND Maya tradition stresses respect and complete obedience to parents, even from married adults.

■ **WHEN** Nicolas and Jorge came to know and love Jehovah, their father adamantly opposed their Christian activities.

“I explained to my father that I was learning beneficial things,” says Nicolas, “but he was a member of the Baptist Church, and he didn’t share my enthusiasm. I quit my Bible study a few times because I didn’t want to hurt his feelings. But I also knew that by getting drunk with my father, I was not setting a good example for my children. My wife and children were so unhappy that they never smiled.”

“Once I began studying the Bible and attending Christian meetings regularly, the truth helped me to break free from bad conduct. I worked hard for my family, and they got the full benefit of my income. Now, as a family, we are busy in Jehovah’s service, and there is happiness and laughter in our house.”

Jorge’s situation was much the same. His drunkenness and bad language caused problems for his family, and he was never at home on the weekends. But his study of the Bible resulted in a marked improvement in his conduct.

“As I progressed,” Jorge relates, “my father became more opposed. He called us false prophets. More than once he threatened us with his machete. Brother Cardoza, with whom I was studying the Bible, had tried to prepare us much earlier. ‘Suppose your father tells you to leave the family property?’ he asked us. ‘My father loves me,’ I explained, ‘and he won’t do that.’ But, sadly, that is exactly what he did.

“Nevertheless,” continues Jorge, “I loved what I was learning, and my life was improving. My family was benefiting from my new Christian personality. We respected one another and were happy together. Today, the preaching work brings me much joy, and thanks to Jehovah, I am a regular pioneer.”

**Frank Cardoza
witnessed to Jorge**



assembly,” she recalls. “I didn’t know what he would do when I came home after the assembly. But I knew that by then I would be baptized, so even if he killed me, I would have done what was right.”

Although Priscilian’s father did not harm her when she got home, he later threatened to kill her. “But he saw that his threats could not stop me,” she says, “and since then he has softened toward me.”

AN OPPOSER TAKES SIDES WITH JEHOVAH

The newly formed group of zealous publishers in San Antonio was prospering spiritually when the Cardozas were suddenly informed in a letter from the local village council that they should leave San Antonio. Earlier, when he paid an application fee, Frank had obtained permission from the council to stay in the village. Now, a prominent member of the village was intent on having the Cardozas chased out. At one of the council meetings, three of Frank’s Bible students spoke in his behalf. Then Frank’s landlord spoke up, warning the council that if they evicted the Cardozas, they would have to pay the rent the Cardozas had been paying him. Frank himself then presented a letter from the Lands Department stating that a person renting privately owned property could not be asked to leave. In the end, the council granted the Cardozas permission to stay.

The man who had wanted the Cardozas evicted was Basilio Ah, a former alcalde (chief) who was still prominent in politics. Basilio used his influence to oppose Jehovah’s Witnesses in San Antonio in every way he could. When the little group wanted property to build a Kingdom Hall, he warned, “You’ll never build a Kingdom Hall in this village!” In spite of

Joyfully Serving Where the Need Is Greater

Moving to a country where there is a need for more Kingdom proclaimers is a big step. But remaining in a foreign field year after year often requires much effort and self-sacrifice. Many of our brothers and sisters have met these challenges with great fortitude and joy.

Arthur and Roberta Gonzalez, for example, came from the United States to serve in Belize with their three-year-old son, Dalton, in 1989. “The biggest challenge,” admits Roberta, “was leaving a secure, well-paying job to live in a country where so many people are out of work.”

“Yes,” confirms Arthur, “you *have* to trust in Jehovah. Reading in the Bible about Abraham, I’m amazed at how he went out from his home, family, and everything he knew. But Jehovah took good care of him. One challenge we faced was getting our ears tuned to Belize Creole. But we relied on Jehovah, and he took care of us.”

Frank and Alice Cardoza came from California in 1991 to pioneer in Belize. “Reading the book of Acts,” says Frank, “made me want to be a missionary. But because we have four children, I knew we would never qualify for Gilead School. So when our youngest daughter finished her schooling, we saw the opportunity to move to another country. When we read in *The Watchtower* about Belize, we made up our minds.”



