

Equipping Reliable Leaders in  
Sound Doctrine  
in

Hungary  
Latvia  
Lithuania  
Poland  
Romania  
Russia  
Ukraine

# NEWSITEMS

## Summer Edition

Summer 2008  
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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*

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International Theological  
Education Ministries, Inc  
P.O. Box 31456  
St. Louis, MO 63131  
Tel.: (314) 691-0169  
Email Dr. Ludwick at  
rdludwick@sbcglobal.net  
On the Web at www.item.org

## THANK YOU, THE FAITHFUL

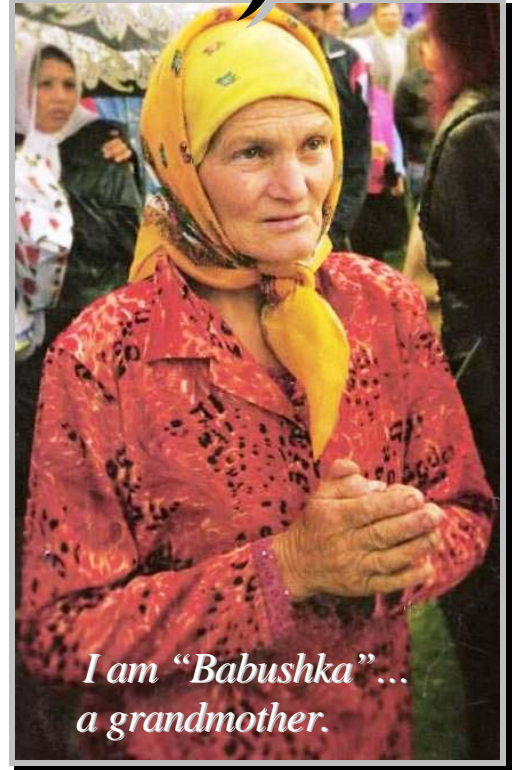
By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM  
President

As you know International Theological Education Ministries (ITEM) is one of the few missions organizations that are carrying Reformed theology to God's people, in the former Soviet Bloc (Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, and Romania). We are blessed to tell you that we have seen many victories and lives changed in the past years with much thanks to supporters like you. We have shared the progress and plans for the future of His Kingdom come, through ITEM. We thank you, "Faithful Ones," for your much needed and gratefully received materials, support and prayer.

At one of ITEM's schools in Vishnevsk, Ukraine the total costs are about \$1,400/month, this includes: President's salary, Dean of Students and Faculties, Registrar, receptionists, secretaries, facilities use, cleaning, maintenance, cooks that feed 25 students who are served two hot meals every day they have school, in part because they travel so far by bus or train to attend school five days per week, which means that we can teach for \$0.46 per student per classroom hour!

ITEM is attempting to help regain title to the Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church properties. We anticipate the costs being over \$50,000 for property worth \$1,000,000+ but the poverty of the church is the obstacle. Impossible to do without God's supporting people like you. With these new facilities we would be able to house a substantial number of students, visiting faculty, have more than a classroom and be able to build a library for the first time in generations!!

Furthermore, we are excited about our new additions, Alister and Sara Torrens, who are ITEM full-time field missionaries, with whom ITEM and MTW are partnering. The Torrens are carrying on much of the



*I am "Babushka" ...  
a grandmother.*

*As a church we prayed for you to come; we prayed until there are so few left that we could only wait and pray.*

*We build our church but have no shepherds. We were lost like sheep - and it was only bricks and mortar - our church was only a building...*

*You brought back to us the church of His Word; you taught us to learn and to teach.*

*You gave us something which united us, and our hearts were committed to repeat and we did and we do.*

*But now there is a chill in our life like in the old times. And we know our church building will one day crumble and fall, but His Church brought you back to us with truth and hope forever.*

*Please do not leave us alone now!*

*Babushka.*

work that the Gorters has begun, in Ukraine.

"I can do all things through Him who empowers me."

