



Newsletter 2016

Bible engagement

In 2015 Estonian Council of Churches and Saar Poll OÜ conducted a survey “Religion, Life and Religious Life 2015 in Estonia” and the summary was published in a book “Where are you going, land of Virgin Mary?” (October 2016). Information about bibrereading confirmed our experience about the vastness of this particular field. From the people between the age of 15-74 yrs who were interviewed, about 36% acknowledged themselves as Christians (which was quite a surprise). Out of this 36% read their Bible every day only 7% (!), once a week (10%) and never 48% (!!). Most of those who opened the Bible, added, that they experience difficulties in understanding what they are reading and need much better explanation of bibrereads.



This presents a serious challenge to churches and preachers, but also to SU Estonia.

Pondering these facts, it was a special joy to think back to all **8 Bible reading camps** we had in 2016, to more than 500 young people, who in camps diligently and with yearning opened their

Bibles every day trying to connect what they read and heard, with their own lives (see the camps newsletter). Even in our very secular country, the “seeds” of bibrereading have been definitely planted to the new generations and our prayer is that these would bear much fruit! It is positive, life-giving experience, that encourages and motivates a young

(and old) person to come back to Bible, to hear anew from the Lord. And the Lord speaks - this is the weekly experience of **campleaders homegroup**. This is the reason, the campteam is not willing to stop these weekly gatherings even during the most intensive camping period! In autumn 2016 instead of one evening per week, they met sometimes even 3 times a week and in 2 different towns. Because God’s Word is the lifegiving Source.



More than 500 children found **SU bibrereading notes for children** in the Christian children magazine “Sunbeam”, 4 times a year. Children in many churches’ sunday schools walked together through the **Big Bible Challenge** adventures. Unfortunately the BBC has not found its way to the parents at

home as a tool we intended, and to meet this challenge SU Estonia needs your every prayer!

SU Bible notes in radio were in the air 2-3 times every day, and though it is getting harder to find new authors and find solutions between the demands of different radio stations, the program has maintained its wide spectrum of dedicated listeners. **SU Bible notes in our homepage and BR card** support the program introducing authors from the world-wide SU to our readers. Many have admitted that web notes are their daily “bread” and the translators testify that translating the notes and getting therefore deeper to bibletext contains extra personal blessing for them. Both radio- and the webnotes have an **open archive** - where one can find for every bibletext already several matching notes now.

Bookmarks were a “new” thing in 2016. In cooperation with SU Finland we published a bookmark for young people and adults, containing Bible timeline and SU BR method. Several hundreds of them have been shared in bible-schools, youth events, camps and churches. The other bookmark “One Story” (designed by Natália Luptáková) for children, was published in cooperation with SU Slovakia and is a first step in a wider children BR engagement process in 2017.

A printed **leaflet of prayer, “Battle gear”** - based on Ephesians 6:10-18, was published first for camp team, but quite soon became popular in churches as well.

There were also several **Bible engagement events** throughout the year. SU participated



in the biggest Christian youth festival “Piiblipäevad” in June, this year the program was named “Parrallel Reality”, with about 600 young people participating..

Iisak Virma from campteam has continued to research and develop different methods of Biblereading through the year and have tried these in a variety of youth groups and programs. One of the highlights was our very first Bible marathon.

“Bible as a living Bread” was a series of lectures given by **Mari Vahermägi** in Lutheran Bible Schools, and a sermon in Methodist church youth service; a lecture “The Word of the Bible in our families” to

another lutheran church; a seminar about prayer in Baptist Church camp; articles and publications in magazine “Church and Theology” ; Bible reading and morning prayer weeks in national radio. Seminars, sermons and presentations have been held during Ecumenical Family Festival organised by Estonian Evangelical Alliance; In Ecumenical Women’s Conference and in Women’s World Prayer Day; in educational conference “Values and Virtues” organised by Tallinn University; and several special radio programs. All these have been welcomed as possibilities to promote Bible engagement and SU work, and highlight God’s Word, as His invitation and gift to us, encouraging young and old to trust and follow it.

