



Pilgrimage to Fatima

the south. Much of the focus is upon the famous shrine of Fatima in central Portugal. Many Portuguese have been known to declare their belief in Mary, but not in God, and the annual pilgrimage to Fatima saw half a million people attend in 2004. Portugal presents the same problems as any modern secular society: materialism, pluralism, and all-round indifference to spiritual things. The situation has not been helped by the negative impact of large, Charismatic churches that have come in peddling their message of “wealth and health” and leaving a trail of disappointment and disillusionment in their wake.

While remaining immensely challenged by the need of their adopted home, and after years of faithful witness, Stephen and Hetty were inevitably faced with important decisions about the education of their children. The year 2001 saw their daughter, Joanne, back in Northern Ireland, and with Richard’s return imminent, they were at a cross-roads. At the same time, a vacancy arose for a coordinator in the Acre Gospel Mission. The work called for experience of field work, general administration, information and deputation. Having satisfied themselves that God had opened the way for their return to Northern Ireland, Stephen responded positively to a new challenge. His work as mission coordinator keeps him in close contact with field workers, and he was able to make visits to Brazil in 2003 and to Portugal in 2004.

What the Smiths could hardly have envisaged is the way in which God has opened a door of witness to many Portu-

guese right on their own doorstep. Recent years have brought a flood of migrant workers into Northern Ireland. They are mostly involved in labour-intensive industry and agriculture, and their numbers include some four thousand Portuguese. Many of these have settled in or around Portadown, Stephen Smith’s home town, and near to where he is once again living. Opportunities to contact those in this “new” community are opening up. Statutory authorities often require Portuguese speakers to act as interpreters, and Stephen and Hetty have been called on to help. Their initial contacts have been followed up, some

in a hall near the centre of Portadown. Some thirty to forty have been attending, most of them unconverted, and there is evidence of a genuine interest with many returning on a regular basis. The work is ongoing. Stephen and Hetty look for other openings to interpret and to teach English. There are opportunities to meet with and speak to Portuguese speakers even on the streets and in local cafes. Many are only too ready to converse with someone who speaks their language, perhaps more willing than if they were at home in Portugal.

Conscious that their potential congregation is fluid (many workers are short-term),



Portuguese speakers in Portadown

individuals have been befriended, and so the way has opened to proclaim the gospel. Others have been invited to the local Free Presbyterian church and have attended services there. But Stephen detected some difficulties with this.

“Those who came,” he remarked, “enjoyed the atmosphere, and they were made to feel welcome, as hospitality was extended to them. However, the service being in English and the message delivered for those fluent in that language, there was limited benefit for those whose English is, at best, limited.”

Recognising the need, Stephen saw the possibility of establishing a meeting for these Portuguese speakers. And so May 2004 saw the beginning of Sunday afternoon services

the Smiths are making every effort to reach needy souls while the opportunity is there.

“Perhaps we can be a link in the chain,” Stephen concludes, “a means of introducing these people to the gospel and perhaps channelling them into one or other of the small fellowships in their own land. God has placed us here, at this time, for a purpose, and we intend to do what we can to reach out to them. Isn’t it amazing that someone sent out from Portadown to Portugal to reach Portuguese, should now be brought back to Portadown with an opportunity to reach those same people? Isn’t God wonderful!” ■

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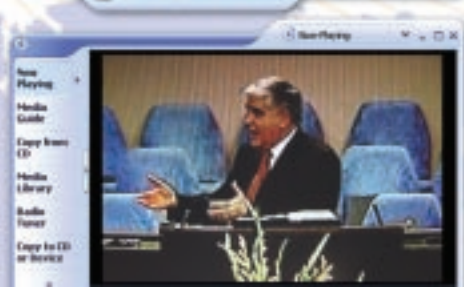
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September 2006

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Today's Date
 Recurring Live Webcast
 Special Live Webcast

CURRENT U.S. EASTERN DATE/TIME
 10:52 PM Friday, September 01, 2006
 My local time is: 03:52 AM (+5)

SUNDAY RECURRING LIVE WEBCASTS

U.S. Eastern	My Local Time	Webcast
06:30 AM	11:30 AM	Ballymena Free Presbyterian Church - Northern Ireland Next
		Lisburn Free Presbyterian Church - Northern Ireland Next
07:00 AM	12:00 PM	Magherafelt Free Presbyterian Church - Northern Ireland
11:00 AM	04:00 PM	Calvary Baptist Church - USA
		Faith Free Presbyterian Church - USA
12:15 PM	05:15 PM	First Baptist Church of Parker Texas - USA
01:30 PM	06:30 PM	Ballymena Free Presbyterian Church - Northern Ireland
		Lisburn Free Presbyterian Church - Northern Ireland
02:00 PM	07:00 PM	Marrieta Valley Church - USA
02:30 PM	07:30 PM	Magherafelt Free Presbyterian Church - Northern Ireland
05:00 PM	10:00 PM	For God's Glory Mission Ministries - USA
06:00 PM	11:00 PM	Calvary Baptist Church - USA
		Faith Free Presbyterian Church - USA
08:00 PM	01:00 AM	Bible Baptist Church - USA

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