



## JUNE 2020 NEWSLETTER



### On Coronavirus and the Power of Incarnation

*By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director*

International travel is limited or simply not advisable due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ITEM teachers have not gone abroad since early March, and it is not clear when they will again be able to travel to teach. The work of training indigenous church leaders has not stopped; it just looks different at the moment. One example is at the Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga, Latvia.

Because the students at BRTS have computers and good Internet service, BRTS hosted online two classes through Zoom. One class was Pneumatology & Soteriology taught by Dr. Barend Kamphuis and the other was Old Testament Pre-exilic Prophets taught by Dr. Mark Vander Hart.

Students from Latvia, Russia and Azerbaijan joined the classes. If these classes had been taught in person, it is doubtful students outside of Latvia would have been able to attend.

In recent years, Artis Celmins, the director of BRTS, has traveled to Russia to teach, speak and attend conferences in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Tyumen in Siberia. Had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives from Russia and other neighboring countries would have attended BRTS's 20th year anniversary in March. This is a result of Artis' networking and teaching in Russia. Artis also teaches at the BRTS Bible School for lay people and at the branch campus in Jekabpils in central Latvia.

I interviewed Artis on Zoom and posted the seven-minute clip on ITEM's Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/teachingnationalChristianleaders/>. Artis spoke about the situation in Latvia due to coronavirus. And he specifically addressed his own family's personal concern during this pandemic. His youngest daughter, Paula has a rare lung disease. This puts her in a high-risk category with regard to COVID-19.

Artis and his family live in the city center in an apartment near the seminary. His daughters share a bedroom. They will be able to go back out to school, but this will pose a danger to Paula. Therefore Artis is looking to move his family away from the city center to a less-populated place and to get a bigger space so there is less contact between his youngest daughter and her two sisters.

If you would like to help Artis and his family, you can give to a designated fund ITEM set up for him.

If you are already a regular donor, would you consider giving above your regular donation to help Artis?

He is a key person in a critical area of the world who is impacting not only leaders in his own country but in Russia as well.

### Check us out on Social Media

ITEM is on **Instagram**: @itemmission. Follow our journeys and tag us when you go on yours.

**Facebook**: <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalTheologicalEducationMinistries/>



## Using Mercy in Visakhapatnam amid coronavirus, cyclone

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director

How do you buy food when you don't have money? Many low-income people in less-developed economies around the world have faced this challenge over the past two months as 190 countries have imposed lockdown restrictions on their populations to slow the spread of COVID-19. As we at ITEM heard from our site directors of the struggles of students who take our courses, many of whom serve as pastors and leaders in their churches, we decided to help by sending money to the worst hit areas in early May, so food could be purchased and distributed to students.

ITEM's mission is to train indigenous church leaders for ministry. But if the leaders we train are starving and yet we focus only on educating them, are we modeling the love of Christ to them? Though we are not a mercy ministry, ITEM cares deeply about the temporal needs of its students and partners.

In India, ITEM has five training sites. One of these is in the city of Visakhapatnam. On the morning of May 7, the LG Polymer plant there leaked styrene gas, which spread out over a two-mile radius. This gas leak killed 13 people and sent more than 1,000 to hospitals with respiratory problems. By God's grace, none of the pastors or leaders we train were

near the affected area. A week later, 600 miles off shore from Visakhapatnam in the Bay of Bengal, a cyclone formed and moved north. Again our people in the city were spared. Our people in northeast India were also spared when the cyclone made landfall there.

Our Lord during his earthly ministry focused most of his time and energy on his disciples. But when Jesus saw people in need, he cared for them and helped them. As the psalmist wrote of the Messiah, "For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy." (Psalm 72:12-13). We thank God for his mercies on many in India and elsewhere during this difficult time.

### Prayer Requests

1. Continue to pray for the field directors and Christians in Ukraine, India, Belize, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania, Indonesia, Kenya, Bolivia and the Philippines who are experiencing quarantines. No American teachers are able to go to these fields.
2. Pray for ITEM's new plan to facilitate teaching during the quarantine by sending materials via the Internet. These materials are shown on projectors and/or TVs.
3. Praise that Bob Smart was able to record his Christ and Salvation lectures so 25 students in Bolivia could be taught.
4. Due to the suffering experiences in many areas where ITEM teaches, ITEM's new program to provide funds for food for students and leaders has been implemented. Pray that the suffering ends.

### How to Contribute

In the U.S. send contributions to ITEM, PO Box 31456, St Louis, MO 63131 or at [www.ITEM.org](http://www.ITEM.org) through PayPal. Email executive director Tom Smith at [tomsmith@item.org](mailto:tomsmith@item.org) Or call 717.640.6268

Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to:

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