

February 27, 2007

Hi Everyone!

I hate cats. This comes as no surprise to most of you, but we experienced something yesterday that took my animosity to new levels.

We've started having regular worship services here in Schwechat every two weeks, and we rent a meeting room in the city auditorium – great layout, the right size, known to everyone in the city, etc. The only problem is that we can't get into the room to set up until 9 am Sunday mornings, which leaves us about an hour to get everything ready for worship - sound system, projection system, Sunday School area, chairs, coffee, cake, etc. We've got good team that works on this and we're getting better all the time.

Yesterday we showed up at 9 am, and the entry door was locked. Georg, one of our men, went around to another door to get in and let us in. He came back a few minutes later and said, "We've got a problem, the rooms is full of cats." Now, the German word for "cats" sounds a lot like the colloquial term for "vomit", so I thought at first that we had a big stinky mess to clean up.

Turns out the room really was full of cats, as the city was hosting a cat exhibition and they were using our room as well as every other room in the place. Obviously the room had been double-booked. My next thought then was to go and get our infamous Dogs of Death and send them in for an all-you-can-eat buffet . . . but we had a worship service to do.

Our team leaped into action, began making phone calls, and in the space of a half hour turned our living room into a worship service room. We had 44 people in our living room for worship, prayer, a sermon about grace, and time for cake and coffee afterwards. (Our previous worship service had 30 people in it). With the 44 we were larger than the average evangelical church in Austria, and we had 9 first-timers there yesterday. It was a great morning (although our living room did look like the economy section of an airplane)

After the worship service I was talking with one of our leaders and I told him that I did not want to use the auditorium any more as we couldn't count on it being free. Georg, (whom you met earlier) heard me say this and afterwards came to me and said, "If this was a business deal I would absolutely agree with you, but don't you think that the man who double-booked the room should get grace from us, since you talked about grace this morning?" (Georg is a fairly new believer) He went on to say that the man would expect us to not do business with him anymore, and that we could be a huge testimony to him. Needless to say, I changed my mind and we're going to stay with the auditorium (and call a few days before every service just to make sure there isn't a glitch).

We had a leaders meeting in the afternoon and we were talking about how well everyone responded to the surprise that morning and how well our team functioned. One of our men then said, "I know that it was stressful for you and Sharon this morning to have to turn your house into a church building in the space of a half hour. I admit though, I had to laugh because I thought, 'I know that Satan wants to block this church, but is cats the best that he can do? He really is a defeated enemy!'"

I've already gotten feedback from the non-believers who were there about how much they enjoyed it and how much they learned – they said they'll be back. We're praising God for how he is working. This next week we will be continuing with our worship training. The preaching class meets again on Friday as well. From March 7-10 I will be doing the Bible teaching at a retreat for alcoholics and their families, and the worship team will have to practice and lead for the first time without my help. They see this as no problem (which means either that they have a lot of confidence now or that I'm nowhere near as much help as I think I am).

Anyway, thanks for your prayers. God is at work. People are coming to Christ and our church is growing both in numbers and in maturity. It was a great day yesterday!

But I still hate cats.

Paul