



Doing Missionary Work in These Challenging Times

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director

In May, Mark Vander Hart, the associate professor of Old Testament studies at Mid America Reformed Seminary and associate pastor at Oak Glen United Reformed Church in Lansing, Ill., visited Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga, Latvia. It was unlike any of his other 14 trips there.

When he arrived for his two month stay, he had to self-isolate in his hotel for 10 days. But Latvia's definition of self-isolation is different from ours. He was allowed to go to the grocery store, the pharmacy, and even to the seminary to teach. The police checked on him three times to make sure he was following the rules. He had to take COVID-19 tests at the beginning and end of his isolation.

He reflected on missions work in these times.

A different focus. "It was nice to be in Latvia where not every conversation turns to COVID-19. They don't seem to obsess on it. Latvia had a surge last fall, the government acted swiftly, and coronavirus infection rates dropped throughout this year."

Limited capacity. "If you go inside any building, you must observe social-distancing of one and a half meters. And you must wear a mask. Many of the stores and shops are very small, so they'll post a sign by the door, maximum capacity, one person or two people. It might be, for example, 17 people in grocery stores, and the way grocery stores monitor that is they put the exact number of baskets by the door."

Worship is essential. "When the government put the country on lockdown, that included churches. But some churches appealed to the government that churches, being essential, should be allowed to operate with public worship, provided the congregants wore masks and practiced social distancing of two meters. The government agreed! While some countries and American states were severely restricting public worship services, Latvian churches were meeting for worship, all the while following COVID-19 prevention protocols. At the same time, many churches are not well-attended, even in the best of times. Worship services did not turn out to be 'super-spreader events,' as some had feared."

When in Rome do as the Romans do. "I don't mind wearing a mask if that helps some people to be a little more relaxed in my presence. I was not there to tell the Latvians how to run their country during a pandemic. It's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, 'I become all things to all people that by all means, I might save some.' People detect whether you as, a foreigner coming in actually want to be there, and you love them, or you are just marking time and can't wait to get back on the plane to leave. They pick that up easily. Latvians historically were always somewhat oppressed by neighboring countries. I think that sometimes they are a bit puzzled that a person would actually love their country and would be willing to take time to go there to work for them."

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After Pandemic, Founder's Death, ANC Faces Future

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director

Springtime brings to mind many things—planting gardens and blooming flowers as well as high school and college graduation. All Nations College in Thika, Kenya wanted to hold graduation in April. But parts of Kenya, including All Nations College's location, were locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So All Nations waited until the restrictions were lifted and planned for the next best time to hold graduation.

Graduation was held on July 9th, a Friday evening. Twenty-eight students from All Nations College graduated. These were from all diploma and certificate programs of study. The students heard from Florence Muindi, the director of All Nations College, as well as from other college directors such as Rev. Michael Musembi and Rev. Francis Matiti.

All Nations has six satellite training centers with plans to begin a seventh in Nairobi. Students from the other training centers come to Thika when ITEM

classes are taught. Before graduation, the installation of partitions to better use their space in Thika was completed. Classroom chairs with writing pads for students, as well as tables and bookshelves for the library were purchased with funds donated by ITEM supporters and from Word and Deed Ministries of St. Thomas, Ontario and Hudsonville, Mich.

During July, Muindi completed certification for herself as director of All Nations College. By law, no person or institution can offer training in Kenya without being accredited, licensed and registered under the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Act, a part of Kenya Vision 2030. Although the founder, Rev. Dr. Daniel Muindi passed away unexpectedly in the spring, All Nations College plans to continue growing and training more pastors and leaders for ministry in the future.

Already, plans are underway for another graduation in February 2022. These graduates are in turn training others in their churches just as Paul instructed Timothy to, “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim. 2:2)

Prayer Requests

1. Pastor Maxim Fokin, who coordinates ITEM training in St. Petersburg, will have surgery on his hip and a hernia.
2. Some of our pastor-students in India have had COVID-19 and thankfully survived. A few have had on-going complications, such as black fungus infections.
3. The 2022 training schedule for our 11 locations plus new fields is being developed. Pray for wisdom as we plug in new and veteran instructors to teach in person, online, and hybrid combinations.
4. Student Missionary Outreach, with whom we work in the Philippines, is opening its Bible Training Institute for staff training in August.
5. Dr. Warren Lammers (ITEM board member) whose wife, Jobbe is fighting pancreatic cancer and Dr. Jeff Richards (ITEM board member) whose wife, Debbie is struggling with Parkinson's.

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