

# Hungarian Gulyas

March 2004

Dear Brethren,

Greetings from the land of the Magyars! Spring has arrived in Budapest – I think. The trees and other plants are indicating it with their blossoms and leaves. The days are growing longer. There are days when mere shirtsleeves are appropriate for outdoor activity. However, some days are still just cold. We are having a lot of that in-between weather where a coat or a sweater seems too bulky and warm, until you are 20 minutes away from being able to change your mind and wear one.

The rebirth of the land, as always, provides rejuvenation to the faces and spirits of us humans too. People are smiling, laughing and talking with more vigor now than in the past few months. Nobody is happier about this change of season than I.

Krisztus Budapesti Egyháza

Many good things have been happening with the church in Budapest. Perhaps the most visible has been the change in how we direct our worship each Sunday. Now, János, Péter, Bill and I rotate who will organize each worship assembly. It is up to the one in charge to assign the various tasks to be done. The effective purpose of this was to allow for a greater variety in the sermons. Basically, we are each taking a turn presenting the sermon from week to week. Péter has preached once already and is scheduled again the last Sunday of April. He did an excellent job.

The internet continues to be our most effective means of contact from those wishing to take correspondence courses. We are able to send them the lessons via regular mail or email. While it still baffles János that people will respond to something so impersonal as a printed ad rather than a personal invitation, he is growing more and more accustomed to it. He is also becoming more aware of the value of the information we maintain of those people who contact us via our email address.

Our hope and goal is to expand this technology to implement a complete web site. None of us is all that computer savvy and we are hoping to get some help from others who know much more about these things. The proliferation of computers and websites in Hungary is an opportunity for us to get into the homes and lives of more people than we could ever encounter out on the streets. We don't want to neglect it.

Several visitors have joined us for Bible studies and worship recently. One young lady from Transylvania who is currently in Budapest working has come to our studies several times. She was walking down the street and saw the advertising (sign) we have at the building entrance. She had been feeling a bit lonely and homesick and told herself a good way to deal with that would be Bible study. Her name is Lora and she always says she will be back the next time, although she has been sick recently and has not made it every time.

The advertising has also caught the attention of others. One man stopped in the other Sunday afternoon when Jeff May and Alan Yeater were here. He saw the advertisement for their lectures. Unfortunately, he came about after it was all over and almost everyone was already gone. We gave him copies of some of the outlines and invited him back the following Wednesday when we were going to have another study on the Death of Jesus. He didn't come. But another man did. Bill was teaching a lesson he called "Who Killed Jesus?" About 20 minutes into the study, the man reaches into his bag, pulls out a yarmulke (the little headcovering Jewish men wear) and put it on. Bill said it was a bit unsettling at first, but went on with his lesson without leaving out anything. It turns out this man is a Jewish Christian. He stayed around and talked to us for over an hour afterwards and I got the impression he would have stayed much longer if it had been possible. He travels all over Hungary and to regions that long ago were also part of Hungary. He told us many things, not the least of which was his knowledge of a "church of Christ" in Romania which is without a preacher right now. He said they have asked him to preach for them when he is there.

Unfortunately, some of our members have not been as regular in their attendance as one would hope. Edit, however, has been attending more often than in the past on Sundays. She is still unable to make it to our midweek studies because she does not get off work in time.

Klári shocked many of us recently with news (first heard from her sister in Székesfehérvár) that she is planning to go back to school in the fall. She will be going to law school, but not in Budapest. She will be about 300 miles away.

János continues traveling to Böhönye about once a month to worship and study with Jozsef and his mother. When we can make arrangements for transportation and a translator, Bill and I try to visit with them in between János' visits.

American Invasion

In March, Alan Yeater and Jeff May came over for a couple of weeks. It was Jeff's first trip outside the U.S. They worked hard while they were here and stayed busy the entire time. In Budapest, they spoke at each service and, at the end of the second week, did a lectureship on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon. They presented lessons on The Life Of Christ. They also visited and studied with many of the Christians here and in other villages. Jeff, like everybody else, was immediately taken with the Christians here just as they were with him. Alan's love and concern for these brethren is clear and prolific. The Vancsó family visited with us once while Alan was here. Other visitors were Vanda's mother Marta, Margo who lives in a village south of here and Péter's girlfriend Judit.

