

Equipping Reliable Leaders in
Sound Doctrine
in

Russia
Ukraine
Latvia
Hungary
Romania

NEWSITEMS



Fall 2003
Volume 6, Issue 3

Fall Edition

CUTTING EDGE MINISTRY IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

By Rev. Rod Gorter, ITEM
Missionary Professor, Odessa
Presbyterian Seminary, Odessa,
Ukraine

“The Word of God truly is “living and active”—powerful enough to transform lives and societies. Thus the atheistic Russian government declared it a dangerous threat, while others considered it a priceless treasure.”

For a short period of time in 1979 I was working in a warehouse of “illegal materials”—materials declared to be dangerous. If discovered at the border, they would be confiscated, along with other “vices” of the state such as drugs and weapons. The one carrying such threats to society would face fines or even imprisonment. What were these dangerous materials I was helping package in Germany for smuggling into the Soviet bloc? Bibles! About that same time an article in the Bible League newsletter described a Russian woman who eagerly bought one Bible costing a whole year’s wages! The Word of God truly is “living and active”—powerful enough to transform lives and societies. Thus the atheistic Russian government declared it a dangerous threat, while others considered it a priceless treasure.

In contrast to working under cover in a German warehouse, my family and I have now been openly distributing and teaching the life-changing truth of God’s Word in the former Soviet Union (FSU) for almost six years. Living in Odessa, Ukraine, my ministry has centered on



Many current and soon-to be Christian leaders in the former Soviet Union have been receiving their Reformed theological education through the efforts of I.T.E.M. laborers

leadership training. Besides teaching in Ukraine (primarily at the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine--ERSU), I’ve had opportunity to teach on behalf of ITEM in Riga, Latvia and two locations in Russia (St. Petersburg and Tyumen, Siberia). My ministry likewise involves ongoing discipleship of national leaders as they serve in their churches.

One typical characteristic of national leaders that excites me is their enthusiastic search for answers— theological and practical. Their hunger for God’s Word and its real-life application to people, is genuine and deep-rooted. Education and reading have been high values in the FSU for many years. Good literature is eagerly received and read. Ethical, social and spiritual issues are pondered deeply-- even more so now by young believers in the churches. Questions asked in the classroom and interpersonally delve far deeper than the superficial, as they seek answers to the meaning of life, the nature of mankind, foundations for ethical choices, etc. This is simultaneously stimulating and challenging. This characteristic of people highlights the need for solid and relevant theological education in the FSU, and particularly for church leaders as they guide the emerging churches as the transforming light of their nation.

Another exciting characteristic of national church leaders is their eagerness to do ministry. As they are equipped and trained for their calling, they typically invest themselves fully and sacrificially in the church’s life and ministry.

Training Shepherds in the
countries of the former Soviet
Block

Inside this Issue

- 1 CUTTING EDGE MINISTRY IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION
- 2 REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT
- 3 TEACHING OVERSEAS – A LEARNING EXPERIENCE
- 4 REPORTING ON TEACHING IN RIGA, LATVIA

November is the month of thanksgiving and December the month of 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 sends 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.

International Theological Education
Ministries, Inc
P.O. Box 31456
St. Louis, MO 63131
Tel.: (314) 537-6020
Email: item@item.org

CUTTING EDGE MINISTRY IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Continued from page 1

In the midst of a society which lacks a focused ideology—a vacuum created with the demise of communism—a true and lasting ideology in Christ's eternal kingdom invigorates the nationals with a purpose above and beyond the discouraging poverty and corruption of their land. Sergei, a student in ERSU, in his zeal to serve the Lord, had already planted a few churches with another denomination, though having very little theological education. As he began studying in ERSU, he gained a whole new understanding of the church, God and His kingdom. Now Sergei is eager to use his passion for planting churches with a solid theological foundation.

One of the challenges we face in theological education is to develop a biblical understanding of and approach to leadership, viz. servant leadership. Historically, the model of leadership in the FSU has been authoritarian leadership, wielding dominating power and control. Many consider an empathetic, servant leader to be weak, unworthy of respect. Thus church leaders need ongoing training to understand that servant leadership is not a sign of

weakness, but of Christ-like strength and compassion.

A further challenge arises for students to understand and practice cooperative leadership with a plurality of elders, and with sensitivity to the needs and desires of the congregation. These biblical principles of pastoral leadership frequently counteract common cultural perceptions.

While the progress we have observed is thrilling, the ongoing needs and opportunities are staggering. We are seeing doors opened for ministry in the FSU and opportunities for ministry multiplying. There are new or expanding opportunities in Latvia, Ukraine and Siberia. ITEM has received further requests to provide theological education in Poland, Romania, Kazakhstan, and other parts of Russia – and even Wales! The Apostle Paul said that we should “make the most of every opportunity” (Col. 4:5). Resources are a key factor! Resources determine the extent of our capability to make the most of these opportunities. Theological education is a tremendous investment of temporary earthly treasures for Christ's eternal bride.

This is truly “the cutting edge” of His growing church. We, and I personally, share gratitude for the privilege of sharing in this ministry with you. We give thanks for the many believers sensing and responding to the call to participate through consistent prayer and generous financial support of His work through ITEM.

