



**500 th  
Anniversary of  
the Reformation  
in Croatia  
by Tom Smith**

In the village of Suza in Baranja, Croatia, on March 10, 2016, representatives, led by bishops Jasmin Milic and Janos K. Kettôs, respectively of the Protestant Reformed Christian Church (PRKC) and the Hungarian Reformed Christian Church in Croatia, gathered to discuss the upcoming celebration of the worldwide 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 1517. They formed the "Planning Committee of the Protestant Churches for Preparation of the Celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation." The oldest Protestant parishes in Croatia are in the areas of Slavonia and Baranja where they have continuously conducted worship services since the time of the Reformation. Today these parishes thrive under the guidance of these two denominations.

Representatives agreed that this anniversary celebration would begin in the city of Karlovac on this year's Reformation Day, October 31, 2016. In 2017, a series of special worship services, lectures, exhibitions and other events marking the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be held in three noteworthy locations: Tordinci, the oldest Croatian Protestant parish and site of the first Protestant Synod held in 1551, Kneževi Vinograd, where a famous Synod was held in 1576, and Zmajevac, location of the first Protestant theological seminary in the region, founded in the 1500's. The Coordinating Committee will inform the public of ceremonies and special programs to be held in other places as they are planned. This month ITEM will send its first instructor, Dr. Robert Smart, to teach at the Mikhail Starin Institute in Osejek, Croatia.



**Teaching  
&  
Reaching  
in Ukraine  
by John Lewis  
Instructor**

(Instructor John Lewis, center, with Ukrainian refugees)

Visiting Kiev, Ukraine, for the ninth time in late January, 2016, proved especially exciting and memorable. Beside teaching Ethics again at the Kiev Regional Bible College [KRBC], I (John Lewis) met with some 60-80 refugees from eastern Ukraine. We met at the Kiev Revival Baptist Church where they ate soup and relaxed and fellowshiped together. Having been taught during Soviet times, these refugees were agnostic, atheistic, or nominal Russian Orthodox. I spoke to them for 30 minutes about my confidence in God, my trust in Christ as my Savior, and the essentials of our reformed faith.

We spent another two hours together as I attempted to answer their questions. These and other refugees meet here or in other evangelical churches on Saturday afternoons. Revival's pastor, Yaroslav Machinsky, serves on the Board of KRBC and also teaches New Testament courses there. Pray for these refugees painfully separated from friends and loved ones and suffering extreme deprivation. Pray that God would use the food, clothing and the love of Christ being offered to them to bring them to a saving faith in Christ and growth in their new faith.

KRBC, conceived thirteen years ago as a result of the shared vision of ITEM's former President Dr. David Ludwick and Dr. Vitaliy Tkachuk, Vice President of the All-Ukrainian Baptist Union, continues to prosper and remain faithful to God. Prospective students eagerly learn Scripture and the essentials of the Christian faith as they prepare to serve as pastors, assistant pastors, Sunday school administrators, and choir directors. Student

enrollment is down a bit this year as prospective students hesitate to request leave from their daytime jobs to attend classes for fear of not being re-hired.

On this visit, I met Anton Azarapin, a 24 year-old student just arrived from the Donetsk Region in eastern Ukraine. He was excited to study Ethics as we discussed the sovereignty of God, absolute and relative truth, God's attributes and the Ten Commandments. Anton, a very bright student eager to serve the Lord, wants to be an evangelist in Russia to share the gospel with the very people who support the destruction of his home. Pray the Holy Spirit would empower Anton with boldness and effectiveness in loving those once his enemies. And pray that all honor, praise and glory continue to be given to God through the ministry of KRBC and its nearly two hundred graduates scattered across Ukraine in large cities and small villages.



**Meet John**  
**“A Rowdy Transformed”**  
**by Will Hesterberg,**  
**Instructor**

This past February, after preaching in a small country church in India, I (Will Hesterberg) sat down to enjoy a delicious meal with Pastor John, his wife, and 6 adopted children. Here is John's amazing story of transformation. John left home as a teenager and became a “rowdy,” right-hand enforcer for a city gangleader. After a few years John moved back to care for his sick mother. Going to church one Sunday he heard the pastor speak from Revelation 9:6, “And in those days, people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die but death will flee from them.” He returned home puzzled about how the verse applied to him. That evening he heard a message on the radio on Revelation 9:6. The next Sunday John visited another church where the pastor spoke from... Revelation 9:6!

Realizing this was more than a coincidence, John sensed God's pursuit and prayed to receive Christ. Persecution in his home village drove him to the nearby mountains for three months but then his village leaders asked him to manage their new dairy farm which he did. On Sundays he continued to worship in another village. One Sunday John brought his very sick mother to the pastor for prayer. She was miraculously healed and became a believer. In his hometown John began a church which grew to 120 but then split. Realizing he needed more training, John attended a year of classes in 2013. He began his present church in 2014 near his house and built a small church where about 50 now worship. When I taught a class on “Biblical Leadership” in Visakhapatnam, there was John with an elder. God has transformed John from a “rowdy” into an energetic, sweet-natured, disciple eager to build the church of Jesus Christ in India.

#### **Opportunities to Pray in April**

- 1. Praise for the classes taught in March - Norris Lessley in Ukraine and Jim Roszell in Romania.**
- 2. Pray for unity and wisdom for the April 22 Board meeting.**
- 3. Pray for Bob Smart who will be teaching OT books and Hermeneutics in Croatia in April.**
- 4. Pray for David Smith who will be teaching at BRTS in Latvia from April 4 to 8.**
- 5. Pray for our Romanian translators.**
- 6. Pray for sufficient contributions for the first shipment of books to the Croatian seminary.**

**W**ouldn't it be great if you could double your giving to ITEM this year? You can, thanks to a friend of ITEM who has pledged \$25,000 to match new or increased giving. Whatever you give above your giving last year will be matched. If you've just begun to give in 2016, it will be matched.

Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to ITEM, Action International Ministries, 3015 A, 21<sup>st</sup> Street NE, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2E 7T1 and in the U.S. to ITEM, PO Box 31456, St Louis, MO or through paypal at [www.ITEM.Org](http://www.ITEM.Org). Phone: 618-939-4836 (ITEM) Email: [lwhesterberg@gmail.com](mailto:lwhesterberg@gmail.com)