

## HELP FOR REFUGEES, INC.

A tax-exempt, non-profit corporation

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**We help orphans and elderly Christians (many in their 80s, even 90s) who had been imprisoned for their faith in present or former communist countries**



**June 2020**

“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.”

(Galatians 3:17)

Late Reverend Richard Wurmland suffered 14 years in Romanian communist prisons. Mrs. Wurmland was imprisoned for nearly three years, also for her Christian faith in some of the same communist prisons.

From an Unpublished Bible Meditation by Late Reverend Richard Wurmland

### **On God's Covenants**

St. Paul writes that the covenant God made with Abraham could not be canceled by the law He gave to Moses 430 years later. Nothing that intervened could make God's promise of none effect. Even God is not free to break a covenant He has made with us. That being the case, how much more are we obliged to honor it! In baptism, in confirmation, at conversion, in our hymns we have promised God repeatedly we will follow Jesus on the way of the cross. These promises are binding. The best “written contract” is a person’s character. When I was in Romanian Communist prisons, I used to tell my fellow-sufferers an old story from the medieval Christian Johannes Tauler (14<sup>th</sup> Century AD.) It circulated afterward from cell to cell and brought comfort to many Christians in chains who were hungry, cold, beaten, and tortured. According to Tauler, somebody once met a man on the road and wished him good morning. "I have never had a bad morning," replied the man. "That is unusual; I hope you may always be so fortunate. " "I never was unfortunate or unhappy, for every morning I praise God. If it rains or shines, if I am at home or in jail, I am still thankful to God. I cannot be 'unfortunate,' for nothing befalls me apart from the will of God, without whom I cannot lose a hair of my head. His will is good in whatever He does. I cannot be unhappy while resigned to Him and as long as His peace rules in my heart."

If this teaching holds true under Communist tortures, it must also prove right in the troubles and sorrows which we have in the free world. We look upon suffering as a catastrophe which has come upon us and are crushed by it. Identify yourself with universal suffering, with God's suffering because of His rebellious children, with the passion of Christ on Golgotha, with the anguish of martyrs for the holy cause, with the hunger, loneliness, sickness, bereavement of all your fellowmen who experience these, with the regrets of saints fallen in sin, with the groaning of the whole creation. Identify yourself with all suffering, weeping with all who weep and your own suffering will disappear in the process.

Valya was a twelve-year-old Russian girl. One day the communist Director of the school decided that Valya should become a member of the Communist children's group known as Pioneers. Valya refused, but refusal was not hers to make, for the Director legally took the place of her parents. Enrollment day came. The selected candidates stood in a group before a table on which were laid Pioneer three-pointed red scarves. One by one the girls stepped forward to take the oath and don a scarf. "Valya Vaschenko," called the Director. Valya stepped forward. "Take the oath, Valya." Valya's mouth stayed shut tight. "Valya! say the oath. Valya . . . Very well, I will read it in your name." The Director pointed to two other girls. "You will place the scarf on Valya's neck as I read." He began: "I, a young Pioneer of the USSR, before my comrades — patriots deciding the question of my admission into the organization — promise that I shall stand firmly for the cause of Lenin and for the victory of Communism. I promise . . . "But his next words were drowned as Valya bust out in prayer to God and began to sing a hymn: "We will stand firm for the Gospel faith, for Christ. Following His example, forward all, forward after Him." (J. POLLOCK, "The Faith of the Russian Evangelicals")

Emperor Valens, named as the last true Roman emperor of The Roman empire (328-378 AD) sent one of his powerful ministers to the Christian bishop of the city of Caesarea, Saint Basil the Great. This imperial policeman threatened the older Christian bishop with deportation should Basil not renounce his Christian beliefs. Basil answered, "where could you banish me, when the entire earth belongs to my heavenly Father?" "Then we will confiscate your wealth", was the next threat. "I gathered my riches in heaven," replied Basil. "If you have a high enough ladder, by all means, go, take them." The envoy threatened further, "you shall be killed!" Basil explained how this life is quickly passing and when one dies, a life after death is starting. "I know you Christians love to become martyrs, so you can be in heaven. I will better keep you imprisoned behind locked doors and behind bars, your hands and feet in chains." said the policeman. Basil retorted, "my Friend Jesus, the Son of God, easily passes through tightly locked prison doors." Amazed, this imperial envoy exclaimed, "no one else dared answer me like this!" "Too bad you never met before a true Christian bishop" was Saint Basil final answer.



