

## DECEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

### It Was Worth It!

Rev. Mark Stewart (Burlington, WA)



India left a real impression on me: congestion, crazy driving patterns, sacred cows in every photograph and on every street. You sense a mass of humanity, most of whom do not know Christ. You feel slightly alone in a country of 1.2 billion who do not look like you. What I remember most, though, are the people I met: pastors and their families and their congregations - outposts of the already present and ever expanding kingdom of God. Their love for Christ and the kingdom remains long after the jet lag finally clears.

I taught a course on Marriage and Family to pastors in Bangalore and Chennai. The brothers are all part of the Anugraha Presbytery with some leading established churches, but also many working with young church plants. I found it rather intimidating to speak into a different culture, using a foreign language, lacking experience on the ground in their country. However, the pastors made it easy, with their love for the Word and their eagerness to learn. I did my best to allow the Bible to speak to issues such as the purpose of marriage, roles, dealing with conflict, and balancing ministry responsibilities with marriage and family roles. These topics were challenging considering India's particularly male-dominated culture.

One cultural difference I had to overcome: as I spoke, the Indian pastors often shook their heads, and I thought that I perhaps had a hostile audience. However, this is their way of expressing agreement! The brothers impressed me with their collaborative spirit as they discussed my lecture points and worked in small groups to apply biblical principles to case studies. Lastly, their sense of humor and laughter were contagious, especially when they were not laughing at me!

Traveling to a foreign country has its challenges. What makes it worth it are the friendships formed with believers who serve and follow the very same Savior and Lord. What a blessing to know these brothers and their families and to celebrate our partnership in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

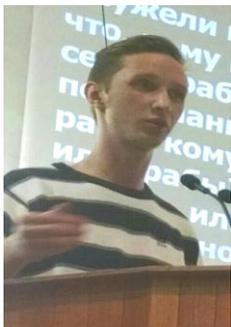
### Meet Our New Board Members



ITEM is pleased to welcome two new Board members: Dr. Rob Toornstra and Dr. Bob Smart. Rob Toornstra (left) and his wife Amy have 3 children; Rob pastors Sunnyslope Christian Reformed Church in Salem, OR. He graduated from Calvin Seminary in 2006 and received his Doctorate of Ministry from Covenant Seminary in 2015 with a focus on Christ-centered Preaching. Rob has taught for ITEM now several times in Ukraine and has developed modules on Christ-centered Preaching from the Old Testament and Christ-centered

Preaching from the Epistles which we have used. He is currently developing a module on Christ-centered Preaching from the Gospels to be used in Ukraine in March. Rob plans to teach for ITEM in Ukraine, Indonesia, and India in 2017. We welcome his experience, expertise, and enthusiasm for training national Christian leaders to preach Christ-centered messages.

Bob Smart and his wife Karen have 5 grown children and 11 grandchildren. Bob has served as lead pastor at Christ Church (PCA) in Bloomington, IL, for 23 years. He received his M. Div. from Covenant Seminary and his Ph.D. from the University of Wales. Bob has taught in Ukraine, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Laos, and Bolivia. He has also taught for ITEM in India, Croatia, and Colombia. He has a passion for training national Christian leaders to be disciples of Christ and disciplers for Christ. Bob has a wide range of teaching and travel experience and plans to teach for ITEM in Indonesia in 2017.



## **Meet Anton Azarapin**

**By  
ITEM Instructor  
John Birkett  
Owensboro, KY**

Anton studies at Kiev Regional Bible College (KRBC) where ITEM supplies instructors five times a year for modular teaching. Born 21 years ago at Pervomaisk, Luhansk Oblast, in eastern Ukraine, Anton, like many of his friends and family, now finds himself displaced from his home by the continuing conflict on the Russian border.

When the current war broke out in 2014, Anton, then 19, left home for Russia where he lived with Christian friends of his mother for around half a year for safety from the fighting. That's where Anton says "God touched me," through the love of Christians in the church. Anton realized he "couldn't do anything without God" and submitted himself fully to Christ.

With that spiritual awakening came a sense of God's call to ministry. Uncertain about the specific form of service to which God is leading him, like many of his generation, Anton anticipates utilizing internet outlets such as YouTube and other modern media to spread the gospel in Ukraine and beyond.

Last year, Anton came to Kiev in pursuit of an international passport. Currently he is living in a church building in northern Kiev with approximately 34 others who have moved from Eastern Ukraine. He works for Dominos Pizza, pursues theological studies at KRBC, and hopes to attend a local seminary. His pastor, the Rev. Peter Shakun (a frequent instructor at KRBC), is mentoring Anton at Birth of Christ Church where his gifts are being tested through occasional preaching and working with the children of several local churches in day-camp settings.

When asked why he was attending the most recent ITEM module at KRBC, Anton explained he hoped to learn new things about church leadership, the module's topic. He and his fifteen classmates studied the biblical qualities and qualifications for leaders including the centrality of the heart for all genuine Christian living from pulpit to pew.

### **Opportunities to Pray for ITEM**

- 1. Praise for John Birkett teaching on Biblical Leadership & Church Government in Ukraine and Jacob Bluebaugh teaching in Romania, both November 14-19.**
- 2. Pray for generous prayer and financial support from churches during Thanksgiving and Christmas season and those churches preparing their 2017 budgets.**
- 3. Pray for Tom Smith teaching Pastoral Counseling from December 16-17 in Croatia.**
- 4. Pray for all the instructor slots to be filled for 2017.**

Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to ITEM, % of Action International Ministries, 3015 A, 21<sup>st</sup> Street NE, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2E 7T1. In the U.S. to ITEM, PO Box 31456, St Louis, MO 63131 or through PayPal at [www.ITEM.org](http://www.ITEM.org).  
Ph: 618-939-4836 Email: [lwhesterberg@gmail.com](mailto:lwhesterberg@gmail.com)