Prayers and financial support are His means of empowerment. Your prayers and financial support not only empower your missionaries but you as well.

**Dr. R. David Ludwick**

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# “OLD FOUNDATIONS, SECURE FOR NEW BEGINNINGS”

By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM President

*This newsletter will take advantage of the opportunity to tell you about ITEM, some for the first time and some as a refresher.*

The primary objectives of the ministry of ITEM are the training of pastors, teachers and lay leaders in the Truths of Scripture and Reformed Theology through the establishment of Bible institutes, colleges and seminaries. Face to face teaching activities, the establishment of Reformed Theological libraries and translation of Reformed Theological literature are all included in our charter and are current priorities. ITEM is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt, donor deductible, religious/educational/charitable type corporation, originally chartered in Colorado by Nicholas Vogelzang and subsequently domesticated in St. Louis, MO.

ITEM works in the following countries of the former Soviet Bloc (Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine). We hope to achieve our objective through the “planting” of the institutions noted above, training men for the pastorate and men/women in teaching roles and those organizations who partner with the church. Our purpose, in part, is to establish organizations engaging nationals in their own countries rather than peopling institutions and their administrations. We believe that the paradigm to be established is one that meets the needs of those whom we serve rather than cloning activities unknown to the indigenous cultures.

(NB. We are not a para-church organization. We do not do what the church does. We train church leadership to meet the needs of the kingdom, wherever relevancy meets opportunity.) We seek to partner with existing entities. We assure them that we will teach and provide conservative biblical Reformed information and literature. As nationals, they will provide the facilities and students who shall come, sent by their home churches, where they will serve practicum between teaching terms. It is also our purpose to translate good Reformed theological literature, e.g. “What is the Reformed Faith” by Dr. John R. de Witt, “Escape From Reason” by Francis Schaeffer and many other books.

We are a Reformational organization requiring subscription agreements for all employees and Professors, which requires acknowledgement of one's position regarding two or more of the following: Heidelberg, Belgic, Dordt, Helvetic and Westminster. Changes of position are noted to be sent to the ITEM Board of Directors. ITEM is not denominational but a mission agency, Reformed in principle and practice. Our Board of Directors, faculty and supporters principally come from seven denominations: URC, CRC, OCRC, OPC, PCA, RCUS, and Netherlands Reformed.

We believe that God's Word, the Bible, is Truth, and is infallible, inerrant and inspired in the original autographa and is the only foundation and guide for all of life. We also believe that the five Reformed standards are instructive but subordinate to the Word of God.

We believe ITEM to be a “Word and Deed” ministry. A “Word and Deed” ministry is the only way ITEM can function in its mission mandate because we must equip ourselves with the Word so that we can equip others in the Word so that they may replicate the work to their fellow countrymen and so on for generations. We are “do-ers” of the Word, living and teaching the Word in order that others may do so as well.

Our financing comes primarily from churches, whose pastors or others (apt to teach) go for a teaching term and return home ‘on fire for the cause,’ energizing their mission committees with the truths of their experience, the committees then consider prayerful and financial support of ITEM.

During the past fiscal year giving has declined. This is consistent with some variation of a fluctuating economy. Other potential factors are decline in donor numbers, which may also be related to the economy. A third factor is a broadened interest in missions, which shifts financial support from one recipient to one newly designated by mission committees.



*Dr. Ludwick looking over the campus of Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine, during his recent trip.*

While other alternatives may be posited, we accept where we are and press on toward saturation of the countries where we serve by the continual presentation of the Reformed faith until He, in His time, by His means, continues to give the victories where we serve or where He has us to serve next.

Practical opportunities for fiscal support include endowment of teaching terms (pastor/professor expenses: flights), facilities use costs, operational expenses, growth and expansion expenses, and funding of projects, e.g. clearing the titles of school properties.

We must admit numerous successes, having faced the challenges including the lack of growth and development of funding utilized for the months and years to come, in pursuit of our purpose as well as the sheer volume of the work produced from the work we have undertaken.