The Communist Jilava Prison. Entrance to the underground cells.



Prison cell with bunk-beds with no mattress, prisoners were obliged to sleep on. Stove for show only, never heated in cold winters.



Mug-shot of Late Reverend Richard Wurmbrand when held in the Jilava prison, in communist Romania.

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father are this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (Apostle James Epistle 1:27)

Some Pictures of Elderly Christians Imprisoned for the Faith, Helped with your Gifts!  
Read their testimonies in our past newsletters at <http://helpforrefugees.com> (third column!)



### **Eugenia Farcas**

Her husband suffered 8 years of imprisonment, in former communist Romania for his Christian activity. Eugenia was also imprisoned for 1½ years. In spite of having 4 children, she continued an extensive and courageous underground Christian work. Read of this family in the 6/2017 Newsletter.



### **Late Reverend Grigore DOGARU**

was arrested by the Romanian communist regime, was tortured and suffered 3 years in a labor camp at the Danube-Black Sea Canal in a group of 40 other ministers. He had 8 children and led a strong underground church activity. Read of him in the 6/2017 Newsletter.



### **Baptist Jucova Valentina Nikolaevna**

a trained nurse (now 96) suffered 3 years in communist prisons for teaching an underground Sunday-school in the former Soviet Union. Read her testimony in the 7/2017 Newsletter.

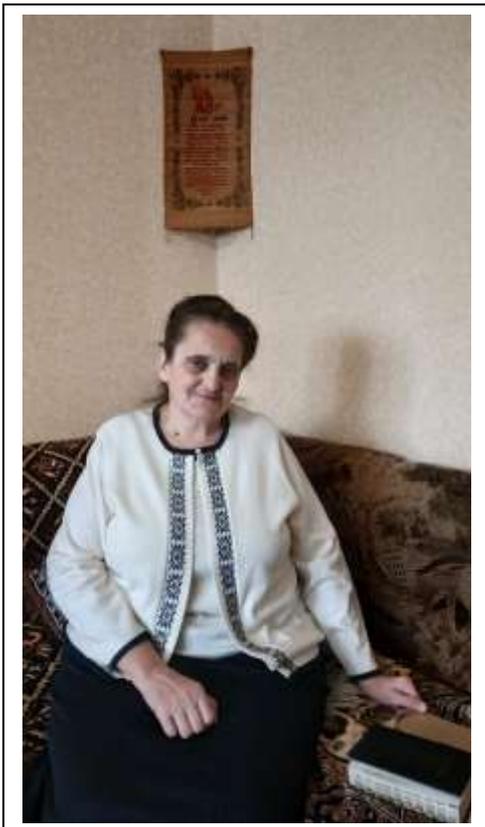


### **Baptist Simionova Lidia Vasilievna**

Was sentenced in the former Soviet Union to three years of prison, for multiplying Christian literature on a mimeograph-duplicator. She continued her underground Christian work as soon as she was freed. She died in 2019. Read her testimony in the 7/2017 Newsletter.

## **Christians Helped with Your Gifts**

### **Three Years of Communist Prison for Conducting Sunday-School**



### **Testimony of Sister Liudmila Petrovna Protsyshina**

#### **“Childhood and youth**

I am 64 and was born in the town of Iziaslav, Khmel'nitskii region, now in Ukraine (previously part of the Soviet Union.) My mother was from a Christian family and attended church as a child, but when she grew up and left the village, she married a man who was far from God. My father was born in an Orthodox family but he was an atheist and also drank a lot and beat me, my mother and my younger brother. When we grew up, my mother realized what a mistake she had made moving away from God. Secretly from my father, she used to tell us stories from the Bible, teach us how to pray and take us to the church in a neighboring village since there were very few believers in our town. Love of singing and learning poems, instilled in me by my first Sunday-school teacher Katya, have remained with me for life.

Once again being drunk heavily, my father drove us out of the house, threatening to kill my mother. This time my mother's patience snapped and we first moved to the town of Shepetivka and later when I was 14 years old to the city of Khmel'nitsky.