To God be the glory for what He has done and continues to do in the FSU.

Rev. Rod Gorter, November 2003

REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Fellow Coworkers,

As 2003 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.

We are delighted to report substantial growth at and through Riga Reformed Theological Seminary! Administrator Artis Celmins reports that investigations into University affiliation will produce opportunities for the granting of degrees recognized by academic institutions. RRTS Board is encouraged by opportunities for growth in course curriculum and academic levels created to meet the needs of the Latvian congregations. Moreover, in-house translations of syllabi into Latvian and Russian (by Nikolay Girdyuk), etc., facilitates instruction by the accommodation of the approximate 40% Russian population into the RRTS community. All this indicates growth in virtually every area, and requesting prayers continue, even increase!

We have also been blessed by the opportunities afforded by an anonymous contribution of funds for the Covenant Seminary Endowment Fund to be used for the sending of a professor and seminary student to teach in the various fields where we labor and earn academic credit as well! We pray for the day when we might send professor/pastor/student teams by such means for every teaching term!

We have been blessed by the opportunities confronting us concerning new fields of labor in Romania, Poland, and other locations in the FSU which we will investigate and share with you as the opportunities emerge further. We ask your prayers that we may make wise decisions.

New opportunities have been proposed in Ukraine whereby we might partner in the provision of Reformed theological faculty for as many as 41 different institutions throughout Ukraine, beginning with Kiev Christian University, and planting a new Bible college approximately 8 miles outside of Kiev and from there expanding as rapidly as He leads!

Our staff continues to answer inquiries as more hear of this mission work and seek opportunities to meet their own missions mandates and leadings. If you know of any person who may be qualified to teach – even your pastors! – please, forward their names and contacts and we will be pleased to respond. The fields are ripe for the harvest and the workers are few... This does not mean that our Lord is pleading because He cannot get His work done, it means there is room for YOU! As Thanksgiving approaches, please consider His work through ITEM as you give thanks.

**Dr. R. David Ludwick,
November 2003**



Rev. Rod Gorter has been ITEM missionary professor in Odessa Ukraine since 1997 thanks to the Lord's provision through faithful supporters like you.

TEACHING OVERSEAS – A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Rev. Scott Churnock, ITEM professor and pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO

“Really, there is only one thing any ITEM professor needs to take. It is this only thing the students want. It is the only thing they need, and it is that for which they are most grateful: the Word of God.”

The suitcases lie open on the guestroom bed and are surrounded by clothes, books, lecture notes, and other assorted stuff. Each day a little more is added to the ever expanding collection of “necessities” for a 3 week trip. Another teaching session with ITEM is in the final stages of preparation. The lectures are ready, the outlines have been e-mailed, and now all that is left to do is the packing.

This time I am determined to travel “light”. Trying to follow the seasoned traveler’s advice of “pack everything you think you’ll need, then leave half of it at home” has been an ever elusive goal. But not this time. Having had to manhandle 2 large suitcases, an overstuffed carry-on bag (the airlines WILL lose at least one bag somewhere en route, so be prepared to live out of the carry-on bag for 4 or 5 days!), and a briefcase bulging with class notes, books, and assorted gifts, is not something I desire to do again. Hauling all this cargo through crowded foreign airports, up dark apartment building stairways, along snow-packed and icy sidewalks, and squeezing it into phone booth-sized elevators, is not my idea of a fun time in Eastern Europe. Besides, fitting 2 or 3 professors and their baggage into a Ukrainian Lada (much like a very old Fiat) is like putting a size 13EEE foot into an 8B shoe: it can be done, but not without extreme discomfort and a severe limp. After all, if the students can wear the same clothes for all 2 weeks of class, why do I need to bring 6 shirts, 5 pairs of pants, one suit, a sport coat, and enough toilet paper to bankrupt the black market? Fitting in with the nationals not only establishes a little rapport, it saves the back too.

Really, there is only one thing any ITEM professor needs to take. It is this only thing the students want. It is the



The Romanian Christians are eager to receive theological training. Will you be part of that effort of equipping reliable national Christian leaders as the doors of opportunity are still open?

only thing they need, and it is that for which they are most grateful: the Word of God. After 4 trips to Donetsk, Ukraine, the most lasting impression I have is the eagerness of the students to hear and learn God’s Word. In class, the desks in the front row fill up first – they don’t want to miss a word. For 8 hours every day, the students take copious notes of everything said by the professor. These notes have to be thorough – they will be the “library” of these future pastors! Trying to go from the classroom to the dining room (a distance of about 10 feet) without being intercepted by at least 10 questioning students is an impossibility.

Teaching in a foreign country is a learning experience for the professors too. Who knew that “you all” in English sounds very much like “you donkey” in Russian? Crossing your legs in church is a sign of disrespect, but try sitting through a 3 hour service without crossing them! Don’t whistle indoors unless you want poverty to descend upon the homeowner. And above all, don’t smile at anyone you pass on the street, especially a woman (her burly boyfriend may not take kindly to your “flirting” with his gal).