As a consequence, we solicit your prayers for the following:

1. That those whom we serve receive the Truths of Scripture through the Reformed faith, faithfully presented;
2. That local pastors, teachers, and lay leaders replicate the work given by our Lord to ITEM to accomplish there;
3. That volunteers rise up to present the work to others, having a mission mandate shared with others, which includes more than just “bricks and mortar;”
4. That we would be useful instruments in the hands of our Lord, seeking only to glorify Him and not ourselves;
5. That we would honor the requests of our brothers in the countries where we serve, seeking to meet their real needs in a culturally disparate encounter and seeking to do so by not imposing a western paradigm on a non-western culture;
6. That He will provide the means needed to accomplish what He has called us to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to co-labor with you. We look forward to the opportunity to serve. We entreat you forward the names of any persons that you believe are qualified to serve in the works mentioned above or if you would like someone to come to you and make a presentation of the work.

In His service and in yours as we anticipate meeting your mission mandate with you by His grace, in His timing, according to his will.

**RDL, March 2008**

USA donations and correspondence: P.O. Box 31456, St. Louis, MO 63131-0456 Tel.+1.314.691.0169; Fax:+1.314.909.7676  
e-mail: Dr. Ludwick: [rldudwick@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rldudwick@sbcglobal.net)  
internet: [www.item.org](http://www.item.org)

Canadian donations only: c/o Action International Ministries  
3015 A 21st St. NE Calgary T2E 7T1 Canada

R. David Ludwick, J.D., M.Div, *President*

# “THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN LATVIA TODAY”

Andre Bouravnev, ITEM Media Director

In 2000, Vazlav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, wrote, "If some of our best features are not fully visible yet, it is because our society is covered with renovation structures, which hide the effort—this time carried out in complete freedom—to restore and regain its true identity." However, as more and more countries of this region join the European Union and the NATO, they are gradually becoming more and more visible and audible on the international arena. Latvia is one of such countries; it is best known as one of the three Baltic States—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The image of a building under renovation applies well also to the processes related to renewal of the religious education that is taking place both in church and public school settings in Latvia following the departure from the Soviet Union.

Yet even after more than a decade of restoration efforts, the road to normalized and standardized Christian education is thorny. In attempts to overcome the residues of the Soviet ideology in its very foundations Latvia has embraced a large-scale educational reform since 2002. Because of the past, religious education both in churches and public schools has to be built up almost from scratch. The same applies to academic research in religious education. During the last fourteen years, religious educators in Latvia not only had to cover in an accelerated way the experience that Western countries had been accumulating for many decades of theorizing and experimenting, but they also had to reflect on the demands of the unique social and cultural context in which they are called to work.

A recent analysis conducted in Latvia by Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy of Riga, Latvia shows that Christian education plays a significant role in the Latvian educational system; it brings the intellectual and cultural values to the future generations, and is an integral part of the European culture. Secondly, Christian education produces a harmonious individual in the contemporary society. But even more importantly, Christian education sets the stage up for the preparation of the Bride in all corners of the world, and in Central Europe in particular, despite incessant secularist and materialist attacks of Satan.

Historically, Christian education was operative in state high schools even before World War II. Educational laws of 1919 and 1934 included provisions for confessional religion classes, both in primary and secondary schools, following the experience of Scandinavian countries. After that, nothing was left, and only in 1991 teaching of religion was reintroduced into Latvian public schools. The Law on Religious Organizations that guaranteed freedom of conscience allowed children to choose between religion and ethics or to study both. From 1991 to 1996, Latvia's religion classes of various kinds were taught as electives on the initiative of the principal and/or individual teachers. Teachers of religion had to design their own curricular materials. Each school paid religion teachers according to its resources with teachers, more often than not, working for free.

