

Equipping Reliable Leaders in
Sound Doctrine
in

Hungary
Latvia
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Poland
Romania
Russia
Ukraine

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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



Summer Edition



HOW MUCH IS A SOUL WORTH?

By Rev. Will Hesterberg, IITEM
Chairman

Larry Sibley, IITEM professor and lecturer of Practical Theology at
Westminster Theological Seminary, teaching a two week term at the
Baltic States Theological Seminary

Perhaps you've seen the Master Card commercials where someone purchases several things while a background voice rattles off the prices. Then the commercial closes with words such as, "A day at the zoo making memories together – priceless. For everything else there's MasterCard."

So, how much is a soul worth? Priceless? One evening Jesus and the disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee. Exhausted from a full day of teaching about the kingdom, Jesus falls asleep on a cushion in the stern. Unexpectedly a storm arises. The panicked disciples wake Jesus, "Don't you care if we drown?" Stupid question; of course Jesus cared. But Jesus simply speaks and the agitated wind and waves relax. Soon they reach the other side and disembark. Remember, it's barely light, and the limestone cave-tombs on the bluffs loom sinisterly before them like the sunken eye sockets in a skull. As they land, immediately a wild, crazy man, dangling broken chains, looking disheveled and near-naked, appears and screams at them. "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me." Jesus commands the man's demons to depart into a nearby herd of pigs that immediately rush into the Sea and drown themselves. The next scene shows the man sitting calmly, fully dressed, at Jesus' feet. A crowd has gathered begging Jesus to leave, because they understand He has power. The man also begs Jesus – that he may come with him. But Jesus sends him back into his community to witness about how God has delivered him, changed him, and given him a new life filled with hope. And then just as quickly as they'd arrived, Jesus and the disciples climb back into the boat and head back across the lake.

How much was that soul worth? Two thousand pigs? A good night's sleep after a long hard day's work? A boat trip across an unpredictable sea? Riding through a life-threatening storm? Venturing into an unfamiliar and strange environment? Engaging the devil and his demons? Facing a very dangerous man? Encountering an ungrateful crowd? Reaching out to a wild man everyone else had written off and cast out of the community? Caring for just one man?

How much is one soul worth? To Jesus – priceless. How about to us? At IITEM, we send professors into some unpredictable situations at times, certainly situations that they may never have encountered before. We send them on long trips across the ocean. We send them to lose nights of sleep as they fly. We send them to do days and weeks of hard work communicating God's Word across language and cultural barriers. We send them to cultures unfamiliar to them. We send them to teach the truth and light of God's Word and, therefore, to engage the devil and his demons of darkness in spiritual battles. Why?

Because every soul they touch and teach, and every soul that the students we teach will in turn touch and teach, is priceless. You are partners with us in this priceless adventure. And whether you ever go to serve with IITEM, remember also, that every person you meet today is an eternal soul that will either spend eternity in heaven with God or in hell separated from Him. Remember that the mission field is always just beyond your door and every soul is priceless.

Rev. Will Hesterberg, April 2007

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MARANATHA BIBLE COLLEGE REPORT

By pastor Ion Vasile, President of Maranatha Bible College, Campina Romania

Maranatha Bible College began its activity in 1999 and it functions under the authority of Maranatha Baptist Church in Campina Romania in partnership with ITEM, Inc. St. Louis MO.

Maranatha Bible College is not a school accredited by the government, but a practical one offering biblical knowledge to those Christians who are interested in it, so that they could teach others in the mission field.

Until now we have been following a curriculum that we worked on in 1999. Eight sessions per year of two weeks each was the initial plan. Because of many different reasons there were times when we only had two or three sessions a year. The courses are taught by professors from the US who are sent by ITEM. The expenses for both the teachers and the students are paid by ITEM.

The students attending MBC are Christians involved in the ministry – missionaries, elders, Sunday school teachers, or simply church members. Every summer the students have been involved in a week of evangelism, every day, two by two. In the summer of 2006, they ministered in 24 villages in Romania, four villages in the Republic of Moldova and four villages in Bulgaria (in a partnership with Rev. Jonathan Taylor). Over 3,000 people heard the Gospel and about 1,000 confessed Jesus as their personal Savior.

In the beginning, the enthusiasm of the young people was great, during the first courses with up to 42 students per session. Things have changed over the years and so did the number of those attending, for various reasons. For example, during the last session in March of this year with professor Baxter the number of students was 12.

Out of the students from MBC a young couple got jobs in Milan, Italy and the knowledge they acquired at the college helps them in the ministry in a church of the Romanian immigrants.

In Romania, the evangelical churches are now recognized by the government. Their problem is not a political one, however, but the Orthodox priests who teach the people that only the Orthodox Church is good and that that the Bible of the evangelical churches and their other books are not good at all. This happens mostly in the South and South East of Romania.