In Khmel'nitsky we began to attend an unregistered church of separate believers who gathered together in homes. I repented in June 1973. Three months later, I was baptized secretly at midnight on the night

of September 1 to 2, along with other converts from the region, in a river of the city of Kamenets-Podolsky. After 2 years, on September 7, 1975, responding to God's call and the request of my pastor, I taught my first lesson at

Sunday school where I still work. If God prolongs life then this fall, I will celebrate my 45th anniversary of the blessed work with children in the work-field of the Lord.

### **Arrest and Imprisonment**

On December 2, 1982, I was summoned to the regional prosecutor's office, being charged of indoctrinating minor children with religious teachings. I was arrested. I was taken to a holding cell where I was to spend the night on a wooden plank bed. It was already late evening, and most of the employees went home. There was no one to give me a pillow and a blanket.

Repeatedly reciting the poem "Voice in the Storm" by Pavel Lyashenko at the church, that has such a passage, *"You're on the plank bed – I'm at the head of the bed, I (God) look at your face intently"*, I could not fully understand and feel these words. But here in the cell alone, I felt the heavenly presence of the One who said: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee!" (Isaiah 41:10). All my feelings, everything experienced by myself such as the presence of God, His support in difficult and hopeless times, the prayers of the church and friends - all this cannot be described in a few words, but I can say for sure: this is a reality in the life of every prisoner for Christ.

Before I even got used to the idea that I would have to sleep on hard cold bunks, the prison officer looked at me attentively and said that he knew me. He turned out to be a neighbor to the family of believers that had provided their home for worship and he constantly used to see me in the yard of their house. God set his heart to help me and he brought me a pillow, a blanket and his pea jacket. When all the bosses left, he shared his dinner with me and offered tea. So, from the moment of arrest to the end of prison bonds, God continued to send to me "ravens" in human form to take care of me the way He once took care of the prophet Elijah.

In the morning I was sent to pre-trial detention center where I spent 5 months before the trial and another month after, until the sentence became confirmed. Christians were rarely seen in this detention center before, and all employees were men. My appearance in the detention center, especially under such an article of criminal code, caused considerable surprise among the employees. They even tried to persuade me kindly so that "I would not ruin my life". It was evident that God set their goodwill toward me. And throughout my stay under investigation and after the trial, I felt how God helped me through them.

There were nine more people in the same cell I was held in. Eight of them smoked several times a day. The smoke constantly filled the room therefore I was looking forward to the moment when we were taken for a walk in a small stone courtyard. And then one day when we were just taken out into the fresh air, suddenly the door opened and they called me back to the cell because they brought me package of food from my mom. I was upset at first, because they could have done it later and not interrupt such a long-awaited walk.

The food was brought by two female detention center workers, each of them holding a basket. They apologized for taking me away from the walk. One woman laid food from the basket on the table in the cell. According to the rules, each prisoner had the right to a food parcel weighing no more than 10 pounds, - the basket could hold only so much. Imagine my surprise when the employee took the second basket from her colleague's hands and emptied it too! Later I learned from my mom, that the employees themselves told her to go and buy food, including chocolate sweets, pears, oranges, and cooked sausages that were forbidden for prisoners. That was why they waited until everyone was taken out for a walk and then returned me to the cell. I was very grateful to God, because it was He who set the hearts of these women! And this was just one example. "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). I felt these words of Christ applying to myself every day.

I had low hemoglobin in my blood. As a result I had frequent dizziness and even slight fainting. Once the officer who used to monitor prisoners in my cell asked me what could raise hemoglobin. I replied that I usually ate sweets, especially dark chocolate. Soon he called me into his office, locked the door and opened a tap with water in order to make a noise as the room was being bugged. Then he pulled some food from the table. There were sandwiches and a chocolate bar broken into the small pieces and wrapped in napkins there. And without saying a word the officer gestured me to eat everything. It was written by his wife's hand on one napkin the following: "Hold on, dear, God help you!" So, he fed me every other day or two days all the way until the end of my stay in the pre-trial detention center.

So, months passed under investigation. On April 13, 1983, a trial took place. I was sentenced to three years in prison. But since I was a child donor and I just donated blood for a little girl before appearing at the prosecutor's office on the day when I was arrested, my prison term was reduced by two months. My friends from the church threw tulips on the prison van in which I was taken away from the court. When they brought me back to the pre-

trial detention center, the security guard accompanying me looked carefully around and pulled out several tulips from under his jacket, as many as he could catch, and gave them to me saying, “This is from your friends”.

