



COME OVER & HELP

2022 Issue 4



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Country Profile:
Latvia



Mission Statement

Come Over & Help partners with churches in Eastern Europe to bring glory to God through gospel proclamation and practical ministry.

Vision Statement

Our vision is to see thriving, biblically faithful churches serving Eastern Europe.



Mr. Raymond Roth

Administrator & Project Director



Mr. Greg Slingerland

Communications Director

Come Over & Help is a non-profit organization with charitable status in Canada and the USA.

The foundation of Come Over & Help is the Bible, which is the Word of God. Come Over & Help adheres to the revealed truths and principles in that Word and to the Three Forms of Unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dordt, Belgic Confession) and the Westminster Confession.

The board and staff of Come Over & Help are affiliated with Reformed, Bible-believing Churches and ministries.



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General Director of HeartCry Missionary Society, Radford, Virginia

Your God is Too Human

By **Raymond Roth**

In a letter to Erasmus, Luther wrote, "Your thoughts of God are too human." With this statement, he was pushing back against Erasmus' humanistic tendency to bring God down to his own level of understanding and ability. Luther was zealous to maintain a God that cannot be bounded by any human formulation or rationalization.

As fallen beings, this is an error we're all quite prone to make, as did Israel: "You thought that I was altogether like you" (Psalm 50:21). We prefer a manageable, understandable, relatable God. This kind of thinking can creep subtly into our views of worship, of providence, of salvation, of judgment for sin. Diminishing God in our conceptions of Him can also enter

into our thinking about missions. For example, we might reason, "Sure, we should do what we can to reach the world with the gospel, but realistically, we shouldn't expect the gospel message to make too much of a difference. We live in a different world than the past, where God did great things in and for the church. This is a culture and society that the gospel can't really speak into. And we can't really expect the modern man, with all his learning and science, to just accept the bare preaching and witnessing of the gospel. We live in a post-Christian age, and it's only going to get worse. Batten the hatches, hunker down, and hope it's not too bad." But this is to bring God down to our level, and to have low and unworthy expectations of Him.





Let us have more of the spirit of William Carey: "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God." Let us go and teach all nations, preach the gospel of repentance and remission of sins to every creature, and witness of Him to the uttermost part of the earth (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Christ has received of His Father the uttermost parts of the earth as His possession (Psalm 2:8). All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before God (Psalm 22:27). The nations shall gladly worship God and know His saving health (Psalm 67). Of the increase of His government there shall be no end (Isaiah 9:7). The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He has set judgment in the earth (Isaiah 42:4). The Gentiles shall come to His light (Isaiah 60:3). The God of heaven is setting up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, and it shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44). He has

been given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him (Daniel 7:14). His name will be great among the heathen (Malachi 1:11). Does this sound like vague, hopeful notions? Inspiring, but in reality 'pie-in-the-sky'?

Friends, this is not wishful thinking. Let us not have small thoughts of God and of His kingdom and glory. There will one day be an innumerable multitude which no man can number, from every tribe and nation, people and tongue. Will you join Come Over & Help as we seek to exalt God by having Him proclaimed against the backdrop of the darkness in Eastern Europe? Will you pray with us: "Let all the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee" (Psalm 67:5) – also the peoples of Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Czechia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine! Let us not limit God, but work, pray, witness, go and give, with hope and anticipation of what our God will do!

A Year in Review

By Greg Slingerland

With Covid restrictions being loosened at the beginning of the year, we were looking forward to business as usual. We had many visits to make and many new partners to visit. However, in the early morning hours of February 24, the Russian military invaded Ukraine. Every major city in Ukraine was shelled as columns of Russian soldiers crossed the border from Russia and Belarus. A mass exodus of fleeing Ukrainians headed for neighbouring countries. Men as young as 16 and as old as 60 were not allowed to leave the country. Ukrainians braced themselves for home defence and street warfare.



Ukrainians in the city of Zaporozhe gathered for an outdoor service due to the threat of shelling



A children's program was set up for Ukrainian children in Krakow, Poland

The Russian invasion stalled, and the military faced high casualties in the face of a fierce Ukrainian defence. What was thought would be a quick military engagement continues to drag on with no end in sight.

