

Equipping Reliable Leaders in  
Sound Doctrine  
in

Russia  
Ukraine  
Latvia  
Hungary  
Romania

Fall 2002  
Volume 5, Issue 3

# NEWSITEMS



## Fall Edition

### TRANSFORMING CULTURE BY DOING HIS WILL



By Rev. Dr. Merle Messer, Alta  
Woods Presbyterian Church,  
Jackson MS

Church of Transfiguration in Makeyevka has been a home to many a student and professor receiving their Reformed theological education through the efforts of I.T.E.M. laborers

**"When I.T.E.M. goes into a country to teach and train church leaders, we are literally training people to take people from one culture and lead them into a different culture."**

This past September I again had the distinct privilege of travelling to Donetsk, Ukraine to teach. Between the Certificate class, the Bachelors and the Masters program in Donetsk and Shakhtyorsk, we had approximately 125 students. I was pleasantly amused to see the familiar bald tires on the left side of the plane that goes from Kiev to Donetsk. We lost electricity every day while we were teaching and we could not eat one day at noon because even the cold water had been turned off. Of course, the hot water was turned off daily during the day and early evening.

Richard Blauw, Roger Sparks and myself went together this year as we have previously. When we arrived two professors from Westminster West were in our apartment, so Roger joined them and Richard and I stayed in the apartment in the church in Makeyevka. We arrived there about 10:30 P.M. after being up all night the night before. Previous to this trip I thought I knew something about mosquitoes, well, I was wrong. But, now I do know something about mosquitoes. I thought every mosquito in Donetsk was around my bed, but again I was wrong, Richard had as many as I did. Finally we gave in, we got up during the night, wrapped our towels into mosquito smashers and spent several hours smashing mosquitoes.

The normally white walls and ceilings are now smattered with squashed brown mosquitoes and some have red spots. We were up all night, but at least we were not disappointed by having water for a shower, there was none. We had three days and two nights with no sleep or running water, but at least we had mosquitoes to amuse us. By the way, one can purchase plug-ins at the Central Market to control the very friendly critters. But please take my advice and spend at least one night with them so you can appreciate them when they are gone.

The threadbare airplane tires, lack of electricity, water and the abundance of mosquitoes are all good things. Someone told me one time that missionaries are supposed to suffer for Christ. When one so thoroughly enjoys teaching in Ukraine as much as I do, things like that help me to feel as though I am 'suffering for Christ.'

On a more serious note, a few weeks ago in the U.S. many of us saw a young mother on television who had been caught on a surveillance camera beating her four year old daughter. I saw her attorney on a news show defending what the mother did as acceptable because of the sub-culture she lived in. He was making a case against removing the little girl from her mother because we would be taking her from the culture in which she was being raised. The attorney defended the culture she was being raised in as equal (as good as) what we would call a culture that consisted of a law-abiding family that had a permanent address. This should cause

### Inside this Issue

- 1 TRANSFORMING CULTURE BY DOING HIS WILL
- 2 REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT
- 3 HOUSE CHURCHES AND HEROES
- 4 FIELD REPORT ON TEACHING AT EUTS

*November is the month of thanksgiving and December the month for praise and gratitude for God's grace! These things we offer, in Christ's name, as his messengers to all who will listen; teaching them the truths of His Word in order that they may teach those whom he send to them.*

*We offer you an opportunity to share in the preparation of His Bride... there is room for you! Please prayerfully consider your participation in His work through ITEM, and call or write us.*

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# TRANSFORMING CULTURE

Continued from page one

us to ask, "Should a culture within a culture be protected against assimilation at all costs?"

When I.T.E.M. goes into a country to teach and train church leaders, we are literally training people to take people from one culture and lead them into a different culture.

We are not trying to 'Americanize' them, but to lead them from a culture of death to a culture of life within the greater culture they are in. Latvians will remain Latvians, Russians will remain Russians and Ukrainians will remain Ukrainians, but they will pass from a culture of death to a culture of life.

