

Equipping Reliable Leaders in
Sound Doctrine
in

Hungary
Latvia
Poland
Romania
Russia
Ukraine

Winter 2005
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*Serving Christ by equipping pastors,
teachers and lay leaders in Reformed,
Biblical doctrine in Central and Eastern
Europe and the former Soviet Union*

NEWSITEMS



Winter Edition

FIFTEEN YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL GROWTH

*By Dr. R. David Ludwick,
President of I.T.E.M., Inc.*

*During our 15 years in existence, we have trained pastors,
teachers and lay leaders in church in the truths of the Bible*

It's 2006! That means 15 years since we began planting seminaries, Bible colleges and Bible institutes. Since 1991, ITEM has grown significantly, supported by your generosity, energized by the prayers of hundreds, and by the efforts of more than 70 professors and of those who followed and then carried forward Rev. Dr. Nicholas Vogelzang's vision (including George and Harriet Van Groningen, Rev. William Ribbens, Rev. James Bultman, Rev. Norman Haan, Dr. Joel Nederhood, Rev. William Renkema, and a host of others who served as light to professors/pastors, advisors and facilitators). ITEM has expanded in that area from one small Bible institute/training center (with 12-25 students, primarily youth) to nine "plants" or partnering arrangements throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The budget has gone from fewer than \$35,000.00 (the moneys received and on deposit during the first five years) to approximately \$350,000.00 as a proposed budget.

Our vision has grown as well. For instance, recently in Ukraine we were asked to precipitate the opening of 41 new theological institutions. With a curriculum of three major programs these schools will focus on pastoring and preaching, music and worship, and Christian education. That means that we have been asked by our partners to plant 39 more seminaries/Bible colleges where the truths of the Bible will be taught! In addition to having participated in the establishment of these institutions, we have shared the Reformed Faith in the lives of more than 3,500 students and seemingly countless church members, Bible students, evangelists, et al. We have trained pastors, teachers and lay leaders in the church in the

truths of the Bible and the Reformed Faith. During our 15 years of existence we have done something that is unprecedented! Churches have been planted; associate and assistant pastors have trained God's people and become senior pastors, ruling and teaching elders and deacons, and are now in position of leadership roles in the churches and in the lives of their people.

We are also lifting the focus not only to include the individual pastor but seeking to provide academic excellence both at the diploma and degree levels. The diploma level is designed to train all of those who are pursuing educational growth for themselves and their people but more under a pastoral and practical mantle. The degree level is being accomplished through a degree program like that in Riga (Latvia) and hopefully in Vilnius (Lithuania) and possibly in Warsaw (Poland), the end product of which is the Master's degree. This degree will be recognized and accredited throughout the European Union and suitable as a foundation for doctoral level of work!

We anticipate that those who pursue a Master's degree or doctoral studies will return to the institutions we have planted and people our own faculties. We anticipate His victories. We also anticipate this self-reliant factor to leave the only goal to be overcome: financial. By His Grace, and in His Will, and according to His timing we pray that "we", you and I, will accomplish what is necessary in that last category - to His glory and to the glory of no man.

In His Service and in Yours,
Dr. R. David Ludwick, December 2005
P.S. You may contact us at
314-691-0169 or
via email at item@item.org.

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ITEM assists the Ukrainian youth camp for homeless and orphan children by sending people and materials to work in the summer camp programs, where they have the opportunity to teach not only the Bible but they have the opportunity to live it out - ITEM looks for the possibility of establishing a school on the premises of camp Sputnik as it has facilities which are not used except during the summer of each calendar year. If you have any interest please give us a call.

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BALTIC REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

By Simon Kistemaker, Professor of New Testament Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary

Dr. Larry Stout came to Latvia in 1991 at the time when the country gained its freedom from Soviet occupation. He noticed a need for spiritual revival and theological education in that part of the world. He dreamed about opening a theological seminary in the capital city of Riga and after a few years talked about his dream with Dr. Gerard Van Groningen, whose expertise in starting and developing a theological seminary were well known in various places around the globe: Geelong, Australia and Sao Paulo, Brazil.

