

BY JEFF REICH

◀ The Desire of Ages for every prisoner in Romania.

▼ Romania evangelism with Nicu Butoi.



▲ Laymen Ministries and Lithuanian Mission Team (l - r): Rimas Scirbinskas, Kevin Page, Bertold Hibner, Jeff Reich, Algas Jankevichiaus



LEST WE FORGET

Reading the works of the early pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church has always been an inspiration to me, not only from a theological standpoint, but also because of the dedication and perseverance of those brave men and women working as missionaries for God. One of my favorite quotes, written years after the SDA movement first began, gives special insight into our church's history:

"In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history" (*Life Sketches*, p. 196).

In the mid-1980s, when *Laymen Ministries* was a fledgling organization, I never thought that we might possibly be carrying on the "mission" legacy of the church. Looking back, I feel the same way Ellen White did as she penned those words. We thank God for what has happened and realize that He has used this ministry, in a small way, to do just that.

I would like to take you on a walk down "Memory Lane" and share with you some of the incredible things that have taken place and are still happening today, as seen in the pages of this magazine.

EASTERN EUROPE

Right after the collapse of Communism, God opened doors for our ministry to pioneer a work in Eastern Europe. Let me share how we first

ended up working in Eastern Europe. At the time, we published a small homegrown paper called *Laymen Ministry News*. This paper had grown from a reader base of 20 to over 1500 in just a few months.

I received a call from a friend in New York State: "Jeff, have you thought about starting a small printing operation in Eastern Europe, like you have there in Idaho?" My answer was quick. "No!" I was a bit taken aback. "Well, you should," he entreated. So we prayed together on the phone.

Just about four days later, he called again and said he had a young Adventist man from Poland who wanted to come to *Laymen Ministries* to learn desktop publishing and printing. And he did come. This was our first contact with people from Eastern Europe. Then a student from Romania came. These two young men told us that if we were going to help in these countries, we needed to go visit them and learn the culture.

Plans were made to visit Poland and Romania in the spring of 1991. The only problem was money. *Laymen Ministries* was a fledgling organization with almost no support. We saved up enough to buy tickets in and out of Germany.



▲ In 1993, Edmond Seferi, Albania's vice-president, standing with Jeff Reich and his daughter, Carissa, in the presidential palace.

We had only \$60 for two of us to travel for 3 weeks around Europe! People said we were crazy for traveling with so little money. But the day before we were to leave, an express mail package arrived at the ministry. Guess what was inside? Six hundred dollars in cash and a note saying, "We were impressed you needed these funds right away." God sent us a token of His blessing.

That fact-finding trip opened a lot of doors for us, and we had money to travel and eat! Being mostly a speaking and publishing ministry at that time, we obtained 501c3 status and changed our name to *LMN Publishing International, Inc.* Years later we realized this name was too long and confusing, and it did not fit all the things the ministry was doing, so we added a DBA — *Laymen Ministries*.

ROMANIA

Our work in Romania began right away. I could share for hours about the things that happened there. To begin with, we translated and printed tracts and pamphlets, shipping over 3.5 million pieces. We then started on translations of *The Great Controversy*, *The Desire of Ages*, and other books.

I was impressed to take the old "The Bible Says" study guides and rewrite them to fit the Eastern European culture. A Romanian co-worker by the name of Nicu Butoi worked with us, and we took the master copy to the country of Moldova to have these printed. 100,000 lesson sets were printed for \$2,200. That's 3,000,000 individual lessons. It cost about \$.02 for a collated, folded, and wrapped thirty-lesson set.

We also sponsored Elder Butoi in public evangelism, and God blessed. Literally hundreds were baptized every year throughout the 1990s.

The travel stories I could tell! So many amazing things happened that let us know God was leading. Soon the Lord opened doors for us to open a prison ministry in Romania, which we still support today. We became friends with General Major Ion Chis, the commander of all the prisons at the Ministry of Justice in Bucharest, Romania's capital. Through him we ended up printing 100,000 copies of *The Desire of Ages* (General Chis himself writing the forward). These were printed on former Communist party printing presses. With the help of prison guards we distributed this book to ALL the inmates in the whole country, and even to the Members of Parliament and the President of Romania. We were featured on CNN and Romanian National TV.

It did not stop there! We printed around 400,000 more books for prison and general distribution. Titles such as *The Great Controversy*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, *Bible Readings for the Home*, and *The Ministry of Healing*. We also worked in Bulgaria with translation of literature and shipped a container of 3.2 million tracts, Bible lessons and pamphlets to help the church there. I wrote an editorial a while back called "Lost in Bulgaria," where I told the story about our first trip to that

country. In our issues of *Laymen Ministries News* at home, we ran a regular feature entitled, "Literature in the Closing Work," which outlined all the amazing things that happened while traveling in these countries.