The evangelical churches are involved in missions in order to spread the Truth that sets people free. The churches in Romania are the strongest in Eastern Europe and, as far as I know, they are followed by the ones in Ukraine.

Right after Romania joined the European Union, many Christians left for the West. This is a door that God has opened for evangelizing the Western churches through the believers who planted new churches or attend the local churches of Spain and Italy, etc.

As far as the numbers are concerned, there has been no recent growth in the Romanian evangelical churches and yet Romania is seen by the evangelical believers as being the country with the greatest missionary potential for the spiritual revival in Europe.

There are many and different missions working all over Romania, most of them being supported in one way or another by organizations or churches from abroad. At the same time, the churches from Romania are sending out missionaries to other European countries to strengthen churches there and to spread the Good News.

We are praying that all these efforts will bring fruit for the Kingdom of God and that many will come to Him and become true believers.

Pastor Ion Valise, April 2007



Romania is a country in Southeastern Europe, bordering Hungary and Serbia to the west, Ukraine and Moldova to the northeast, and Bulgaria to the south. Romania has a stretch of sea coast along the Black Sea, and the eastern and southern Carpathian Mountains run through its center. It has seen numerous empires come and go from the Roman, to the Ottoman, to the Austro-Hungarian. After World War II the country was under communist rule although the leadership pursued a foreign policy independent of that of the Soviet Union.

The capital of Romania and largest city is Bucharest, the sixth largest city in the European Union. Romania joined NATO on March 29, 2004, and the EU on January 1, 2007. Romania has the seventh largest population and the ninth largest territory in the EU.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF MISSIONS

By Rev. Chris Polski, Pastor of Golden Isles Church (from email correspondence received in January. Rev. Polski had made "lightening" passes through Warsaw and Lithuania, writing from ITEM's seminary in Latvia)

During the teaching trip it was observed that the people of the Lithuanian Reformed Church have been experiencing difficulties and the frustration regarding the return of properties confiscated during the Soviet times and subsequently sold to non-Reformed liberal denominations, which are substantially backed by a number of Western religious groups.

The Reformed church there consists of 15 congregations, 13 of which have been without pastors for more than 10 years. It was my mandate to try to determine what had been done so that the appropriate course of action could be undertaken - the return of the churches and their properties to the rightful owner, the Lithuanian Reformed Church. At some point litigation ensued and it seems to be the best course of action if the congregations join together to off-set the costs of this expensive undertaking. It was discovered that rival Reformed groups have been planted and cultivated in the same name as larger established churches and all without authorization. In addition, other groups, like Opus Dei, are working to undermine the evangelical church in this country. Legal action to extricate them would cost thousands of dollars; on the other hand, the church has an intensive push for righteousness.

Right now, Rev. Dr. Algimantas is primarily concerned with stopping liberalism, training apologists, teaching lay people the Bible, finding a way to purchase their property, or regain it through legal means, ordaining trained pastors to take on the empty pulpits, and finishing his studies so that he may have an accredited theological degree. In all honesty, he rightly asserts that the work seems overwhelming. There is little or no money and few candidates for the ministry. He states that if they are to succeed without restraint they will need a lot of help from the outside. At the same time, he is very optimistic about



Clockwise:

1. Rev. Polski teaching a class in Vilnius Lithuania, a small gathering of about 20 people.

2. Preaching at the Evangelical Reformed Church of Vilnius wearing a special pastoral robe and collar, which is what all ordained ministers wear in Lithuania

3. Preaching at a Reformed church in Kaunas, whose building was turned into a dancing hall during the Soviet regime.



Excerpts from Chris Polski's journal on the history of the Reformed church in Lithuania.

"The first reformed church in Vilnius can be traced back to the 1560's, about the time that John Calvin died. But within a couple of generations the movement was squelched by the counter reformation of the Catholic Church. Some reformed believers, however, survived. The movement picked up steam again in the 19th century but the combination of German liberalism and communism again diminished the believing church. The years under Soviet rule were terrible for everyone, but especially the evangelical church. Their properties were taken from them, their people were oppressed and theological education was outlawed in an effort to cut off a new generation of preachers before they could be taught. Finally, when the Soviets pulled out in 1991 the church was permitted to meet openly but without educated ministers and buildings, it has been a very slow process forward. And not only this, but there is virtually no theological literature translated into the language of Lithuania. So not only must potential pastors get a theological education, they must also learn English or another more common European language in order to access the best materials available. These people are in need of translators to get some of the best theological texts into their own language. Algimantas remains optimistic about the future of the church here in Lithuania, but as he has said many times, "We need workers!"

the situation in Latvia today.