Left to right: Dalton, Roberta, Arthur, and his mother, Martha Gonzalez

Alice and Frank Cardoza

“I agreed to try it for three years,” says Alice. “Now we’ve been here for 18 years, and I love it!”

“We love people, and we love to work,” adds Frank, “so it’s easy for us to draw close to those who love Jehovah. Starting more studies than we could handle and seeing people respond to the truth has made these the best years of our life. We would not give up this privilege for all the money in the world.”

Carl and Martha Simons moved from Texas to Belize in 1988. “Our two children were ten and eight years old when we moved,” says Martha. “In Belize we spent entire days preaching together with the congregation in villages in the bush. We also worked together on the construction of the Assembly Hall, and we always had a house full of brothers and sisters staying with us during the assemblies. We are grateful that we could raise our children here, because they associated with special pioneers

Carl and Martha Simons



and missionaries. Yes, there were times when we felt like getting on a plane and leaving—times without electricity, running water, batteries, and telephones. But if we had to do it again, with all the ups and downs, we would do it. Our lives have been enriched because of serving where the need is greater.”



that, the brothers obtained property and built a modest and attractive Kingdom Hall. Amazingly, one of those at the dedication of the Kingdom Hall in December 1998 was Basilio. What had happened?

Two of Basilio's married sons had been having family problems. Twice Basilio had asked his church to help his sons, and both times he had received no response. Then his sons started studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. Basilio's wife, María, began to notice that her sons were making changes for the better and that their family life was improving. So María herself asked to study the Bible with the Witnesses.

"I really wanted to get to know Jehovah God," María says, "and I told my husband we should go to the Kingdom Hall to learn more about God." Although Basilio did not easily let go of his strongly held feelings against Jehovah's Witnesses and Frank Cardoza, whom he called "that foreigner," he was impressed with the positive changes his sons were making as they applied Bible truths in their lives. Basilio decided to examine Jehovah's Witnesses for himself, and after a few discussions, whom did he agree to have

as his Bible study conductor? None other than "that foreigner," Frank Cardoza!

"What I read in the Bible changed my mind," explains Basilio. "I had been a Catholic for 60 years, lighting incense before the idols in the church. Now what I was



María and Basilio Ah

learning about Jehovah was in his own book, the Bible. I am ashamed of the way I acted with Frank Cardoza, who is now my brother. I'm not afraid to say that I was wrong. I was zealous for the things I believed were right for my village and my religion. But I stopped practicing the Maya traditions that have to do with spiritistic healing, common in our villages. I also ended my involvement in the Maya political movements." Today Basilio and María Ah happily serve Jehovah as baptized publishers.

Jehovah's servants are known for their loving, joyful, and zealous spirit. In remote regions of Belize, many publishers walk three hours or more up and down steep hills to reach householders, and they do not like to miss meetings. For example, one evening Andrea Ich was assigned to be a householder on the Theocratic Ministry School. That day she had walked two or three miles through the jungle to pick avocados with her sons. In the process she received 23 wasp stings. Nevertheless, she went home, prepared a meal for her family, went to the meeting, and handled her part on the program. Her face was swollen from the insect bites, but it was a happy face. It is always encouraging to see that although the dear Maya brothers and sisters may have traveled a whole day in a truck or bus to attend assemblies and conventions, they are delighted to be united in worshipping the true God, Jehovah.

VIOLENT WEATHER BATTERS BELIZE

Over the past 115 years, Belize has had 51 hurricanes and tropical storms. Since 1930, there have been 12 hurricanes that either hit Belize directly or passed close enough to cause serious damage and

loss of life. One of the worst, Hurricane Hattie, struck in the early morning of October 31, 1961, with winds gusting up to 200 miles an hour and a tidal surge that caused hundreds of deaths. Belize City, which lies only one foot above sea level, was a foot deep in mud. A report from the branch stated: "While most of the brothers [in Belize City] have had their homes badly damaged or destroyed completely, they do not have any serious injuries. They have lost their clothes or had them ruined by the water.