It was an event that impacted not only Ukraine but the whole region in profound ways. Churches all over Eastern and Central Europe opened up their homes and extended the hand of fellowship to those fleeing from the conflict in Ukraine. The churches here in North America responded in beautiful ways and helped our Eastern European brothers and sisters to house, feed, transport, and care for the Ukrainian refugees. In Ukraine, our partners still put themselves in harm's



Many visits were made this year, including Project Director Raymond Roth's trip to Pastor Denis Boris and his family in Almaty, Kazakhstan

way to bring life-saving supplies to the conflict areas.

Throughout all of the darkness and despair, our partners were able to share the gospel in ways they hadn't been able to in past years. In Isaiah 45:3, we read *"I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, am the God of Israel."* The war has shaken the foundations of these Eastern European societies in ways not experienced since the fall of the USSR. In the darkness of war and

loss, many are calling on the name of the LORD.

As we finish 2022, Europe faces an unprecedented energy crisis. The sharp increases in prices of electricity and gas will hit those in Eastern Europe the hardest. Winter was a struggle for so many in normal years but has only been deepened this year. In Ukraine, the Russians have been targeting the country's utilities in an attempt to bring the country to its knees. The damaged electricity and gas infrastructure will not be able to meet the needs of many Ukrainians this winter.

Dear friends, throughout all the geopolitical events of the last year, the mission and vision of Come Over & Help continued on. Church plants were supported, Reformed titles were printed, prisoners were visited, disadvantaged children and elderly were cared for, and many other gospel initiatives were carried out.

Will you help us finish the year in a strong financial position? Please consider giving a year-end gift to ensure that we can continue to help local churches throughout the former Soviet Union to be thriving, Biblically faithful bodies of believers who spread the gospel to the glory of Christ.



Humanitarian help came in many forms throughout the past year, including WinterHelp

"God can use you, as you"

By Paula Roth

When we look at our weaknesses, we can conclude that we are less useful in God's kingdom. The Lord often exposes our limitations so that we learn to depend on Him.



My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ~2 Corinthians 12:9

I recently had the privilege of accompanying my husband Ray on a trip to the mission field in central-eastern Europe. There I met Krisztina, a Hungarian Christian living in Miskolc. Krisztina is a mother to three young adults and is married to Imre, a Reformed Presbyterian pastor. We had a pleasant time of fellowship as she shared her life story.

When Krisztina was 20 years old, her only sibling and younger sister

Csilla died tragically in a car accident. The years that followed were filled with grief. Despite growing up attending church, Krisztina had many questions. Who was God? Why would He do this? Was there more to life than death? Why did Csilla die and not her? Csilla was an outgoing and happy girl. Krisztina in contrast was quiet. She didn't show her emotions and struggled to put her thoughts and feelings into words.



Krisztina with her husband, Pastor Imre Szoke in Miskolc, Hungary

The result? Krisztina started reading her Bible and searching for answers. Her mind understood theological truths, but how to apply these truths in her life was unclear. Over time, the Lord used tragedy to draw Krisztina to Himself. In the past, Krisztina felt that having an outgoing personality was the ideal for service in the Lord's kingdom. Partway through our conversations, the gentle mannered Krisztina leaned forward with a sparkle in her eye and said, *"God can use you as you are. You don't need to be someone else. He can use you to serve His purposes. God is in charge. He builds His church and is faithful."* I sensed a beautiful contentment and confidence in her words. The Lord had taught Krisztina to trust Him with life's providences and with her personality.

What are Krisztina's gifts? She can often be found in the kitchen prepping, cooking, and serving food. The parsonage is next door to a conference center. Over the years



The Szoke family

many individuals and families have been nourished by Krisztina's loving service. Her supporting role is a vital role.

Krisztina also enjoys helping the elderly or the young mother struggling to manage her home and children. Krisztina has found her voice. Her love is communicated through hands that are willing to bless others.

How have they seen the Lord working? Individuals who have been excommunicated have come back to church. Children in the church are growing up with good teaching and are responding to God's word. The church family can forgive each other and pray for one another.

What are their needs? To remember that the Lord is faithful; that He would grow them spiritually and that humility would be the result; that they would be able to live what they believe in a way that draws others to the light of the gospel.