The seminary there, at considerable expense, has gotten accreditation. It is well established. Both Latvian and Lithuanian Reformed groups are aspiring to work to their mutual advantage by removing the restrictions of the past and opening the doors of opportunity for accredited growth through local universities, and on into the EU and thereafter to the rest of the world.

The needs are few but great: strong biblical teaching, necessary fiscal foundations, and trained leadership committed to the cause and to the proclamation to the Word of God accurately and to the four corners of the earth. So we say to you, "Come and see for yourself. Be touched by the circumstances... touched to the point of taking the next step rather than sit comfortably and watch."

Rev. Chris Polski, February 2007

REPORT ON FLORIDA VISIT

Last year the Board of ITEM identified the southeastern US as another target area for the communication of the ministry of ITEM. President Dr. R. David Ludwick and Board Member Rev. Perry Tinklenberg made the trip to make and renew contacts:

David and I met at Orlando Int'l Airport, traveled 963 miles and parted company at Orlando Int'l road weary, still on speaking terms and generally no worse for the wear. Most of the road time was spent in theological discussion with some breaks to share a fishing story or two.

A representative of Ligonier Ministries and St. Andrews Chapel were our first contacts and ITEM was promised that the material we presented would be reviewed by the Ligonier Missions. We learned that approximately 20 Ligonier publications had been translated into Russian and were ready to be released. There is a possibility that we may be able to get copies of these publications for ITEM ministries gratis or at a subsidized price.

Reformed Theological Seminary was the next stop on the agenda where we met with a couple of professors. Both expressed a keen interest in ITEM. There was a definite willingness to teach but scheduling might be a problem for any activity in the near future. Both professors were encouraged to consider ITEM as a resource for possible internships and short term mission projects for students who have completed all their Master's level coursework. The ITEM ministry will be presented to the RTS faculty for information.

Men from the Oasis Community Christian Reformed Church were next on the list, and were challenged to pray about going to teach for ITEM one year from now.

Day Two began with our visit at St Andrews Presbyterian Church in Hollywood, Florida. We were referred to contacts at Redeemer Bible College. We then met the elders of Port St Lucie Christian Reformed Church.

The next stop was in Sebring to meet the elders and pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA), who expressed a great interest in teaching. Our final appointments were with a few more men from PCA and URC.

The long trek to the airport was interrupted by a short stop at City of Palms Park to see where the Boston Red Sox conduct their spring training. I would have given equal billing to the more important Twins field, which I had already seen, but David seemed nonplussed by either so we just hit the road, as it were.

All in all, the trip was promising and the interest in the work of ITEM is still elevated. Yet we continue to ask you to keep ITEM in your prayers and spread the work about the work being done and the victories being won.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Rev. Perry Tinklenberg, February 2007

A TRIBUTE TO REV. NICK VOGELZANG

During this past year, we have thought about articles for this newsletter regarding Rev. Nick Vogelzang. We have accumulated and will for the rest of this year include some as each newsletter is published. If you would like to have yours included, please forward your email to this address for consideration and placement. We will also, during this year, share with you something of the life of Rev. Bill Ribbens, also a visionary, but of an entirely different cut. We have also started a memorial fund for these men, which will be used to advance the training of students, especially in hermeneutics and homiletics.

Nick Vogelzang was a consummate visionary. I've said it before and I'll say it again, "He had the capacity to see things when no one else could or to picture things in a place, other than where they were." His enthusiasm was contagious, his smile and laughter-- infectious. His "salesmanship" of the gospel-- untiring, and, he was God's man.

You have all heard the story about how ITEM, Inc. began with the dialogue between Nick and Dr. Joel Nederhood. Where Nick suggested that the Back To God Hour do something more than just broadcast behind the Iron Curtain. Being the undaunted spirit that he was and recognizing the signs of opportunity, he took money from his inheritance and did "do something."

He started Christ for Russia, as ITEM was formerly known.

As I looked through the files that he had delivered to me when I became Executive Director, I realized that an ability to read was not enough, I needed to be able to interpret as well. His speech grew more and more intense as he spoke about his dreams for reaching more and more people, especially those coming out from under the Communist rule.

Many times I pictured him in white pants, with white shoes, white jacket with vertical stripes, and a straw boater; oh, also, a Bible in one hand (for the Truth) and a cane in the other (to punctuate his sentences).

Did you know him? Can you picture him?

Generous with his time, with what God had shared with him, and with his life.

I remember him, these ways. Though we only spent 25-30 hours together.

How do you remember him?

Dr. R David Ludwick, April 2007



Waiting in the barren land, praying that you will come... and we do... This babushka walking home on the road to her Ukrainian village where ITEM students and professors proclaimed the Good News to 81 residents of her village for the first time...

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