

The Cleaford Christian Trust

...caring about Romania...

Charity No. 1039861



Cleaford News



Special Edition June 2012

We have not been able to communicate with our many supporters for some time, but now wish to bring you up to date with a sad development in Romania.

In 1999 we were asked by pastor Gyula Borzasi (GB), minister of the church in Brasov and General-Secretary of the Convention of Hungarian speaking Baptist Churches in Romania, if we would provide funds to help poor widows in his church who were living on very low pensions. We arranged for supporters in the UK to each sponsor one of the widows with a monthly payment. We sent this money each quarter to GB for him to distribute to the ladies. From time to time he sent us reports about the ladies, and suggested additional ladies whom he would like us to add to the scheme.

In February 2012 we were advised that some of the widows were not receiving their money. Within a few weeks GB confessed to the church, and wrote telling us, that he had not handed over the money for a long time, and he repaid about £13,000 which should have been passed to the ladies. Investigations continued as to whether this was the correct sum, and we have now established that a further £4,000 needs to be repaid to us.

As we are bound to do, we reported this misappropriation to the Charity Commission and to the Independent Examiner of our Annual Accounts. In both cases they were happy with the remedial action which we had put in hand. We also notified other charities whom we know work with the Hungarian Baptist churches in Romania that there had been a confession of misappropriation of funds.

The next question was to ask whether there had been problems with other monies we had sent to Romania. For over ten years we have been making twice annual visits to Romania, and each time we have met with pastor Istvan Borzasi (IB), as minister of Targu Mures church and at various times as a Vice-President or President of the Convention.

IB has presented a number of needs to us, and we have provided funds for purchase of land to build churches, purchase of buildings to serve as churches, building materials for churches, salaries for pastors in the Convention, equipment (such as chairs) for churches, help for widows and families in particular need, subsidies for children to attend summer camps, and money and materials for work with children.

Following the GB confession, we asked the Executive of the Convention to arrange an independent investigation to establish whether there were any problems with the funds that had been sent via IB. Should it be found that any funds were missing, TCCT would expect to be reimbursed. At about this time IB issued an open letter, with a 'declaration' which explained how he had used money TCCT had sent for each purpose.

Jozsef Kovacs, the General-Secretary of the Convention, undertook that a member of the Executive would be appointed to investigate and report, and the question of reimbursement would be considered.

We provided detailed schedules of the amounts of money donated and the dates of transfer for each project. Each quarter when we had transferred money to IB we had given him an email with the details of how the sum was to be allocated, so much for a salary, so much for widows, etc.

The report of the Convention's investigation showed that approximately £80,000 had not be used for the purposes for which it had been sent, and so IB's 'declaration' was seen to be a lie. Some pastors had not received their salaries, and had not even been told that we had responded to IB's request for us to support them. This money was said to have been used for other church purposes, such as travel expenses, which we had declined to fund when we had been asked previously.

It is well known that there is widespread corruption in Romania, but we had always felt that dealing with senior churchmen in a mainstream denomination, together with regular inspection visits and meetings, would save us from such problems. Not only were we deceived, but so also were their colleagues in the Convention. There has been genuine shock and disbelief amongst responsible people who are much closer to the brothers than we could ever be.

Since our formation, the Trust has handled over £900,000, without taking into account the value of the large quantities of goods that we have delivered, so we need to keep the scope of this current problem in proportion.

We are currently in negotiation for the return of the money, and we will be using different methods for sending support in future. On our visits we have seen many successful projects, churches planted, poor people helped, ministry with the disabled developed, very effective children's camps, etc. There is still a large amount of good work going on, which we wish to continue to support.

Angus Cleaver
Chairman