"Bulldozers are clearing the streets and large fires are burning up what is left of the destroyed houses. Here in the [missionary] home, we had about two feet of water, which did much damage. It was up to about nine feet on the outside, . . . but it was good that the missionary home was built above street level. . . . Very little food can be purchased . . . , and they are still digging out bodies."

Ten days later, the branch reported: "Conditions [in Dangriga] are worse than here [in Belize City]. The people are forced to work eight hours a day to get coupons to buy anything. The army controls everything, and nothing can be bought with money." Two boys died, and their father's legs were broken when their house collapsed. Both boys were active publishers, and the 12-year-old had a fine reputation for witnessing to his schoolteachers.

The eye of the hurricane passed between Belize City and Dangriga, where most of the brothers suffered either partial or total loss of their homes and possessions. In the days after the hurricane, the governor invoked emergency powers, imposed a curfew, and summoned the British army to enforce these

measures and to shoot looters. Men, women, and children caught breaking the curfew were herded into pens for the night.

Despite the chaotic conditions, regular congregation meetings and field service activities were resumed as soon as possible. This was difficult with so many people living in shelters and with the yards swamped with water and mud. But people needed the comforting message of the good news of the Kingdom, and Jehovah's Witnesses were willing to make sacrifices to share it with them.

Living conditions were very difficult, but the love and generosity of Jehovah's Witnesses abroad did much to lift the spirits of the brothers in Belize. Twenty-five boxes of clothing and other items were received from other branches and distributed among Witnesses as well as many non-Witness neighbors. The branch office and the Kingdom Hall were among the few buildings that withstood the onslaught of the hurricane. Consequently, when the government requested the use of the Kingdom Hall as a public hurricane shelter for the community, the brothers readily agreed.*

“WOULD YOU PRAY FOR US, MRS. PRATT?”

For three days in October 2000, the inhabitants of San Pedro on Ambergris Cay were battered by Hurricane Keith's 125-mile-an-hour winds and torrential rain. Ladyville, 10 miles north of Belize City, was flooded by some 32 inches of rainfall in three days. Forty-two brothers sought refuge in the Assembly Hall in Ladyville. Almost all the homes on Cay Caulker

* As a result of this hurricane, the capital was moved from Belize City to Belmopan, in the interior of the country.

TIME LINE

Belize

1923 James Gordon preaches in Bomba.

1933 Freida Johnson preaches in Belize City.

1934 Thaddius Hodgeson conducts meetings in his bakery.

1941 First publishers baptized in Belize City.

1945 First missionaries arrive.

1946 Branch office established.

1957 No more missionaries allowed.

1959 Branch office, missionary home, and Kingdom Hall are built.

1961 Missionaries again permitted.



A boatload of brothers going to an assembly



1930

1940

1950

1960



1961 Hurricane Hattie devastates Belize.

1971 Bird's Isle is used for assemblies for the first time.



1988 An Assembly Hall is built in Ladyville.

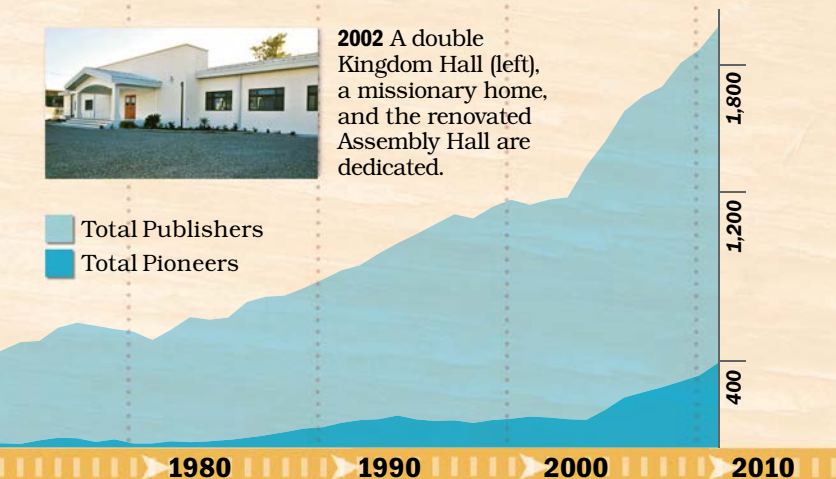
2000 Hurricane Keith batters Belize.