ITEM developed a plan using Dr. Van Groningen's model in part to establish a regional theological seminary. Professors from the United States will come to teach for short periods of time. ITEM works in cooperation with professors attempting to raise funds to cover the necessary expenses of transportation, accommodations and the rental fees for office and classroom facilities, etc. ITEM contacted prospective faculty members serving in Presbyterian and Reformed theological seminaries to travel to Riga and offer specific courses in their fields of study. In 1998 Van Groningen was among the first professors to teach in Riga. ITEM also promoted this fledgling seminary then called Riga Reformed Theological Seminary by asking in the USA professors of New Testament, Old Testament, Systematic Theology, Church History, and Missions to travel to Riga and teach for one or two weeks at a time. Mr. Artis Celmins, a native Latvian, filled the post of a long-term administrator.

I had the privilege of teaching at the Riga seminary offering a course on the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistles of Peter to seven or eight students who took it for credit and a few others who came in as auditors. Much to my surprise I noticed that I could lecture in English and the students were able to understand me. One or two students needed the help of a translator. I asked why the students were sufficiently advanced in understanding English. I was told that upon liberation in 1991 the younger generation realized that to get ahead in the world at large they had to learn English, and they did.

Once again, in 2003, I was asked to return to Riga and present a course on the Book of Revelation. The enrollment had increased and many of the students I met two years earlier were continuing their education. There was progress and further development also in regard to building a functional library. But the greatest advance was when Artis Celmins approached the administration of the University of Latvia and asked them if their students would be interested in taking courses at the seminary. If they were, then the question of accreditation could be pursued. If university students would receive academic credit on a provisional basis, could accreditation also be extended to all the registered seminary students? The answer to both questions was affirmative.

The university was willing to extend credit on a provisional basis for a two-year term to the students taking seminary courses. Because of this arrangement, the enrollment at the seminary increased. Also, the Board of the seminary decided on a name change. Instead of calling the seminary Riga Reformed Theological Seminary, the Board broadened the appeal by naming the school Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary. This was a step in the right direction, for now students from other parts of that region could apply for admission. Indeed, one student came from Lithuania and three from Sweden.

Another advance took place recently – and that was a relocation of the seminary itself. Instead of renting space near the apartment that provided accommodations for visiting professors, the newly named BRTS now has its office and classroom in a Reformed Church building located in the downtown area. The church building dates back to the early 1700s and was owned by the Reformed people of Riga. But in the Soviet era the building was used for other purposes, including a restaurant. When liberation came about 15 years ago, the city government gave the building to the Lutheran Church. Fortunately, the seminary Board has been able to make an agreement with the Lutherans to rent part of it.

I returned once more in December 2005 and offered a one-week course on the Gospel of Matthew and one on the Book of Acts the following week. The enrollment of registered students reached 16 with 9 auditors. The classroom was full. And by all indications, the seminary experiences steady growth on a solid foundation.

The Lord has blessed BRTS in numerous ways. I pray that in faith and prayer the members of the Board and the administration, the students, as well as supporters look to God for the continued growth of the school and gradual development to the glory of His name.

Simon J. Kistemaker, December, 2005

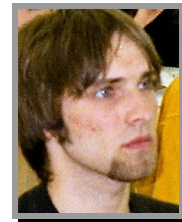
WHAT THE SEMINARY'S STUDENTS SAY



Timur Anickin

BRTS Student

"I'm married and have two children. I have been Christian for almost 14 years. Currently I'm working with a Russian-speaking Reformed church plant in Riga, Latvia. I really enjoy the studies at the seminary for it has answered many questions with which I struggled. But it is more than just theological studies – I feel that God has called me to minister to the Russian speaking community here in Latvia and to share these Biblical truths which I have learned at the seminary."



Martins Martinsons, BRTS student

"I am leading youth group at Riga Reformed Bible church located in the very center of Riga, Latvia. I'm also active in several other church ministries. ...the one thing I like the most about my studies at the seminary is the interaction that is between students and professors who come. It has always been very encouraging for my personal growth as well as for the ministry I am leading."

My goal for studying at the seminary is to be prepared for pastoral ministry and I am planning to be involved in church-planting. I also wish to do further studies in the Reformed theology."



Alvis Strikeris, BRTS student

"I am a member of Riga Reformed Church pastored by Rev. Ungars Gulbis. I am actively involved in the church ministry - leading a weekly Bible study, preparing and leading prayers in Church services and participate as a disciple in elders meetings."

...studies at the seminary have helped me to get to know God and gain understanding about the Bible, it helps me as a Bible-study leader and also it is my preparation for pastoral ministry which is my ultimate goal."