In 1993, the Ministry of Education and Science established the Inter-Confessional Collegium of Religious Education in which leaders of the five traditional churches — Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, and Old Believers — together with officials from the Ministry of Education started a discussion on the common curriculum for religious education in public schools. Although initially a common ecumenical curriculum was devised, eventually the confessional approach was followed, as in many other Western European countries, such as Finland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Luxemburg, and parts of Germany and Switzerland. Teachers of religion had to belong to and be certified by one of five traditional Christian churches — Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox, and Old Believer.

Each church trained its own teachers of religion and developed its own curricular materials, which had to be approved by the Ministry of Education and Science.

While the confessional approach was being repeatedly supported, advocated, and financed on the official level, its way into the educational practice in state schools was far less enthusiastic. Schools that dealt with children belonging to various confessions found it very difficult to introduce the confessional approach in its pure form, except for some religiously homogenous regions such as the eastern part of Latvia, which is predominantly Roman Catholic. According to statistics, in 1998 they were only taught in approximately 20 percent of all schools, mostly in grades 1 through 4. In addition, the confessional approach was under constant pressure and a sharp critique from the mass media. Attempts have been made to bypass ecclesiastical control by offering such courses as “History of Religions” for secondary schools (1998) and “Christian Ethics” for primary schools (1999) under the structure of social sciences.

As a result, the five major confessional curricula were replaced with one common non-confessional Christian curriculum. The resulting joint program, “Christian Faith,” for grades 1 through 4, focused on the basics of Christian faith from a non-confessional, biblical perspective. However, teachers still had to be approved by their churches. It was also emphasized that these changes in the curriculum of religious education in public schools had been initiated, authorized, and controlled by the members of traditional churches, and not the Ministry of Education and Science. Thus, teaching religion in public schools is still regarded as implicitly confessional. This means that only five traditional Christian groups have free reign.

Today, all schools will offer a choice between a non-confessional course, “Christian Faith,” and a course in “Ethics” in grades 1 through 4. Ideally, they also can offer a non-confessional course, “Christian Ethics,” as an alternative to secular “Ethics” in grade 7 and an elective course, “History of Religions,” in high school. However, students are not required to study religion in any grade, provided they study ethics in elementary school and grade 7. Teachers can acquire certification to teach religion and ethics at the Professional Program of Teachers of Religion and Ethics at the Faculty of Theology, University of Latvia. However, teachers of the course “Christian Faith” still have to be approved by their churches.

*continued on page 4*



*Rev. Alvis Sauka, pastor of a Reformed Church in Riga, Latvia, delivering a report on the state of Reformed education in Latvia at the synodical meeting of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania-Unitas Lithuaniae*

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Even though there has been certain progress in the field of religious education due to increased governmental support, in reality, the existence and form of religious education in a public school are still highly dependent on the attitude of its administration. It is still possible for principals to influence the decision of parents of elementary school students in favor of ethics, as well as to choose to offer the electives, "Christian Ethics" and "History of Religions." This situation allows for a wide range of experience with religious education in different schools: in some of them religious education flourishes, in some it barely exists, and in others it is completely ignored.

In the process of choosing models, designing curricular theories, and writing textbooks, various factors should be taken into account that are specific to the local context, such as the atheistic upbringing of the majority of the adult population, the experience of persecutions of religious faiths during the Soviet times, as well as current political, economic, and cultural problems of a transitional post-Soviet society. Today's students will form the not-so-distant society. They will soon be teachers, politicians, businessmen, pastors and lay leaders who bring intellectual, cultural, and ethical values for generations to come. The emphasis lies in the necessity to promote the formation of a knowledgeable, competent, educated, virtuous and ethical individual who is characterized by an inner harmony of feelings, intellect and will, all under the canopy of the comprehensive biblical teaching. What a blessed opportunity it is for us to step in with our gifts of resources, knowledge, talents, and experience! "At the present time, your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need." (2 Cor. 8:14).