In Romans 10:1 Paul was praying for the salvation of his countrymen! When Paul was praying this way he expected something to change when a person was converted. This past September I listened to some students as they told about their lives prior to their conversions, for some they were busy avoiding the law and now they are preaching to prison inmates. They had left a culture of disobedience to everything and entered a culture of obedience to God.

Their lifestyles demonstrate that they have been grafted into a new tree (Romans 11:24). There is no way to do this other than through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said "I am they way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

The Bible teaches that "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9). My question is, "saved from or to what?" We are saved from death and given life, saved from hell and given heaven, brought from a life of disobedience to God to a life of obedience to God. This is done via leaving one culture and entering a n-other culture.

How does I.T.E.M. fit into all of this? Well, I.T.E.M. maintains an apartment, translators, cooks, drivers and supports students so that professors can go and teach church pastors and leaders so they can lead people from one culture to a n-other culture within a culture. We respect the national culture the people live in, but we desire to see people pass from death to life and learn the truth of God's Word while they are at it.

How can they hear unless they are told, how can they be told if we are not sent? We all know that God works all things out according to His will and that He can use stones to convert people if He wants to, but lets face it, God normally uses His people to do His will. I wonder who God will use this month, next month and the next few months to support this work financially? David Ludwick can schedule people to speak to anyone who would like to contribute to I.T.E.M. or would like to help in any way. I.T.E.M. has the opportunity to go into several more countries and open up more schools for the training of pastors and others, but right now the funding is not there. Maybe, just perhaps, the Lord is urging you to help support I.T.E.M. so others can enjoy threadbare airplane tires, on and off water and electricity and appreciate a mosquito free environment.

**Dr. Merle Messer, May 2002**

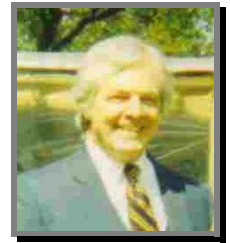
particularly that of the value of investing our time and prayers as well as finances and Reformed theological education. It has been our position from the beginning that theological education has a different kind of "staying power" than do bricks and mortar. It is a blessing, a blessing to send professors, to be sent as professors, and to receive the teaching that the professors bring to each of the respective student bodies and from there to their churches and the generations to follow!

Answered prayer, especially that relating to expansion of the mission opportunities, seems always to bring the opportunity for more labor and more blessing. We share these things with you because we hope to always be able to share the blessings of His victories in this fallen world until the victory of His return changes it all!

We covet your prayers, the sending of those who are apt to teach and who are known to you, your financial support, and at your request the opportunity to present to you in person a living picture of the things that the words on this page can merely describe. If there is opportunity in your schedule for such sharing, please contact us.

We remain in your service and in His,  
**Dr. R. David Ludwick, I.T.E.M. President, October 10, 2002**

# REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Fellow Coworkers,

As 2002 begins its last quarter, I am taking the opportunity to share with you again some of the victories of this year. It has been, truly, a most heartening experience to participate with you in our Lord's blessing of His children through ITEM.

The work in Eastern Ukraine continues to grow including the interest in the Master's Degree Program and the Power in the Pulpit Homiletics Conference. We are delighted with the ties that these two activities have made with Westminster Theological Seminary (California). We are also delighted for the ties that we have been able to make for Riga Reformed Theological Seminary with Covenant Theological Seminary faculty.

We have also been blessed by the opportunities afforded by the anonymous contribution of funds to the Covenant Seminary Endowment Fund to be used for the sending of a professor and a seminary student as frequently as twice annually to teach and experience His grace in teaching opportunities in the various fields where we labor.

The new school in Tyumen, Siberia experienced its first official professor, Dr. Warren Lammers, who visited it for a teaching term this September and plans are being made to people the faculty during the winter and spring terms upcoming.

There is the possibility that ITEM will send a second full time missionary to the field within the next year or two—to Campina, Romania, a couple experienced because of travel and working with international students during the past several years.