ALBANIA

Albania was the most closed and hardline of the former Eastern Bloc countries. We were the first Adventist missionaries in this country after the collapse of Communism. The only ones who preceded us were two men from ADRA (Adventist Development & Relief Agency). Little did we know we would soon be making history!

A year later, on my second visit, I came in contact with a lady named Migen Shehu, a graduate in linguistics from the University of Tirana (in Albania's capital city). She was attending the very first evangelistic meetings being held by David Currie in the basement of the Enver Hoxha National Museum. Elder Currie was from the Trans-European Division and a great person to work with. Right away we hired Migen to help with translation work.

By our next visit a couple months later, Migen had taken a job as a diplomat for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but she also continued to help with our translation work. One evening, she took my daughter and me to the Presidential Palace where we met a man by the name of Edmond Seferi.

After visiting for a time, I finally asked Mr. Seferi what his job was in the Presidential Palace. He told me that he was the Chief of the Cabinet, a position next highest to Sali Berisha, the President of Albania. In short, he was the vice-president of the country.

Edmond, Migen and another young lady named Enkelea Gjoleka, who turned out to be the President's personal secretary, became our translation

team! We printed 3.5 million tracts, pamphlets and Bible lessons for this little formerly-Communist country!

LITHUANIA

We first traveled to Lithuania in the autumn of 1993. In a dream one night, I heard a voice telling me to go to Lithuania. I do not put much stock in dreams, and I am certainly no prophet! We had already been helping to set up a printing operation in Poland, yet knew nothing about this little country that lay just to the north.

The day after I had the dream, I looked on a map — only to discover that there **was** a country called Lithuania! To top things off, that very day a young man with a strong accent called me from *Weimar Institute* and asked if I had ever thought about working in his home country of Lithuania! Now all this got my attention!

In 1993 there were around 50-60 Adventists in the whole country. *Laymen Ministries* started a translation and publishing work there. We set up a small printing house, hired Bible workers, sent over student missionaries, and helped with evangelism. Today we still support projects and Bible workers. We look back to that dream and how it led to strengthening the Adventist Church in Lithuania.

INDIA

It was about 1994 that we made our first trip to South India. This led to working with Pastor Shadrach Samuel in translation, publishing and evangelism. Soon Pastor Johnson came on board with us. God led, and we pioneered the very first Adventist TV programs broadcast all across India in both the English and Tamil languages.

Today we have 48 Bible workers, a TV production studio preparing programs for various networks, and still operate a large translation and publishing work.

Two years ago, we opened an orphanage in the southern tip of India. Right now, we are adding a girls' dormitory to this facility.

NEPAL

In 1998 we began working in Nepal, at first with Joel and Joyce Meyer, along with Sandra Horner. We held the largest "Christian" event in the history of that country — a Health Expo which was seen on TV across Nepal and was supported by several American organizations, as well as the Medical College of Kathmandu. The king of Nepal's personal physician, Dr. Pandey, was one of our guest speakers.

Right after that event, we were personally invited to attend a small celebration hosted by Dr. Pandey, with the king and queen of Nepal attending to give their blessing. We were seated with many of Nepal's highest-ranking government and military officials. We were invited to attend a brunch afterwards.

Some time after this, the political climate took a turn for the worse. The king and queen, along with many of the royal family, were assassinated in the palace. The situation became very unstable, so the Meyers returned to the US, and Sandra Horner moved to North India, where she continued working with *Laymen Ministries*, setting up a school for Nepali youth to receive Bible training and learn health evangelism.

I CAN SAY, "PRAISE GOD!"

As I shared in the quote at the beginning of this article, I concur with Ellen White when she wrote, "In reviewing our past history, having traveled over

every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader." As you read this article, understand that I've had room to share just the tip of the iceberg of events that have happened. There are so many amazing miracles that could be shared, and have been shared in the past.

As you read the pages of this magazine, you will see where 32 years of ministry have brought us with God's leading. We feel blessed that God has, in a small way, used our teams over the years to bring hope, light, and truth to these dark places of the world.

We also want to gratefully acknowledge that none of these things could have happened without people like you walking right along with us on this amazing journey. We thank you and invite you to continue on with us to watch God do even more amazing things! ♦

▼ Reception attended by the King and Queen of Nepal

