

News from Keston College

The invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet armed forces and the spate of arrests within the Soviet Union almost clogged the telephone lines to Keston College during the first weeks of the year. Calls were to be expected from national radio and television presenters, the major newspapers and church leaders. In addition, local radio stations and several of the more popular daily papers found a new interest in the lives of people within the Soviet bloc. Our Information Department, now installed in the newly constructed Communications Centre, was able to cope through telex, telephone and the enlarged *Keston News Service*. Our postbag too was heavier than usual, and many new and former supporters paid tribute to the reliability and efficiency of our staff.

We had the privilege of welcoming Alexander Ginzburg, the human rights activist, to Keston College in January. He had been separated from his family since his expulsion from the Soviet Union last summer because his wife refused to leave behind their adopted Russian son. When it was finally realized that the authorities would not allow him to leave—he is currently in the Soviet army—Mrs Ginzburg made the agonizing decision to leave for the West with her other children and join her husband. The family was re-united in February. That month we welcomed another distinguished visitor, Anatoli Levitin-Krasnov, the well-known Orthodox writer who now lives in Switzerland. It is a great privilege and encouragement to all at Keston to meet at least some of the people for whom we work and pray.

Dr David Russell, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and President of the European Baptist Federation, was able to visit Keston towards the end of 1979. This is the first time that a British Baptist leader has visited the College; and it was particularly appreciated that Dr Russell (who is also one of the sponsors of our fund-raising Appeal) was able to share with the staff his own experiences of visits to the Soviet Union.

We were deeply grieved at the news of the arrest on 15 January of the saintly Fr Dimitri Dudko from Moscow. He was moved several times from

one parish to another, then finally arrested because he was too successful at preaching the Gospel, too good at communicating the truth—which was bringing new hope and life, especially to young people. Just as sad was the news that Pastor Vladimir Shelkov, the courageous Adventist leader, had died in a strict regime labour camp in Yakutiya at the age of 84. Mrs Shelkov, who lives in Samarkand (several thousand miles from the prison camp), was too ill to attend her husband's funeral—the only notification she received of his death.

Michael Rowe, Head of Soviet Studies, was able to attend the congress of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow last December. In February this year Alexander Tomsy, Head of the East European Department, gave a lecture on the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia and Poland at a conference organized by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. Southern Television visited the College in February to compile a series of seven short programmes involving staff members of various departments. On 9 March Michael Bourdeaux, the Director, gave the second of a series of Lenten sermons broadcast on BBC Radio 4. The speakers were all people whose lives had been influenced by living or working abroad.

A generous grant has been made to the College to enable Jane Ellis, our senior Soviet researcher, to concentrate on her study of the Russian Orthodox Church with the object of publishing a book—intended as a sequel to Michael Bourdeaux's *Patriarch and Prophets*.

After four years of tireless devotion to Keston's cause, covering numerous activities ranging from public speaking to co-editing the newsletter *The Right to Believe*, Victoria Watts left us at the end of March for family reasons. It must have been a far cry from the Old Vic on the one hand and a riding school in Hampshire on the other to the dilapidated primary school in Keston, where Victoria pitched in as a volunteer to do anything that needed doing. Her friendly charm and enthusiasm have played a major part in our public relations ever since. Many a supporter has been encouraged and enlightened through her letters acknowledging gifts or answering queries. Our sponsored walk to Canterbury last year was only one of many ventures initiated by Victoria, and while her cheerful presence will be sadly missed every day at Keston, we know we shall see her often and that her many talents will still be invested for us in Hampshire and further afield.

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