



2020 Showed Us God's Mansion Has Many Zooms

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director

“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:19). While the context of this passage is about God’s plan of redemption for his people, we can see that God brings about surprises like rivers in the desert. This year, God surprisingly blessed the ministry of ITEM in the midst of a global pandemic which has negatively touched most people on earth.

Until this year, ITEM sent instructors to other nations to do live, in-person training. This changed when borders closed and gatherings of people in most nations were restricted. In 2020, ITEM instructors used Zoom to teach online and/or to do live question-and-answer sessions with students. While a few instructors did travel overseas, most classes were delivered through live-streaming, recorded videos and hybrid mixtures.

Through Zoom, Spanish-speaking students in several Latin American countries participated in classes directed to Cochabamba, Bolivia. Russian-speaking students in 10 countries participated in classes directed to Riga, Latvia.

Other new endeavors for ITEM in 2020 were a YouTube channel, lectures on Vimeo, a Facebook page and an Instagram account, a new promotional video about the ministry, and updates to ITEM’s website. ITEM invested in laptop computers, projectors, smart TVs, Zoom accounts, and Internet connectivity in several sites.

Because of the economic hardships due to the pandemic, ITEM sent money to Belize, Bolivia, Indonesia, India and Kenya to obtain food and other necessities for students and their families.

At first glance it seems disappointing that only 19 of 57 classes occurred in 2020, yet we are aware through online classes we have had more students in more countries than at any time in ITEM’s history. One class in southeast Asia has already had over 1,200 students through the Internet with hundreds of others watching individual lectures.

Plans for 2021 include online, in-person and hybrid classes. When more borders open and international travel is safe for instructors, we hope the majority of classes will be done in-person as this is the best educational format for student learning. We pray the global pandemic will be contained in the near future and thank God for developments of anti-viral drugs and vaccines. We praise God for doing new things in the ministry of ITEM in 2020.

How to Contribute

In the U.S. send contributions to
ITEM, PO Box 31456,
St Louis, MO 63131 or
at www.ITEM.org through PayPal.
Email Executive Director Tom Smith at
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or call 717.640.6268

Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to:

Action International Ministries
3015A 21st NE
Calgary AB T2E 7T1

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Staying informed on what ITEM is doing around the world has never been more important. We encourage you to follow us. ITEM is on **Instagram**: [@itemmission](https://www.instagram.com/itemmission), **YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/Mc24JfvgOoA>), Channel: ITEM-Videos, **Facebook**: <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalTheologicalEducationMinistries/>

Worldview: Christ Claims Primacy in All Areas of Life

Sacha Walicord grew up in Austria, pastors a church in Grand Rapids and last month taught a class for ITEM on worldviews to students from across Eastern Europe at Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary. That proved a powerful combination. He spoke with newsletter editor Matt Crossman about it.

On the diverse makeup of the class and teacher:

“It is wild. But isn’t it a wonderful picture of the gospel? We are all one in Christ Jesus. It doesn’t matter if they are in Russia, Kazakhstan, America or Austria. That’s a foretaste of what’s to come.”

On the importance of the subject matter:

“I stumbled into this whole area because I saw a strong deficit in our theology and in our pulpits. We have become more and more focused only on personal sanctification and pietism. We would never talk about issues that pertain to the world around us, that pertain to work or what we would call secular life, which of course is a false term because Christ claims all areas of life.”

“We have abandoned a biblical view of just about everything around us. We don’t have a biblical social ethic, we don’t have a biblical view of labor, we don’t have a biblical view of counseling. We don’t have a biblical view on politics. We don’t have a biblical view on the law. We must never fall prey to the lie that some areas are excluded from the claims of scripture.”

On teaching worldview teaching across cultures:

“It is similar but it is not the same. Almost all of the students I taught come from countries that for decades were socialist. Socialism is not only a political and economic view. Socialism is a whole worldview. We have to unmask that worldview and replace it with a biblical worldview.”



On worldview in the age of pandemic:

“We need a biblical view of disease. Worship is the most important thing we will do in this life and the life to come. Nothing will trump that. You want to take covid seriously by all means. But one thing you don’t want to do: you don’t want to take it more seriously than obeying God. We can’t just close down the churches.”

On why everyone needs a biblical worldview:

“The reformation doesn’t happen from the top down. It has to happen from the bottom up, and it has to begin with the gospel. Then we have to ask Francis Schaeffer’s question, how should we then live? We need Christians in all walks of life. At the same time, I need to warn them, applying biblical principles to a secular society does not make a Christian nation.”

“It’s the application of 2 Corinthians 10, where it talks about taking every thought into captivity to the obedience to Christ. Every thought, everything we say and do, we do in a biblical way.”

Using modules is a backup plan, now and in the future. “Our preference still is to get back to face-to-face instruction. We feel there is no substitute for that,” Will Hesterberg said. “This is simply a temporary substitute until we can start traveling again.” But even when travel resumes, the modules will still be valuable. Occasionally an instructor gets sick, or something happens at his church or with his family, and he can’t make a scheduled trip. “It’s so short-notice that we really can’t get somebody else plugged in as a substitute. Now it’s easy for us to say, we’ll just send you the module instead.”

Modules can serve as a tool to get to hard to reach places. “We are planning to use these modules to expand to new fields where maybe we can’t get there. So we send them a module, which gives them a taste of what our teaching is like. Then they can decide, yes, we want more of that or, well, maybe not. So we don’t spend as much money up front doing the exploratory work. But if it works out letting the video do our initial job, then we have the opportunity to expand into more fields that way.”

Prayer Requests

1. Jobje Lammers (the wife of Dr. Warren Lammers, ITEM board member) has pancreatic cancer. She had a chemo port installed. Pray the chemo is effective and for healing of her body.
2. Pray for protection of Christians in the Indonesian island of Sulawesi where four members of the Salvation Army were brutally killed by terrorists. Pray for comfort and consolation of the victim’s families.
3. Praise God that Artis Celmins, his wife Kristina and their daughter Paula are slowly recovering from COVID19 in Riga. Artis is the director of Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary.
4. Pray for students in Bolivia who are doing classes on Christian Theology Overview and Introduction to Old Testament, despite lost jobs and the on-going COVID19 pandemic.
5. Praise God for the many students in Indonesia taking the Revelation class online.