COUNTRY PROFILE

Latvia By Raymond Roth

Area:.....64,589 km² or
24,938 miles²
Population:.....1,900,000
Official Language:.....Latvian
Capital:.....Riga
Ethnic Groups:.....63% Latvian, 24% Russian,
3% Belarusian, 10% Other
GDP Per Capita:.....\$21,500 USD



History

The eastern coast of the Baltic Sea was first settled by Baltic and Finnic tribes in the millennia before Christ. The local people began to integrate more fully with Europe as missionaries and crusaders, mainly German, were sent to spread the Catholic faith. Following the Livonian war (1558-1583), what is today known as Latvia came under the hegemony of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The following centuries saw Poland, Sweden and Russia struggle for control of this territory, with Riga even becoming the largest city in the Swedish Empire for a time. It was during this time that Lutheranism was adopted as the main religion for much of Latvia.

By the end of the 18th century, all three Baltic provinces (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) had been annexed into

the Russian Empire, while able to retain some measure of autonomy and identity. Riga again flourished, becoming the largest port in the Russian Empire.

World War I devastated Latvia and left it in a state of political chaos. However, a successful defense of their territory against a German force (1919) and the Red Army (1920) galvanized the Latvians, and a liberal constitution and democratically elected assembly were put in place.

During World War II, Latvia was forced to accept a 'mutual assistance' pact with the Soviet Union, elected officials were replaced by Soviet cadres, and a puppet government was installed. Subversives were summarily shipped to Siberia or killed. In the course of the ebbs and flows of the war, Latvia was overrun by the



Germans, who murdered tens of thousands of Jews, before being re-captured by the Russians in 1944. Over the following decades, Latvia was Sovietised and collectivised and Russian immigration to Latvia was encouraged, so that by 1959 the ethnic Latvian population had fallen to 62%. During the time of the last leader of the Soviet Union, recently-deceased Russian Mikhail Gorbachev, a nationalistic movement burgeoned until the Republic of Latvia gained full independence in August 1991. Today, Latvia is a modern nation, a member of the EU and NATO, is developing economically, and is a free country.

Religious Context

Latvia was one of the last regions in Europe to be Christianized. During the Reformation, Lutheranism swept much of Northern Germany and Scandinavia and into the Baltic states. Since then, due to the communist era as well as the general trend in Europe to secularization, religiosity has declined drastically in Latvia. Lutheranism is still prevalent, but it retains almost none of the vibrancy and gospel-centredness of Luther himself. Today, there are three Reformed churches in Latvia that keep in close fellowship with one another. Their memberships are each between 50 and 100. They subscribe to the Westminster

Standards, and there are good, stable, well-trained pastors in the churches. In addition, there are several churches which could be considered Reformed Baptist. There are perhaps 15 titles in Latvian that could be considered 'Reformed', as well as several CCEF booklets. Finding translators and editors is difficult. By God's grace, Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary was founded in 1998, and today trains not only Latvians, but also men from several neighbouring countries for gospel ministry, by means of visiting professors. Overall, there is reason for guarded optimism. The Reformed church community is growing. The growth can be noticed in maturity (growing commitment to Bible studies and various ministries) and in financial giving. But there is also a growth in numbers as new people (non-Christians) are being converted and are joining the churches.



Pastor Martins Martinsons, the pastor of Pardaugava Reformed Church



Raymond Roth, Artis & Christina Celmins, and Greg Slingerland visit together in Riga, Latvia. Artis Celmins is the director of Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary.

Come Over & Help has supported the church in Latvia for many years:



Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary

We give towards the administrative and equipment costs, help with renovations, and support the development of a Biblical Counseling program, amongst other items.



Pardaugava Reformed Church

We assist the youngest of the three Reformed churches, pastored by BRTS graduate Mārtiņš Martinsons, with their operating expenses.



Radio Broadcast

A weekly Reformed radio broadcast by Pastor Ungars Gulbis is sponsored by Come Over & Help.



Publishing

We regularly help with various Latvian-language translation and publication projects.

PLEASE PRAY

Please pray for Latvia and for the small Reformed contingent there. Atheism, materialism and immorality are rampant. Pray:

- That the existing church plants would be rooted and grounded in the Word of God, and that more churches would be planted by the existing churches
- That the theological instruction at Baltic Reformed Seminary would well-equip a generation of men for gospel ministry
- That the efforts to put out good Reformed literature would be blessed by God
- That the small Reformed foothold would continue to grow
- That the name of Jesus Christ would be known and exalted in this spiritually confused land



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O God my Father
There is no shadow of
turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy
compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been,
Thou forever will be.



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