Campsite and reterat centre “Kibuvits”

“Kibuvits” was a top priority and hottest prayer item (especially for our prayer team) throughout 2016. In the beginning of March, when **Glenn Coombs and Monika Kuschmierz** visited Estonia, we put down a **timeline**, hoping that the Lord will provide necessary funding to complete the 1st phase of development. It was much needed and truly encouraging to experience this kind of support from wider SU family. Through the

years there has been a lot of waiting and uncertainty about the future in this project and sometimes this tends to eat up all hope. Especially when the campwork is bursting and we struggle with finding the places for camps, but can't proceed with developing our own site. The joy, creativity and bigger picture Glenn brought, the networking, feedback, possibilities, prayers and updates - it all helped us to push forward even at the moments of some despair. One of the special highlights was in June, when during my sabbatical I was able to visit 2 **Christian communities** in England (Franciscan community in Hilfield and Christian community in Scargill). For the very first time I



was able to experience in different forms the environment that we've so far only envisioned. And it was so much more than in the visions! Being there, I daily recognised in reality certain details and pieces of the vision we



had carried in our hearts for our site for years. There was so much to learn and the leaders in both places were extremely helpful. Special thanks to John Simmons, who made it all possible!

The **biggest challenge** came suddenly, during the phase of preparing drawings for the housing. Our camp team had given their feedback to the first drawings of the houses to architect and while discussing these we realised, that the **“little house”** with which we had planned to start the activity on the site - was in fact too little and as such a **dead end solution**. But how do you change if even this little house costs more than any real funding we've ever got? Yet - the architect needed the decision and after a week in prayers we chose to do the **“step of faith”** and decided to go for the full size house - one fitting the needs of actual camp and retreat work. **“Walking on water”** may seem **“doable”** reading the New Testament, but in real life, with real buildings, it is more than scary. The new drawings were fantastic, fitting perfectly to the wild environment, for our needs and very much appreciated by our camp team. Now... we are waiting for the Lord - to show us the next steps, to provide in His time according to His measure.

By summer Glenn had realised one of his **“crazy ideas”** and organised us 10 hammocks - so that the camp team could start at least doing something on the site. This kind of equipment itself was another dream come true for our team and we thank everyone who participated in this! But because of intense camp season the very first overnight event on the campsite ever - **“The Hammock-fasting-and-prayer-night”** - took place in rather chilly temperatures in the beginning of October. In our own, Kibuvitsa campsite, at the heart of the forest, on that pitch black night we sat around the campfire praying, sharing and dreaming about this place God has given us, trying to line in with His plans, asking His guidance and praising Him for what is to come.



Maybe the darkness was good - for we could not see all the work that needs yet to be done. Instead we tried to see in faith. It was a bit cold, but really comfortable to fall asleep



in a hammock, listening to the silent song of the forest and the sea, dreaming about the future.... Next morning our new lake was “blessed” by Rando, the very first swimmer in it - who actually showed that a good cold swimming round is very much possible there. Before we left for breakfast and hot sauna, I visited the **well (!), that had been installed** just few days earlier and thanked God for answering our prayers about the additional funding for the first phase. God is always faithful - by Christmas, also **the powerline** was brought to the site and made **ready for connection!** Two of the biggest challenges were done!



We want to thank you all for the prayers and support! Please keep praying with us for the funding we need for housing - in this area we are still “on the water” and waiting for the Lord.

The last provision we rejoice to share is about the warehouse. Between camps on August I suddenly received a message, that our long term partner, who gave us storage room, terminates his business and moves away from Estonia. Together with Bible Society we were eagerly searching the next place but

there seemed none fitting to our needs. Just before leaving for next camp I only managed to pray: “Please God, you see our needs...”, and when the camp was over, the agreement with the warehouse was signed! It costs us more, but for the first time we don’t have to drag heavy boxes from top floor and can really create an order on the shelves and this is a great thing!

Through big and small challenges God has proved throughout the year 2016 how faithful, loving and trustworthy He is. And we thank Him for all of you, who have stood by our side, not knowing much (and I am truly sorry for so few updates!), and still supporting us in every way! May God bless this year for you as we unite in following Him.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

Mari Vahermägi
national leader

The special camping season 2016 newsletter is at: <http://www.avatudpiibel.ee/en/scripture-union-estonia/newsletters>

More pictures are available at: <http://www.avatudpiibel.ee/galerii>