When the time of my transfer to prison came, then in order to re-educate me, the head of the pre-trial detention center transferred me to solitary confinement and didn't let me buy food for my trip at the prison store. But later when the bosses left, a “feeding trough” (a little window in my cell's door) opened and a female duty officer began to pass me groceries. She walked through the cells and, as the prisoners could, they shared food with me. And now I had a whole bag of food for my trip! So once again, God showed His care and love and demonstrated that there was no reason for me to worry. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

On May 26, at 10 a.m., I arrived at the Odessa general regime penal colony to serve a 2 years and 10 months term of imprisonment.

In the prison I was placed in a squad of 180 people living in the same room. There I met for the first time a jailed sister in Christ, Liuba Donchenko from Kharkov (read sister Donchenko's testimony in our missionary Newsletter of January 2017, N.Ed.) At that time, there were 2,000 prisoners in the same prison, and we two were the only believers. We greatly appreciated each other and our fellowship. The truth was that we could only see each other for 20 minutes a day, as we worked in different work shifts. But on Sundays we could communicate almost all day.

After two and a half months, two more elderly sisters were brought to our place, Alevtina Panfilova (aunt Alia) and Valentina Kokurina (aunt Valia). (Read the testimony of sister Panfilova A. in the November 2017 Newsletter, N. Ed.) We worked in the same shift with aunt Alia and after work, we used to spend all the time until the end of the day together. We met with aunt Valia and Liuba on Sundays when we used to gather all together and have tea parties and talk, pray and quietly sing songs. On October 14, 1983, sister Liuba was released, and there were three of us left.

Young people from the Odessa Peresyp Church found an opportunity with the prison guards to transfer us some money and food. And what was the best, they managed to pass us a little New Testament! Of course, we couldn't keep it with our stuff because if the guards would find the booklet, they would take it away and put us into the punishment cell for 10 days. Therefore, we divided the text into parts to be kept by each one of us. Eventually the book of Revelation was taken from me during a search, as well as the book of Acts from aunt Alia. We managed to save the rest of the New Testament. Contrary to existing rules by God's grace, we were not punished.

We continued to have our secret worships on Sundays. However, the enemy of human souls envied that our spirit was joyful and decided to add some sadness into our lives. Suddenly we found out that aunt Valia was being transferred to another prison. Our joy was overshadowed but “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28). Aunt Valia was sick and often went to the prison hospital although outside the prison itself, but still it was a closed and guarded territory. There, you could shop at the store with products that could not be found in a prison store. So, she bought food there. God used the situation for our good in this way.

On the second floor in one of the prison buildings, the windows did not face the prison yard, but were oriented toward the city of Odessa, towards “freedom”. The special bars on the windows formed a grid at such an angle, that you could only look up to the sky. Nevertheless, someone made a small hole in the lattice. Once on the day before my birthday they called me to this so called “prison telephone office”. Through the “peephole” I saw a few young people from the Peresyp Church staying near the prison fence and holding carnations in their hands. At the time construction prisoners worked in a small area between the prison fence and the buildings. They took the flowers and brought them to me. Such a pleasant surprise I got from God and youth from the church!

God used to show His support in different ways. A lot of letters came from all over the former Soviet Union. Every day we were checked and lined up. At this check, the squad leader constantly said that the mail is exclusively for me. I used to get up to 10 letters a day and even whole stacks of letters on holidays. Once I received 180 letters in a week. The whole prison “buzzed” that Christians were very friendly people and it was their God who taught them to do that. I could feel my family, friends and the church prayer support.

Days passed fast. Aunt Alia's term of imprisonment came to an end. She was released in July 1985, and for the next two months I was alone. At that time the prison was overcrowded with 2,200 prisoners and myself alone was a believer. But I didn't feel lonely. Later I found out that aunt Alia as she was leaving the prison, suggested to all friends who were meeting her, to pray for me right there at the checkpoint, asking God to double His protection.