REFLECTIONS ON RIGA

By Stephen Estock, Associate Pastor at the Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO

It was March and I was excited about my new call to be the Minister of Adult Nurture at Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church. I was looking forward to the teaching opportunities that I would have, especially being located so close to Covenant Theological Seminary. Little did I know that the opportunities would come so quickly.

On my very first day of work before I had unpacked, our senior pastor called in to his office and told me to call Gerard Van Groningen and it was he who asked me to teach a class in Riga, Latvia. It is hard to say "No" to Dr. Van Groningen and I didn't. I taught homiletics and thoroughly enjoyed it.

As plans fell into place, I realized that I was experiencing a number of "firsts". It was my first trip overseas as a pastor, my first time teaching with a translator, my first time preaching with a translator, my first time preaching in a church building that was older than my country. The list could go on and on.

The entire experience was very enriching. I learned much about myself and the spread of the gospel throughout Central and Eastern Europe. I really enjoyed the students of the seminary and greatly respect the work they continue to do for the Lord. My family has enjoyed the pictures and stories of my trip. When some of the BRTS students visited St. Louis for some courses at the seminary, we were able to spend some time with them seeing the sights of St. Louis. My boys still talk about the time they met pastors from Latvia. The whole experience not only opened my eyes to the work of God around the world, but it has also broadened the horizons of my family.

When I accepted the call to serve at the Kirk of the Hills, my desire was to grow in my knowledge and experience so that I could be a better pastor. I never would have guessed that God would begin answering my prayer on the very first day. My experience with God's servants in Riga was very special. I am eager to see what God will do with the men He is raising up to serve in Central and Eastern Europe. I am humbled by their commitment and their faith. I was privileged to play a small role in the work God is doing.

**Rev. Stephen Estock,
December 2005**

RELIGIONS IN UKRAINE: CURRENT DATA

By Andre Bouravnev, M. Div, ITEM Director of Publications

ITEM has been active in training Christian leaders for quite some time now. I would like to bring it to your attention that putting the work of ITEM in demographic/religious perspective presses us to do more for the ministry of the Reformed theological education in Ukraine.

Ukrainians are one of the largest European ethnic groups with a population of more than 36 million living in Ukraine where they make up over three-quarters of the population. Worldwide ethnic Ukrainians number close to 42 million with the largest Ukrainian community outside of Ukraine in Russia (about 3 million), almost 2 million Ukrainians in North America (890,000 in US and 1,000,000 in Canada). Large numbers of Ukrainians live in Kazakhstan (about 500,000), Moldova (450,000), Poland (300,000), Slovakia (200,000) and Argentina (100,000). There are also Ukrainian diasporas in Brazil, Belarus, Romania, Germany and former Yugoslavia. In other words, affecting Christians in Ukraine inevitably reflects not only on spiritual life in Ukraine but around the world as well.

Christianity in Ukraine dates to the earliest centuries of the apostolic church when, according to the legends, it was preached by St. Andrew in parts of the modern territory of Ukraine.

More than 97% of the religious communities now registered in Ukraine are Christian. About half of these communities are of the Orthodox tradition. The other half is divided among Catholics and Protestants.

There are three major Orthodox jurisdictions in Ukraine: Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kievan Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. There are three Catholic churches represented

Church or Religious Denomination In Ukraine	Communities (or churches)
Orthodox	15,553
Catholic	4,268
Baptist	2,394
Pentecostal	1,448
Charismatic	348
Adventist	969
Lutheran	88
Presbyterian	50
Sub-Carpathian Reformed	113
Other Evangelical	2,459
Mormon	49
Jehovah's Witnesses	971
Jews	251
Muslims	472
Buddhists	44
Eastern Religions	81
Pagans	93

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in Ukraine: Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church, Armenian Catholic Church. In addition, there has been an apostolic nuncio in Ukraine since 1992. A part of the Christian faithful belongs to the Protestant churches. Protestantism appeared in Ukraine in the 1530s and '40s. Today the largest Protestant groups in Ukraine include Baptists (All-Ukrainian Union of the Association of Evangelical Baptists), Pentecostals (All-Ukrainian Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith-Pentecostals) and Seventh-day Adventists (Ukrainian Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists). Despite the rapid growth and aggressive missionary activities, even today Protestants in Ukraine remain a small minority in a largely Orthodox Christian country.