Our staff continues to answer inquiries as more churches hear of the mission work,



Power in the Pulpit Conference with over 4,000 attendees up-to-date (1,900 this year alone)

## HOUSE CHURCHES AND HEROES

By Rev. Dr. Zachary Eswine, Professor of Homiletics at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis MO

**“One begins to learn that perhaps, it is in this darker side of endurance that Christ’s strength is strongest, the goodness of His news is most felt, the power of His joy is most observed, and the forgiveness of sin is most keenly realized.”**

When preaching and teaching in the former Soviet Union, the meaning of certain passages of Scripture can suddenly become more clearly apparent and more deeply felt.

One such example from my most recent trip to Donetsk can be found in Acts 16:40. “So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.” Or another, “Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus . . . to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.” Both passages reveal the chains worn for the gospel of Christ. Both passages reveal the names of ordinary people. And both passages proclaim the inability of those chains to hinder the profound encouragement of the gospel for a few gathered believers in an ordinary house settled solidly amid a world of houses hostile to Christ. Such thoughts instructed my heart as I traveled out into the villages of Avdotyeczno and Dockuchayevsk some ten and forty kilometers from Donetsk one Sunday morning and a fortnoon. These were villages with strong communistic heritages, which up until five to seven years ago had no Christian church. These are villages in which some of our “heroes of the faith live” said one pastor; villages where beloved brethren, fellow laborers, and fellow soldiers have born testimony to Christ.

### What do Christian Heroes look like?

On worn wooden benches in a worn ordinary house they gathered; a few men, but mostly it was older and widowed women who came. Their bodies evidenced the hard life they have fought. But these dear people



*Waiting in the barren land, praying that you will come . . . and we do . . . This babushka walking home on the road to her village where ITEM students and professors made an evangelistic presentation to eighty one residents of her village – for the first time hearing the Gospel message in three generations.*

were made beautiful by the hope in their eyes and their large teeth-revealing smiles. Twenty to twenty five greeted each other with holy kisses and gracious joy. For the next two-plus hours, we sang, recited poetry, sang some more, cried, prayed, heard the Word of God preached, praised, prayed, sang some more, heard the Word of God preached again, more poetry, more singing, more prayer. And then we went on to another house in another village for more of the same. And as these few faithful knelt on the barren floor and poured out their hearts to God, though I could not understand their words, I began to understand by the deep conviction and joyful ache in their voices, something more of what it must mean that one can do all things through Christ who strengthens. The strength of Christ to endure and outlast the shameless persecution of the faithful was evident in this little house forgotten by the world but whose address is surely known in heaven. Sergei is one of the pastors. He is a graduate of Donetsk Seminary and a former student of many of us who have taught there. He has four children, works a full-time job, is a Deacon at one church and pastors this little flock. Oleg and his family (another pastor), sold their house in order to begin building a church building at another village. They are praying to God for the rest of the money needed to finish the first church building for Christ that will stand in this village for over seventy years. After worship at one house, we walked in the field picking juicy plums from the trees and enjoying them as our lunch. Another house later in the afternoon

offered a hearty lunch of soup, bread, watermelon, sausage, cheese, and tomatoes.

### Where do such Hero’s Live?

As I was given a ride back to the apartment, the faithful heroes walked back on the dusty roads to their homes where running water and electricity is scarce. Food is hard to come by because money is so little had. While our Western athletes appeal to Christ who strengthens them for competitive victory, and while I appeal to Christ who strengthens me through a bad day, these aged heroes appeal to Christ who strengthens them for daily gratitude amid an experienced history of hate and amid so little of a present material possession of anything. Yet, in these houses joy and gratitude is found.

### Conclusion

Thus, we end where we began; considering what a trip to the former Soviet Union can do for a person’s understanding of Scripture. Christ’s strength, as Paul said, enables one to endure through good and bad, through plenty and want. One begins to learn that perhaps, it is in this darker side of endurance that Christ’s strength is strongest, the goodness of His news is most felt, the power of His joy is most observed, and the forgiveness of sin is most keenly realized. One begins to learn this when he worships for a while in the house of a hero.

