

# Baptist COURIERS FOR CHRIST

## The Pinch Hitter

by Joshua Stertz



“One hundred and eight!” I exclaimed as I read the online statistic. Tim Carpenter (the director of our local Bearing Precious Seed ministry) and I were discussing the importance of baseball to people in the Dominican Republic. I finally decided to look up how many Dominican players are currently on the MLB active roster. Besides the United States, this country has more players in the majors than any other. A couple of days later while on our survey trip to set up the details for the upcoming E.P.I.C. (Evangelizing People In the Caribbean) I would have the opportunity to share that newfound knowledge in a unique way.

We planned to go out with a team on Saturday morning evangelization and looked forward to the opportunity to give out some booklets containing Romans and a plan of salvation. Tim and I were partnered with our driver/fellow believer, Alexis, and a local pastor. As we pulled up to a crowded park, I noticed there was a sandlot baseball game in progress. While walking around the park and offering the booklets to folks young and old, I noticed that everyone was taking them from me (quite a different response from what we typically experience in Europe). Suddenly, I heard someone yelling my name across the park. As I looked in the direction of the voice, I saw Alexis waving his arm for me to come to him. I moved quickly, unsure as to what situation we might be facing, but I was relieved when he shared that

we had an opportunity to preach the gospel to the ball teams! The pastor had approached the coach with the booklets, and when the coach heard that we were from America, he wanted his players to hear what we had to say.

I told Alexis that I was going to grab my Bible from the car and that he and Tim should make sure that each player got his own booklet. “Dear God, please give me the exact words that these boys need to hear, and help me to use great ‘plainness of speech,’” I prayed as I walked back under the shade tree. It was surreal to present the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to this group of about 30-40 ball players. I likened the game of life to the game of baseball, asking the boys questions about winning and losing the game of baseball, which they answered correctly. Then I told them that, like in baseball, there are winners and losers at the end of this life. Winners spend eternity in heaven, while losers spend eternity in the lake of fire, and the only way to win is with the perfect pinch hitter (Jesus Christ). He is the substitute that took our sin for



*Continued on center page...*



*Tim Carpenter distributing booklets of Romans to the ball players*



*More folks gathering around on both sides of the fence as I preached*

# HISTORY Highlights

by Ken Stertz

“Our contact is nervous...we have Bibles...we could be arrested if found with them....”

For this *History Highlights* we are revisiting a newsletter article written by Ken about a trip into communist Romania with Ken and Tricia and Larry and Cheryl.



ROMANIA—Saturday, October 15, 1988: border crossing into Romania. Border crossing—Hungarians are thorough; Romanians are very thorough. Both ask, “Do you have Bibles?” They look at our English ones, and the Romanian guard is a little disturbed with Tricia’s songbook. They know we are Christians, so they ask, “Do you have friends in Romania? Do you bring gifts for Romanians?” The questions are difficult, but somehow we squeeze by the worst of it. On into Oradea, we must stay at the government approved Dacia Hotel. We miss it on the first try and end up on an unplanned “scenic tour” of the city. We are stared at a lot and kind of stand out as Americans. But we do finally find it and check in at \$80.00 per night for the worst place we have stayed. The next day about 1:00 pm we are picked up by our contact for some unusual visitation. We drive to a village home over dirt and rocks that make us wish we had a 4-wheel drive. We are met by a lovely older woman who takes us in for a fine meal. We are shamed when these folks do the best they can to feed us well when they have so little. We have brought some fresh bread, fresh pork from the duty-free shop, coffee, rice, chocolate, canned chicken, and other things we managed to get in. She cries when we discuss her daughter, living in Hungary. She tried once to bribe the authorities with coffee to obtain a passport and started off on the train only to be turned back at the border without apology or explanation. We visit for awhile, make up a few more food packages, and head out



for more visits. The next is to a pastor and wife. He is in the church, cleaning and studying. He is embarrassed about the frayed house jacket he wears over his clothes. His wife is a jubilant, grandmotherly type who insists on feeding us at least some bread. She cuts up the fresh Hungarian bread we brought her, though we protest. Bread in Romania is often made mixed with sawdust because the wheat crops are sold internationally to enrich the government. She runs to the neighbor to borrow water. They get water only three hours per day and don’t know when it will be on. Someone in the neighborhood will yell, “Water!” and everyone quickly fills containers for daily use. She picks apricots out of her yard and purees them, then mixes them with water run through a carbonator. It is sweet and delicious. She borrows marmalade and honey, which she serves generously with the bread. She obviously gets great pleasure in serving us. She is also an artist and has beautiful paintings of her own hanging throughout the house. It never ceases to amaze us, the passion for beauty and dignity amid poverty and privation. We sing and pray together, and too soon we must go, leaving behind another food parcel.