I remember another case. In our prison they served boiling water at certain times. It was from 4 to 5 p.m. and from 7 to 8 p.m. for my working shift. You could make tea or jelly, warm canned porridge. Usually a lot of people gathered in line, and there was not always enough time for everyone to get boiling water. Once, almost all day there was no water at all. And at last when they gave boiling water, there was simply a huge amount of people who wished to get it. I took the turn, but did not really hope that I would have time to get some boiling water. Then, a group of convicts for especially serious crimes appeared, they kept the rest of the prisoners in fear and submission. One of these convicts said loudly, “Okay, there are a lot of us but we have only one little Baptist girl here. Everyone, quickly move aside, let her pick up some boiling water!” I was speechless. Everybody obediently parted, and I went up closer and got hot water. Such little things, are very tangible when God takes part in your life in different circumstances. It happened more than once that when someone was plotting something bad, God turned everything for good.

After serving my time, on October 2, 1985, I was released. Since I did not succumb to “re-education”, meaning that I didn’t refuse God, the authorities of the prison decided to supervise me. This meant that upon returning home, I should be registered with the prosecutor and I was forbidden to leave the city without the knowledge of the authorities or leave home after 8 p.m. or take guests in my home, etc. In addition to this, my local police inspector was to inform all my neighbors that I was a former prisoner. And he had to force them to inform on me in case guests would come to my place or I would not observe the curfew. But such a document can only be signed by the political officer of the unit. That very day, the political officer, a woman, fell ill and did not go to work. For some time, I was kept waiting for her to appear but finally, I was escorted to a checkpoint where my friends met me.

That same evening, at worship in the Odessa Peresyp Church, I shared the blessings with which God generously accompanied me all my way. His fatherly care helped me to overcome all difficulties and trials in my prison bonds. A day later, I returned home to my mother, relatives and friends, to my native church, in which I serve the Lord until now. And God willing, I want to work while He strengthens me.”

Across, a **sample only** of a long list, our mission was able to compile beside other lists, of over 480 elderly Baptist Christians still alive, who suffered for the Christian faith in the former Soviet Union. The prison sentences amounted from 2 years, to as many as 18 years of communist prison. If considered together, their years of prison-sentences shown in our **abbreviated** table, would most likely add up to over 2,000 years of prison. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> column together, show year of birth and the most recent country they live in (like Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, etc.) We try obtain exact addresses, so we may be able to send encouraging help to those still alive.

We were able to send repeated help to about 120 such elderly Russian-speaking Christians and over 110 of other languages. Many of their testimonies you can read in the monthly newsletter. Testimonies available also on the internet. **Look up third column at:** <https://helpforrefugees.com>

409	Власенко	Валентин	Мифодьевич	1958	Украина
410	Вольф	Андрей	Корнеевич	1958	Казakhstan
411	Иуркин	АЛЕКСЕЙ	ЯКОВЛЕВИЧ	1958	Россия
412	Левен	НИКОЛАЙ	ВИКТОРОВИЧ	1958	Казakhstan
413	Романюк	Владимир	Николаевич	1958	Украина
414	Тиссен	Давид	Давыдович	1958	Россия
415	ТУРКЕВИЧ	Василий	Тарасович	1959	Украина
416	Бычкова	Степан	Павлович	1959	Украина
417	ДРИСВЯННИКОВ	АЛЕКСАНДР	АЛЕКСАНДРОВИЧ	1959	Россия
418	СВЯТОЦОВА	ЛЮБОВЬ	НИКОЛАЕВНА	1959	Россия
419	Варавин	Виталий	Федотович	1959	Россия
420	Дубицкий	СЕРГЕЙ	АДАМОВИЧ	1959	Россия
421	Лашенко	Борис	Владимирович	1959	Украина
422	Тянько	ИВАН	ИВАНОВИЧ	1959	Казakhstan
423	МАРЧЕНКО	Станислав	Павлович	1960	Украина
424	Донченко	Александр	Максимович	1960	Украина
425	Откасов	Венедикт	Александрович (Валерианов)	1960	Узбекистан
426	Савченко	Михаил	Михайлович	1960	Эстония
427	Федеева (ШВЕЦОВА)	ДИНА	ВЛАДИМИРОВНА	1961	Алания
428	ШВЕЦОВА	АННА	ВЛАДИМИРОВНА	1962	Алания
429	Богодушко	Александр	Валерьевич	1962	Эстония
430	Миньков	Павел	Дмитриевич	1962	Эстония

**Sample of a List of 480 former Imprisoned Christians in the former Soviet Union**

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