Dr. Zachary Eswine, September 2002

# FIELD REPORT ON TEACHING AT EASTERN UKRAINIAN THEO- LOGICAL SEMINARY

By Nicolas Farelly, Th. M. (Covenant Theological Seminary)

**" The reception I received from the students and the school workers was so warm and their interest in me and my family so present that my expectations and deep desires were quickly met."**

Many people have already asked me: "Tell me *everything* about your trip to Ukraine!" To such a demanding and overwhelming request, I have so far hid behind my pre-made answer: "Well, ask me questions, and I'll tell you." But a blank page does not ask questions, it simply demands words and facts. So where do I begin?

I went to teach in the seminary in Donetsk from August the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>. I was assigned the Gospel of John, a beloved gospel of mine since I have spent the last 12 months focusing on it for my studies at Covenant Theological Seminary. My fellow professors were the Revs. Zack Eswine and Richard Terpstra who respectively taught Homiletics and I & II Corinthians. Both of them had already been to Donetsk, so I certainly benefited from their previous experiences there as they encouraged me in certain directions and warned me against others.

But I suppose that what you really want to know is "What did I learn from my trip in Donetsk?" Many things, indeed, but I shall focus on only two. First, I had a blast! This certainly taught me that I love teaching. After only a day or two in Donetsk, I was already making plans to come back in the near future. The class interactions with the students were challenging and honest, their willingness to learn was real, and their dedication to the Lord and his Church so obvious that I quickly felt that I could not only have an impact on the students, but maybe

as important, that they would have an impact on me. As I taught them the Gospel of John, I was taught about myself: my strengths and weaknesses, my own cultural biases, etc. More important, I was drawn nearer to our Lord as I learned more about his Church in Ukraine. This is what teaching did to me, and it was unexpected. Certainly, the content that I taught was important and I have great hopes that I was able to give the students a better understanding on the gospel of John. But I didn't know that the students would teach me so much in return. I was humbled by this unexpected twist and I praise our God for the work that he did in my heart during these two weeks.

The second thing I experienced was the great blessing of fellowship with believers in Ukraine was for me. I made it very clear from early on that fellowship with the students was of utmost importance for me. I knew that some of them would probably disagree with me on some theological issues. I knew that our cultural and social backgrounds were such that humanly speaking, fellowship was not to be expected. But I also knew that our belonging to Christ could surpass our differences so that we would enjoy Christian fellowship. You may not be surprised to hear that I did not have to work hard at all on this. The reception I received from the students and the school workers was so warm and their interest in me and my family so present that my expectations and deep desires were quickly met. At some point I had some 20 students gathered around me as I showed them pictures that I had brought. After two days of class, a student whom I thought would ask a question about the lecture, asked me to stop so that I could spend some time telling them about me, my coming

to Christ, family, etc... Our fellowship, therefore, was real and refreshing to me.

So here I am, back in Saint Louis, MO, spending much time still reflecting on my time in Donetsk, the people I met, the changes that were made in my life. I wish I had more time and space to tell you some more about all that this trip meant to me, but certainly the essential has been said. I am eager to go back and meet with the dear people I met in Donetsk and pray that the Lord will soon grant me the great blessing of answering my prayers positively!

Thank you to the many of you who prayed for us, both professors and students in Donetsk!

Nicolas Farelly, August 20, 2002

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## SPECIAL REPORT: RIGA REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The RRTS is growing in numbers and in the quality of the theologians who people its student body. Professors traveling there from America six times in the past year have presented the Gospel through the disciplines of Reformed theological education time and again and the students through the able guidance of Artis, Alvis Dainis and Ungars have caused the reputation of the seminary to extend to Lithuania and Estonia – talks are under way about expanding in that direction.

More in the next newsletter.



Student leadership of RRTS (Artis, Alvis, Dainis, Ungars) meeting with Dr. Gerard Vangroningen