



Diary of a Missions Trip to BRTS in Latvia

In January, Rev. John Irwin of Myrtle Beach, S.C. traveled to Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary to teach New Testament history and theology. He kept a diary for ITEM.

Preaching: This is the third time I have been invited to preach in Riga. It is always a challenge to do so with the traditional translation style of saying a sentence or two and then having a translation. It also is quite rewarding to be able to preach God's Word and interact with the members.

It was another amazing "coincidence" to have the church sing a song in Latvian that my church in Myrtle Beach sang in English the week before. I always enjoy worshiping in another culture. The Reformed churches in Riga always amaze me with their high-tech audio and video capabilities, often surpassing churches in our own country in this area.

COVID in Latvia: At this time it is essential to visit the tourism office upon arrival to show your vaccination status and get a QR code. Nearly every business requires customers to show the QR code and an ID (passport is easiest) to enter. Masks are required for entry into nearly every building.

Teaching with the virtual element: Janis, the on-site translator, sat in another room and translated what I said into Latvian for the in-person students. Artis Celmins, the director of BRTS, sat in the back and interacted on Zoom with Russian translator Valeri (who was in Thailand), and students from Russia, Belarus, Lithuania, Ukraine, Romania and Kazakhstan. The technology and set-up for this was really first-class.

Latvia in January: I took my son, Micah, 17, with me so he could experience traveling to another country.

The tensions in the region with Russia made our prayers for peace among our students more palpable. In addition, prices for utilities, particularly natural gas, doubled just in the month of January in Riga. This may cause hardship for families, businesses and others in the country.

BRTS and exciting growth: I could not be happier with how BRTS has grown in influence in the region over the past few years. The connection to the Reformed group in St. Petersburg, Russia is amazing. The goal is to eventually have Russian students come to Riga, perhaps even with a retreat-style location with accommodations. Until that is possible, the on-line option has been a way to both increase connections and strengthen them throughout the COVID pandemic.

Personal connections: This is the fourth time I have taught in Riga. I have now taken my wife, daughter and son with me once each. My friendship with Janis and the connection I have made with the Celmins family are precious. Their hospitality, care for my family, and willingness to show each of us their lives is a true blessing.

My daughter still communicates regularly with one of the Celmins girls by email; going there was really a life-changing experience for her. It is also wonderful to see a Reformed covenant family modeled for us from another culture.

Check us out on Social Media

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, **YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/Mc24JfvgOoA>), **Channel:** ITEM-Videos,

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

ITEM Faces Opportunities, Challenges in Mission Field

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director

Eugene Peterson compared ministry to farming. Having grown up on a farm, I agree. One must plant seeds if you expect a harvest. But no farmer can control the weather or pests or commodity prices. Neither our work or worry nor God's gifts without God's blessing will do us any good (HC #125). So one starts with prayer, then plans, and then works the plan and continues to pray. When things go sideways, you adjust and keep on depending on God.

ITEM adjusted when the COVID pandemic restricted travel in 2020 and 2021. We fulfilled our mission to equip pastors for ministry by shifting some of our teaching online. As restrictions eased, more travel possibilities meant more in person and/or hybrid learning for our students. ITEM instructors are recording more video modules. An educational website is being developed. When ITEM cannot send instructors from North America, we use indigenous scholars to train others. We are doing this in Kenya and India.

God has blessed ITEM in the past few years with good donations to fund the work of training pastors. But what will happen when the economy falters? And what will happen when many of our investors pass on into eternity? We will pray and depend on the Lord. We will adapt, reduce whatever expenses we can and implore others to join ITEM in making disciples. This is what we are already doing.

God has also blessed ITEM with good leadership. Board members have pastoral and missionary experience as well as academic and business backgrounds. Seven of the 12 are at least 70 years old or older. While there is no immediate need to find younger board members, we do expect in a few short years from now to be adding young men to the board.

So please pray for the ministry of ITEM. Ask the Lord of the harvest for new instructors to go. Petition God who owns the earth and the fullness thereof to provide the funding for ITEM's ministry. Pray to God to help us find new younger

donors to invest in this kingdom work and for younger men to lead the ministry. Our Lord who multiplied five loaves and two fish can leverage technology and all of our resources to train more pastors, so ask Him! ITEM's challenges are opportunities to trust Him and to grow in grace and knowledge of Him.

Prayer Requests

Please pray about these issues.

1. Pray for Alister and Sarah Torrens' daughter, Saphira, and a successful outcome on her surgery scheduled for Feb. 8. Alister is president of Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine.
2. Pray for peace and stability in Ukraine.
3. Pray for Jim Roszell and Bob Clark as they teach at All Nations College in Kenya this month.
4. Pray for Tom Smith as he and his wife go to Santiago Theological Seminary to teach apologetics and to explore the Dominican Republic as a possible new field for ITEM.
5. Praise God for successful training of 54 pastors in Orissa, India in late January, and pray for more training with this group of pastors who are hungry to learn the gospel and how to preach it.

How to Contribute

In the U.S. send contributions to
ITEM, PO Box 31456,
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at www.ITEM.org through PayPal.
Email Executive Director Tom Smith at
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