2001 Mexico branch is given oversight of Belize.



2002 A double Kingdom Hall (left), a missionary home, and the renovated Assembly Hall are dedicated.

■ Total Publishers
■ Total Pioneers





Cecilia Pratt

were destroyed. The 57 publishers on Ambergris Cay and Cay Caulker lost most or all of their possessions, and both cays were without electricity, water, and telephone service for several weeks. The prime minister declared the Belize, Orange Walk, and Corozal Districts as well as Ambergris Cay and Cay Caulker to be disaster areas.

A mandatory curfew was enforced throughout the stricken region in an effort to stop looting.

Cecilia Pratt, a special pioneer on Cay Caulker, heard the hurricane warnings and prepared a bag in case she had to seek refuge when the hurricane struck. That day, she had just collected the field service reports from 12 sisters and had intended to take the afternoon boat to the mainland to turn them in to the branch. Cecilia carefully wrapped the group's field service reports in plastic and put them in her emergency bag. Sure enough, during the night, Cecilia and some of the sisters had to take shelter in a concrete school building, while the rest of the group found protection in the health center.

"The wind ripped the zinc roof off the first classroom we were in," relates Cecilia. "We all had to grab our things and dash to another room. It felt as if the whole building were shaking in the wind, even though

it was made of concrete. When we peeped outside, it seemed like the sea was all around us—there was no land. Our little group stayed together, and we prayed intensely. The 40 people in the classroom, all from different religions, were terrified. Some were saying, ‘This is God’s work.’ A Catholic lay preacher came to me and asked, ‘Would you pray for us, Mrs. Pratt?’ I answered, ‘I can’t. I’m a woman, and I don’t have a hat.’ The man replied, ‘Well, I have my cap.’ I wasn’t sure if I could pray for everyone, but I wanted to let these people know that it wasn’t Jehovah who was bringing the hurricane. So I prayed with our little group loud enough for everyone to listen. Just as I finished praying and everyone in the classroom said ‘Amen,’ the wind went quiet! At that point the eye of the hurricane was passing over us. The Catholic preacher said: ‘That was a good prayer. Your God is the true God.’ After that, they didn’t want us five Witnesses to leave the shelter, and for the next three days, they gave us food and coffee.

“I was worried, though, about the other publishers. The next morning, when the wind stopped, I left the shelter to look for them. There were fallen trees and destruction everywhere. Some houses had been moved 40 or 50 feet by the wind. I looked in the community center first and found two sisters and their children. Another sister’s house was gone, but she was alive.”

In the aftermath of the hurricane, the branch had difficulty collecting field service reports from the storm-ravaged congregations. But the reports from Cay Caulker were the first to arrive. Cecilia had kept them safe in her emergency bag and had personally

handed them to the brothers who came from the branch to check on their welfare.

During the following weeks, the brothers on the devastated cays received relief supplies as well as practical assistance from volunteers who helped clean and repair their homes and the Kingdom Hall on Ambergris Cay.

Merle Richert, who worked with the team in Cay Caulker, reports: "First we set up accommodations and arranged for the distribution of supplies. The next day we started repairing the houses of the publishers. On Sunday we all went out in field service in the morning. Then we prepared a place for meetings in a sister's yard, making benches for the audience and a podium out of an old coconut stump. We adjusted the meeting schedule to allow for the 8:00 p.m. curfew and had 43 at the public talk and *Watchtower* Study."