Ukraine also has Jewish and Muslim communities. Non-traditional and New Religious Movements have also come to Ukraine, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, White Brotherhood, Buddhism and Neo-paganism (various forms of neo-paganism, from monotheism to polytheism, are popular with small circles of the intelligentsia, who, carried away by the ideas of national revival in the late 1980s, considered the revival of ancient pagan beliefs as its necessary condition. That is why neo-paganism has gained certain support, especially among some leaders who follow the idea of a national Orthodox Church). The number of these communities and the amount of their members is growing dynamically. Therefore, pray for His enablement of our efforts and for His will to be done.

**Andre Bouravnev,
December 2005**

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ROLE MODELS FOR BELIEVERS

By Dr. R. David Ludwick,
President of I.T.E.M., Inc.

It is a blessing to go to the post office each morning to pick up mail for ITEM. It's a second blessing to open it at my desk having reviewed all the names at the address corner and the postage stamp in recognition of many and in the remembrance of some, of all of you. You not only support ITEM financially, but serve Him as prayer warriors and brothers and sisters in Christ! You realize the need for the teaching of sound theology. The lives of God's people require that they live out their beliefs. Only this way they will be able to pass on the blessing which they have received from Him to those who will follow.

Having spent 20 years prior to attending seminary (at age 46), teaching and practicing law I came to preparation for ministry with no idea where He would use me and my family. I can assure you, that missions (if you had asked) were probably not very high on the list. However, not only does He know best, but He does best. He leads us to the accomplishment of His plan of redemption in history.

I have been touched sincerely by the lives of many of the people with whom I have come in contact. Many are "the real people" of God's creation who are guileless, self-sacrificing servants and who convict those who know them of their place in His plan.

Many of these role models for believers have been pioneers in their efforts: Monar and Stenia Shaded in Poland, patiently working and waiting for decades in His service, attesting again to the truth that God's plan is accomplished and His will be done through us; men like the core group of the Riga school (Alvis Sauka, Artis Celmins, Ungars Gulbis, Dainis Smits) each of whom made a selfless sacrifice in their efforts to serve their countrymen by serving Him; Andre Bouravnev who came to the U.S. to study Reformed theology, received Masters in Divinity degree and has worked behind the scenes, administering the database, preparing publications, preparing as well as participating in presentations at home and on the road, and remaining loyal to ITEM even in the face of alternative opportunities; Rev. Vitaly Tkachuk, founder of the Kiev Bible College, whose patient



Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary class in June 2005 with Dr. Iain Duguid and seminary students, including Alvis Sauka, Artis Celmins, Ungars Gulbis, Dainis Smits

perseverance through the decades of the communist times now provides the basis for the establishment of the 41 Bible colleges/seminaries in Ukraine; Dr. Konstantine Ivanov, President of Society for Open Christianity in St Petersburg, Russia, a pioneer in Christian education, elementary school, through seminary/intelligentsia institute; Dr. Fred Johannsen, forensic toxicologist, ITEM Treasurer; Rev. Will Hesterberg, ITEM Board member, now Chairman; Mrs. Carlo (Margie) Hansen, ITEM Administrator and Bookkeeper, Algimantas and Vita Kvedaravicius in Lithuania, Ion Vasile in Romania, Jim Foote in Siberia, and countless others – all serving without compensation and yet with a spirit of independence, committed to the cause of theological missions.

When I think about working with these people and having received the benefit of their real life experiences and insightful wisdom I marvel at the fact that He chose me to be a part of this mission work.

I would pose to you a question, which was asked of me on one occasion. I think it has the ability to focus our attention regardless of how we react to its answer. At a dinner I was discussing with Andre the future of missions in general and in my life, and in ITEM's in particular. I stated, half-thinkingly, that I had become more and more committed to the cause of missions, even to the point of considering going to the field

full-time. His response to my comment radically changed my perspective. He simply looked at me and said: "Why don't you?" My brain raced as I searched for an answer to his response. But there was no answer, only "important" excuses. Since that time I found myself spending more time in the field. Yet I also see that we are called to work here as well. God has provided us with good leadership in our efforts to bring the Reformed faith to the countries of the former Soviet Union, and good learning experiences in those instances where we learn what He has for us by testing us, which ultimately leads to His will prevailing.

As we begin this New Year, I wish to thank you for your persevering support, for your sacrificial giving, for your belief in the Reformed faith, for your grace which comes from Him alone, and for your prayers, which are most certainly a necessity.

Thank you and Slava Bogu.
Dr. R. David Ludwick,
December 2005

PS Please, contact us if you have good Western Theology books in each language: Russian, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian.