

Family wants ministry to disabled children started in Romania_51704

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Becky
Oprean
reads her
favorite
scripture,
Psalms
139,
before
giving her
testimony
at
Emmanuel
Baptist
Church in
Bucharest,
Romania,
in 1999.
Her
mother,
Lidia
Oprean,
holds her
Bible for
her.

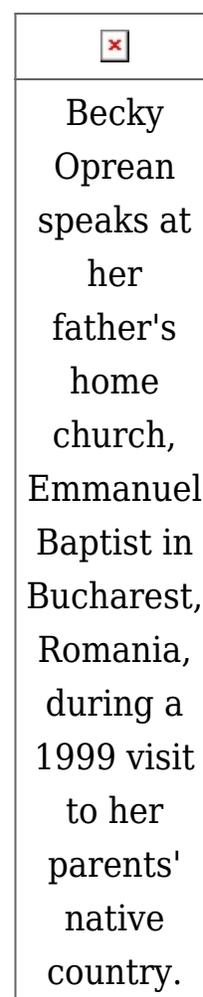
Family wants ministry to disabled children started in Romania

By Craig Bird

Special to the Baptist Standard

The verbal and visual messages resonate in any setting—a smiling, wheelchair-bound teenager confidently quoting Psalm 139: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

But in Romania, where “imperfect” children are hidden and not helped, the impact is multiplied when that teenager is Becky Oprean, granddaughter of a longtime president of that country's Baptist union.



And it's multiplied further when her mother, Lidia Oprean, candidly talks about her own bitter battles with shame, anger and fear after Becky was born with spina bifida.

“God has given me a growing conviction to reach out to other mothers

because, in Romania, they have almost no support to help them deal with all these feelings,” Oprean explained.

“Under the Communist government, children like Becky were literally shunned, and the church often didn't help mothers who felt God was punishing them unfairly. I know what it's like because, at first, I wished Becky would die rather than grow up crippled. I screamed at God and doubted that he really loved me or her.”

So in late July, the mother and daughter will be at the center of a first-ever conference for mothers of handicapped children.

At a mountain resort a six-hour drive from Bucharest, 100 women will spend four days exploring what God has to say about the subject—both in the Bible and through the lives of children like Becky and mothers like Oprean, both of whom now attend Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio.

“There is space for 120 women if we had enough money, but we still need about \$1,000 to pay for 100,” Oprean explained. “Most of these women can barely afford to feed and clothe their families, so we are paying all of the expenses.”

It is the first step toward a dream of providing a permanent, on-going ministry for Eastern Europe that could include summer family camps, sports camps and rehabilitation centers—all laid atop a foundation of evangelism.

If that master plan sounds a lot like what Joni Eareckson Tada does, there's a good reason. The Opreans met Tada at one of her family camps and soon were working as “Joni and Friends” volunteers.

That relationship led to the family making numerous trips to Romania to distribute wheelchairs for Tada's ministry.

Tada also encouraged them to write about their own faith journey—and authored the introduction to the resulting Romanian-language book. She also has encouraged this new venture.

“God has literally used Becky to spark a revival in Romania,” Oprean said.

“She has spoken on national television (to an estimated viewing audience of 23 million) and at churches and orphanages across the country. Those events, plus the book, and word-of-mouth have attracted a cross-section of Romanians to the conference. There will be evangelical Christians but also Orthodox Christians and even quite a few nonbelievers, but all will be mothers struggling to raise a handicapped child.”

Another result has been that about 20 leaders of this ministry-to-mothers have emerged, themselves mothers of handicapped children. These devout Christians not only will lead sessions at the seminar but will head up the on-going support groups that will continue to meet monthly.

“These leaders minister to me too,” Oprean pointed out. “Many of them have children with much more severe handicaps than Becky, children who can't talk at all. I look at Becky with that great personality and listen to her talk about her faith, and I realize I am so very, very blessed.”

That was not the way she felt 17 years ago. She and her husband and young son had immigrated to the United States just months before, after a seven-year battle through the government bureaucracy.

Because of their faith, the Communist government denied the young couple the college majors they preferred and restricted them to low-level employment.

But their newfound happiness at being in the United States evaporated when the doctor said, “There's a problem with the baby.” The mother was especially devastated.

“I even asked the doctors if they could just let her die,” she admitted. “For three years, I battled God.”

Then one day, she called home and heard the tears and sorrow in her father's voice when he answered the phone. After assuring her that everything was fine, her father said he was really glad she called when she did.

“Your mother and I have been praying and fasting for 72 hours about your attitude toward Becky. We've been asking God to help you understand that she is a gift to you from him.”

Oprean was swept by a peace that has remained to this day. “God understood me and forgave me and healed me,” she explained. “And Becky has been an unending source of joy and encouragement to me and to others.”

Three years ago, Becky's medical condition worsened, a normal progression for people with spina bifida as their bodies mature and grow.

“She asked God for one more trip to Romania and to get to finish her Bible Study Fellowship program,” Oprean said. “She's made three trips since then and this summer will be No. 4. She finished that Bible study and has gone on to do more.”

More inspiring is that she shares her mother and father's core commitment to reaching out the families with handicapped children, both in the United States and around the world.

“She is saddened by the thought of dying, but she also reminds us that she's always looked forward to getting to go be with Jesus where she can run and walk like other children,” Oprean added.

“But she asked me point blank, 'Will you and Daddy continue this ministry

after I'm gone, or will you quit?'

“I told her: 'Becky, God gave you to us as a special gift, and we will spend the rest of our lives in this ministry. We couldn't do anything else.'”

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