ASSEMBLING TO BE TAUGHT BY JEHOVAH

In the late 1960's, the use of a tent made it possible for assemblies to be held in various places in the country. Yet, it takes days of hard work to put up a large tent. Santiago Sosa explains: "We started work early in the week, putting up the tent, bringing benches from the Kingdom Hall, and borrowing chairs. We had a cafeteria at assemblies then, so we borrowed pots and pans and often stayed up all night to cook and complete the work. Sometimes we would have everything set up, only to have it all blown down by a violent squall during the night. The next day we simply had to put everything up again. But nobody complained."

Jeanne Thompson remembers a convention held in a rural community between Belize City and Orange Walk. The brothers had to chop out the bush next to the Kingdom Hall before the tent could be erected and the benches set in place. "It ended up raining for the whole district convention," says Jeanne, "and it flooded under the tent. So we sat with our feet propped up on the bench in front of us. Little did we realize that the area was infested with coral snakes. Thanks to the rain, we were compelled to stay in the tent and close to the Kingdom Hall. It would have been dangerous to venture out into the bush."

In the 1970's, Bird's Isle, a small tropical island about 400 feet off the southeast tip of Belize City, became available for assemblies. The owner had

***Sitting under a tent at a circuit assembly,
Punta Gorda, 1960's***



“Somebody Who Cares!”

ALEJANDRO AND REBECCA (BECKY) LACAYO

BORN 1950 and 1949 **BAPTIZED** 1966 and 1959

PROFILE After graduating from Gilead in 1972, they served as missionaries in El Salvador, Belize, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Honduras. They now serve in the circuit work in the United States but have never forgotten the time they did relief work in Belize.

■ “WE’RE in the middle of Hurricane Keith!” wrote Becky on Monday, October 2, 2000. “It’s been raining for about two-and-a-half days without letup.”

The following day, after the wind and rain abated, Alejandro and special pioneer Donald Niebrugge were able to take some provisions to Ambergris Cay. They and two local elders visited every publisher in the two congregations to check on their welfare.

“On Wednesday,” recalls Becky, “brothers from different parts of the country brought food, water, and clothing to the branch for the brothers on the islands. Soon the lobby and the library were filled with supplies.”

Meanwhile, Alejandro and three others took provisions to Cay Caulker, gave timely encouragement, and prayed with the group. Witnesses as well as non-Witnesses were deeply moved by the brothers’ love and concern. “I’ve been giving donations to my church for years,” grumbled one woman, “and no one has come from my church to ask how I am.”

“Look at the other people,” said one sister through tears of joy, “and look at us! We have somebody who cares!”



Becky and Alejandro Lacayo

built a thatched auditorium with electricity, water, and toilet facilities with the idea of using it for entertainment. The brothers built a wooden bridge from the mainland, providing ready access to a quiet and peaceful place for many assemblies.

In March 1983, land was leased from the government for an Assembly Hall in Ladyville. At first, the brothers built a temporary structure for circuit assemblies, special events, and district conventions. Then, in 1988, a steel building was purchased in Guatemala that could be used as a permanent Assembly Hall on the Ladyville property.

PROGRESS IN THE CHINESE FIELD

Since the 1920's, Chinese immigrants have settled in Belize, many of whom enjoy reading our publications in their language. For example, Roberta Gonzalez relates: "I wanted to witness to a friendly Taiwanese lady who owned a bakery, but I knew she was not religiously inclined and was always very busy. I also knew she had two teenage children, so one day while I was in her bakery, I gave her a copy of the *Young People Ask* book in Chinese and told her I would like her opinion of it. A few days later, as I drove by her bakery, I saw her waving frantically at me. When I stopped, she excitedly told me that since I left the book, she had been waiting for me to

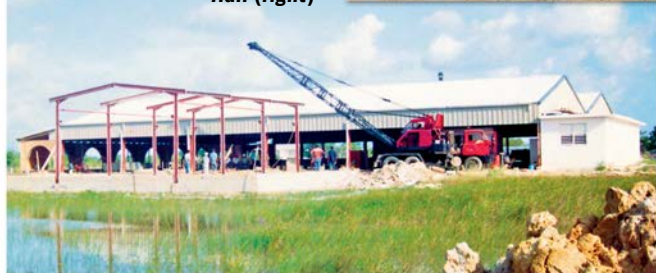
come back. She said that most of the teenagers in the Taiwanese families were having problems after immigrating to Belize. She felt they all needed to read the *Young People Ask* book. She had her son count up the number of Taiwanese families in town that had teenagers and then asked for 16 books because she wanted to give each of them a copy as a gift.”