Sources used: Anta Filipson, "Religious Education in Post-Soviet Latvia," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 13 (Fall 2005), 10-12. R.Balodis, *The State and the Church* (Riga, Latvia: Nordik, 2000), 251. Ethics, "Skolotais [The Teacher], 2000, Part 1, pp. 46-50; Part II, pp. 2, 26-29. Ministry of Education and Science, *History of Religions; Standard for Secondary Education* (Riga, Latvia: 1998); Ministry of Education and Science, *Christian Ethics: Social Science; Standard for Primary Education* (Riga, Latvia: 1999). H. Andersone et al., "On the Future of Religious Education in Latvia," *Diena [The Day]* (15 October 1998), 2 and 15. M. Kwiran, "Europe" in *Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education*, ed. by I.V. Cully and K.B. Cully (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 229-33; P. Schreiner, "RE/RS in European Schools," 1998, <http://www.comenius.de/projektedetail.cfm?id=51>.

AVB, March 2008

## "GIVING AND MONEY"

By Andre Bouravnev, ITEM Media Director

Money is important. It gives us stability. It earns us respect and recognition. It allows us to provide for our needs and wants. But can it really do all that? Can it make us content, appreciated, even happy? Can it really sustain our needs? The truth is, the Lord blesses with riches, but He also curses with it. Proverbs 11:4 says, "Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death." And who can forget the rich young ruler who reportedly obeyed all of God's commandments, and yet walked away sad after Jesus pointed out his one true weakness – his love for money. Money brings the selfish conditioning to love it, treasure it, and trust it. How can I know that I trust money more than anything else? How can I know if even in some small part of my life I trust not God but my money to take care of me? Perhaps, it is when I am struggling to give to the right cause. And perhaps, it is even when I am willing to give but not too much, so as not to risk my security and safety. It is also when we share our love for Christ with our love for money.

Money is a gift that keeps on giving not because we can make more money with it, but because when the Lord blesses us financially, we are called to give generously. "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty." (Proverbs 11:24) Many people feel personally rewarded by committing to worthy missions or other charitable programs. They say that their commitment to giving is a spiritual discipline, like prayer and worship, which helps them experience God in a more personal way. It also connects them to other Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world. They also say that giving gives them a happier outlook on life, lifting their spirits, just like it does whenever you help someone.

In fact, statistically those who give are happier than those who do not. According to the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, of 30,000 American households, people who gave were 43% more likely to say that they were very happy about their lives. People who give are also less depressed than non-givers, according to the University of Michigan's Panel of Study of Income Dynamics. Researchers have investigated this by conducting experiments in which people are queried about their happiness before and after they participate in a charitable activity.

The result is clear that giving has a strong, positive casual impact on our well-being. "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7)

So why do people hesitate to give? Because they don't immediately see what the return is. We pay for gas and see the return in our car's gas tank that will take us home and not stall in the middle of the highway. We pay for groceries and get our delicious dinner that same evening. We can even indulge ourselves with a cup of coffee on the way to work. But when we give money to church or a mission organization, we don't immediately see the result. But that is the real secret behind giving. When you give without expecting anything in return, you genuinely give your money in the spirit. This kind of generosity spills over to other areas of our life. You become more generous with your time, words, and actions toward your family, friends and anyone you care about. The simple truth is, if you are willing to help a stranger in need living thousands of miles away without expecting anything in return, how much more will you be willing to help those that are close to you? It may not come back in the form of money, but something even more valuable and imperishable. It is investment in God's Kingdom. Earthly empires rise and fall, as even now we experience the crunch of encroaching economic recession. But the Kingdom of God will stand forever.

So why give? Because generosity is encouraged (2 Cor. 8:1-15); but also because you want to give; and also because there is a blessing in giving and a blessing in receiving, but more so in giving, as Jesus himself said "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

AVB, March 2008

Consider this, ITEM supports a seminary in Vishnevsk, Ukraine, with Reformed teaching and costs that round up to \$0.46 per student per classroom hour! (Below, a picture of Dr. Ludwick, center, and seminary's President Rev. Tkachuk, right) Is this cause worthy of your support?