But as you walk down the street, or find yourself packed into an ancient trolley-bus, remember the immense privilege you have of preaching and teaching God’s Word in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Many of the believers we teach in the classes and to whom we preach in the churches have spent time in prison for doing what we now do freely and openly. One of the

greatest lessons we learn is humility.

As you read this article, John Lindley, a ruling elder from my church, and I will be in Romania for another ITEM teaching session. This will be my 5th trip and John’s 2nd, but our first trip to Romania. What might we expect? We don’t really know. We have studied up on the country, talked with others who have gone before, but the unexpected still lies ahead. However, there are some things we do know to expect: the students will be eager and appreciative, the believers will be warm and gracious, and the Lord will bless His Word. What more could we ask? What more do we need?

Now, back to my packing. I wonder where I put my 4-burner Coleman camp stove? Just in case the stove in the apartment goes out!

Rev. Scott Churnock, October 2003

USA donations and correspondence:
P.O. Box 31456, St. Louis, MO 63131-0456
Tel.+1.314.537.6020; Fax:+1.636.861.1613
e-mail: item@item.org
christforrussiaukraine@juno.com
internet: www.item.org
www.christforrussia.org

Canadian donations only:
c/o Action International Ministries
P.O. Box 280, Three Hills, Alberta T0M 2A0
CANADA

R. David Ludwick, J.D., M.Div, *President*,
Rodney Gorter, Th.M., *Professor*, *Odessa*
Presbyterian Seminary, Odessa, Ukraine

newsITEMs is free upon request

Permission is granted to reprint in whole or in part provided the following credit is given: “Reprinted from newsITEMs, a newsletter of International Theological Education Ministries, Inc., St. Louis, MO”

REPORTING ON TEACHING IN RIGA, LATVIA



By Dr. Hans F. Bayer, Associate Professor of New Testament Director of the Th.M. Program at Covenant Theological Seminary

General report:

From May 21-30, I taught a 27.5 hour course on "Hermeneutics and Exegesis" at RRTS in Riga, Latvia. Additionally, I gave a 3 hour lecture (May 24) to pastors and church workers in Vilnius, Lithuania (Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church), a 90-minute lecture (May 26) at Latvia University in Riga (2 university students and 4 RRTS students attended; exam week...), and preached twice on Sunday, May 25 (Alvis Sauka's Reformed Church and Malcom Firth's International Baptist Church).

I took 28 books, purchased by ITEM, for my course and for an upcoming summer 2003 CTS ACCESS course.

Attendance at the RRTS course ranged from 20 to 25. I had additional personal meetings with Artis, Ungars, and Alvis; in Vilnius I had lunch with Algimantas Kvedaraviius, senior pastor of a Reformed Church in Vilnius. Through the arrangement of Alvis Sauka, I also had lunch with Prof. Juris Calitis (Ph.D. Harvard), dean of the faculty of theology at Latvia University, Riga.

Eleven students took the final (oral) examination on May 30. They will also write a 10-page response paper to K. Vanhoozer's "Is there Meaning in this Text?"

Impressions:

The students were very motivated and engaged. The group as a whole is now much more homogenous and academically prepared than during my previous two visits.

Artis and Nikolai are doing a fine and dedicated job in running the

day-to-day affairs of the growing seminary. Artis is happy that the administrative-clerical responsibilities now rest on Nikolai's shoulders.

Artis is thus able to tend to his own responsibilities and studies. RRTS' contacts to the Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church are very much appreciated, and two of their main pastors attended my class with great interest.

The four CTS-ACCESS students remain very motivated, and at least three of them still plan to pursue doctoral studies at Latvia University in Riga following their successful completion of the ACCESS M.A. at CTS in St. Louis. In due time, they should form the indigenous core-faculty of RRTS.

The seminary is taking shape and should continue to pursue contacts with

the Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church. Further contacts with Latvia University and Luther Academy in Riga will widen its witness to thoughtful biblical faith and reformed confession in the context of liberal and Lutheran academia, respectively. In our personal meeting, the dean of the faculty of divinity at Latvia University, Prof. Juris Calitis, sounded very open to the idea for me to give future lectures at the University.

In summary, I believe RRTS is developing in a very strategic place and time as it provides Biblical-theological training in the Baltic region. However, it should not do its important work in isolation, but rather seek contacts of cooperation or contribution.

Sincerely,

Hans F. Bayer, October 2003

Dr. Hans Bayer (Covenant Theological Seminary) teaching a 27.5 hour course on "Hermeneutics and Exegesis" at Riga Reformed Theological Seminary from May 21 through May 30, 2003



"While we have observed a thrilling progress in training leaders in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), the ongoing needs and opportunities are staggering."

"There are new or expanding opportunities in Ukraine, Latvia, and Siberia. ITEM has furthermore received requests to help provide theological education in Poland, Romania, Kazakhstan, and other parts of FSU. The Apostle Paul said that we should 'make the most of every opportunity' (Col. 4:5). Resources are a key factor determining the extent of our capability to make the most of these opportunities. Theological education is a tremendous investment of temporary earthly treasures in Christ's eternal Bride. This truly is 'the cutting edge' of His growing church."

Rev. Rod Gorter