In October 2000 the branch arranged for a three-month language course in Mandarin for pioneers and publishers who were willing to care for the Chinese communities in their territory. What were the results? A Chinese group with several pioneers was formed, which has subsequently grown into a congregation. In spite of intense opposition, some have responded to the good news and to the love they are shown in the congregation.

For example, Monje Chen accepted a Bible



The steel building below now serves as an Assembly Hall (right)



study in 2006. In the beginning, his family cooperated with him, but soon they started to ridicule and oppose Monje. Suddenly, the family sold all their property, including the store Monje was managing, and gave him an hour to give up his new religion and move with them to another country. He refused to renounce his new beliefs, so his family moved away, leaving him with nothing. Monje moved in with a brother and continued studying the Bible and attending meetings regularly. “I built up a close relationship with Jehovah,” says Monje, “and he took care of me. My Bible study and meditation on the Scriptures have helped me, as has the encouragement from the brothers.”

Monje was baptized in November 2008, and his family’s attitude has improved after seeing the transformation in his conduct and speech. “Obeying Jehovah did not make me poor,” Monje adds, “and it certainly brought me happiness. Jehovah did not leave me but let me live among a united, loving brotherhood.”



Renovated Assembly Hall



MEXICO BRANCH OVERSEES THE WORK IN BELIZE

After carefully considering the needs of the Kingdom work with the Branch Committees in Belize and Mexico, the Governing Body determined that the work in Belize should come under the supervision of the Mexico branch. This became effective on January 1, 2001, and has resulted in benefits and happiness for our brothers in this part of the world.

Since then, the Mexico branch has helped supervise the construction of a number of Kingdom Halls in Belize. On March 16, 2002, a modest double Kingdom Hall was dedicated in Belize City. The following day, a dedication program was held for the beautiful new missionary home and renovated Assembly Hall in Ladyville. Many who had been serving Jehovah faithfully for five or six decades were among those who enjoyed the dedication talk given by Gerrit Lösch of the Governing Body. Good progress has been made since the formation of a Kingdom Hall Construction Group, which has helped build 20 Kingdom Halls throughout the country.

Brothers and sisters at the site of the double Kingdom Hall, Belize City



In 2007, to help preach in seldom-worked territories, 325 pioneers from Mexico came to Belize. Their visit proved to be a fine stimulus to the evangelizing spirit in Belize. As a result, the number of pioneers here rose impressively.

In contrast with church leaders who pray every year that Belize be protected against hurricanes, Jehovah's Witnesses received practical direction for emergency procedures in advance of the 2007 hurricane season. How grateful they were for this instruction when Category 5 Hurricane Dean struck in August. All the brothers at risk were evacuated and housed with brothers in safer areas. After the hurricane passed, Witnesses from all over the country helped repair homes and Kingdom Halls, prompting a local radio station to praise Jehovah's Witnesses as an example worthy of imitation.

UNITING PEOPLE OF ALL NATIONS

With Jehovah's blessing, there are now over 1,800 publishers in Belize—a ratio of 1 publisher to every 149 inhabitants. And with 1 out of every 39 Belizeans attending the 2009 Memorial, the potential for growth is great!

The disciple-making work in Belize over the past 80 years has produced a mosaic of beautiful, spiritual people, who are united by the “pure language,” the truth about God and his purposes. “Shoulder to shoulder” with their spiritual brothers and sisters earth wide, Jehovah's Witnesses in Belize are making good use of the pure language to give a public witness that brings honor to Jehovah, our loving God.—Zeph. 3:9.

Would you welcome more information?
You may contact Jehovah's Witnesses at **www.jw.org**.