Jeff, Alan, Péter and I traveled to Böhönye one day. Alan and Bill visited with Margit, Klári's sister in Székesfehérvár. Also, all us Americans traveled to Brno, Czech Republic one Saturday for the regular Bible study the Christians there have. Jeff and Alan taught. On the trip home, we were able to share a compartment on the train with a young couple from Slovakia. These two Christians enthralled us with their stories about the Lord's work where they are. They have their own website devoted to Bible study and Christianity.

The week after they left, Jeff Young and his family arrived for a visit with the Bynums. Jeff and Melanie lived in Prague about 12 years ago, just as the Czech Republic was opening up after the fall of communism. This trip is their first visit back to Europe. They have two children. Jeff is travelling with Bill to Bulgaria for a couple of weeks. When he returns, he and his family will go to the Czech Republic before returning home to North Carolina where Jeff works with the church in Winston-Salem. Jeff has taught two of our Bible studies while he has been here.

Donna Keith and Marcia Johnson from Alabama will visit for a few days this month too.

## Financial Information

In my last report I mentioned the horrible situation with the devalued dollar here. Unfortunately, the dollar hasn't gotten any stronger. In fact, it has weakened even more. There is some hopeful news things will improve sometime in the future.

Fortunately, a good brother in Florida has come to my aid. He is now sending me money for my work here to help make up for the loss in value of the support I am receiving from others. The Gardendale, Alabama church also increased the amount they are sending me each month.

Thank you all for your help in the Lord's work here in Hungary. Your financial help, as well as the support you give me in so many other ways, means so much. I appreciate your prayers, emails, letters and calls. Although I am physically several thousand miles away, you seem very close because I know of your love and concern; and that helps me.

## Personal Notes

I have been struggling lately with the decision I must make about staying on in Budapest after this year. When I made plans to come, I told myself and everyone else I was coming for at least two years. Amazingly, in a few months, two years will have passed since my arrival.

There are many days when I know I want to come home. And then other days I feel I need to stay here and help in any way I can.

Although in most ways that matter, life here is not unpleasant or all that difficult. But there are times when the loneliness and frustration makes me keep "Sweet Home Alabama" playing in my head. At times, I wonder if I am doing all that much good.

The Hungarian Department of Immigration might help me make my decision. I received notice from the American Embassy that the Ambassador has been officially notified effective May 1, 2004, Hungary will begin enforcing their immigration laws concerning visitors who do not have long-term visas to live in the country. Hungary officially joins the European Union on May 1.

Many people are saying, "They always say that, but they never do it." While that may have been true in the past, Hungary has never been a part of the EU before. It might not be so easy for them to make exceptions as in the past. In brief, the law allows any American to visit Hungary for up to 90 days within a six-month period with only a valid U.S. passport. After 90 days, he must leave until the end of the six-months. Prior to moving, and after I moved, all attempts at acquiring a residence visa proved futile. In fact, with things as they are now, there is no way I will be granted such a visa. I plan to consult a lawyer here to see if there is any loophole or exception that I do not know about. I also hope he might know of some way we can get the church officially registered here. If so, then there is no problem because an officially registered church can simply issue a letter of invitation for a U.S. citizen to come work with them and a visa will be granted. In case you might not remember, all it takes for Hungary to officially recognize a church is 10,000 members. We haven't quite made it there yet.

I hesitate to even consider leaving. As far as I know, no one is currently considering moving here. Although Bill is not planning to move, he is only here for part of the year. He is burdened with two difficult works and could use all the help he can get here in Hungary (and for that matter, he could use help in Bulgaria too). I would like for someone to move here or be planning to move here before I leave. Also, I have made no plans or arrangements for a place to move to.

I thought it best to go ahead and share some of my thoughts about this matter with you now. I will keep you updated as things progress.

Thank you all again for your concern and support in the work here and for me.

God is good and His lovingkindness endures forever.

Isten veletek!

Mike

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