Our contact is nervous. We have seen some road checks, and we have Bibles along. He decides to leave them at a pastor’s house. We could be arrested if found with them. It is difficult to find the next home on the dark street, but finally we do. The husband (pastor) is away conducting a funeral, but the wife and children are excited about visitors. They are also desperately poor, but their home is happy, and their faces seem





Ken, Tricia, Larry, Cheryl

to glow with joy. We refuse an offer of tea; we pray and leave another food parcel along with some sweets for the children.

It is dark and late, but we have one more visit to make back in Oradea. The home is on a street that looks like an abandoned back alley but which is, in fact, a main street off the city center ring. The buildings are crumbling, trolley tracks run down the street, and we must park on them. We ring the doorbell, the door opens, and we are hurried in. We are met by a very gracious but firm gentleman named Georgi. We sit together over tea as he proceeds to tell us that he has waited nearly a year now for some much-needed Bibles. I sit and listen with much respect and admiration. The police have already beaten this man for his work as an evangelist and his faithful stand for Christ. How small our problems seem in his presence. He has promised his people Bibles twice, and they have not come. We can make no perfect promises, but by God's grace the Bibles will come soon.

It is very late when we leave. The shops have been closed for five hours, and trams and buses have long since stopped running. There is an eerie lack of activity for such a big city. We drive back to the hotel. The streets are dark and deserted; police are everywhere, and we feel extremely conspicuous. We are let out about a half block from the hotel. As the van pulls away, we see two uniformed police watching the whole charade. We saunter into the hotel trying desperately to look casual in a ridiculously un-casual situation. How could we explain that "tourists," who "have no friends in the country" have been away from their hotel without their car long after stores are closed and public transportation has stopped? We go to our room with strange feelings and emotions, steeling ourselves for an official knock on our door. We pray silently; we say good night to the television with one channel and the phone with no dial and sleep a little less than soundly. We have deep appreciation for those who have prayed for us.

...to be continued...

## The Pinch Hitter

Continued from front page...



Poor people



Rich people

*A sobering reminder that I was able to share with the boys at the sandlot!*

us. **"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."** II Corinthians 5:21

I told them that, unlike baseball, that if we lose the game of life, we don't get another chance to play again. I had seen the above picture on my FaceBook feed that morning of two identical caskets. I showed them this picture and told them that one day I may have the opportunity to watch them play ball in the major leagues and that they may have lots of money, a big house, and fancy cars. However, if they die lost in their sins, they will still lose the game of life and face eternal damnation. As I shared the Romans Road with them, I had each guy turn to the verses in his own booklet and read them with me. When I felt assured that they understood that they were sinners, that they needed to be saved from their sins, that Jesus is the ONLY Saviour, and that they needed to repent and receive his free gift of salvation, then I turned over the invitation to Alexis. Over twenty of those young men bowed their heads right there on the edge of the baseball diamond and asked Jesus to be their Saviour! The Lord knows their hearts, but we can be assured that they heard a clear presentation of the gospel and took a copy of the book of Romans home with them to read further.

Opportunities like this abound in the Dominican Republic, and we are excited to offer two missions trips to this country in 2025. March 3-11 we have a trip going to the Samana peninsula, and March 17-25 we have one to Santo Domingo (the capital city). We need laborers on these trips to help us give out the gospel to lost folks in these regions. Please visit [epic.wyldewood.org](http://epic.wyldewood.org) for information or an application. Feel free to call me at 920-420-8215 if you have more questions or need further information.

Whose life could be changed eternally because you are willing to take your time and resources to be witnesses in the regions beyond?



## More Containers Shipped

Thanks to the faithful support of so many of you, we have had another wonderful year of shipping 20-foot containers filled with scripture to Europe and beyond. Many of these scriptures we won't have the opportunity to physically distribute ourselves, but we often receive pictures and testimonies of how the word is going out and changing lives across the globe. Several containers were shipped into Croatia early this year, followed by a container to the Philippines, and we have sent several containers to various countries in Africa. The most recent arrived in Zimbabwe a few weeks ago, and the local authorities have been trying to extort money for its release. Please pray with us that each container of scripture would make it safely around the world to its intended destination and also that God would protect his word from those evil men that try to keep it out of the hands of folks that need the life-giving message! **"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it."** Isaiah 55:11



**WYLDEWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH**  
3030 Witzel Ave.  
Oshkosh, WI 54904-6599  
[www.wyldewood.org](http://www.wyldewood.org)

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