

Christmas Edition

# Lithuanian Baptist News

The Baptist Union of Lithuania

You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free  
John 8:32

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Dear LBN Readers,

For a number of years already in the minds of many Lithuanian people the birth of Jesus Christ is led by the famous tune of the Coca-Cola company in the Christmas promotional clips. The elderly lady and her grandchild are sitting in a gloomy and apparently cold house that is suddenly lit by the light coming from the outside. In a few seconds, we hear the music and see that wonderful caravan of Coke's trucks coming into the village. The light of their entire paraphernalia gives, it seems, a new impetus for the life of the villagers. Everything suddenly becomes beautiful and shiny: houses, streets, and even faces of the people.

This picture is more or less representative of the messianic expectations triggered in the people's minds in the countries of developing capitalism. As Lithuania has just joined the NATO and is expecting to join EU in the year 2004 this vision of what Lithuania needs in her 13th year of independence becomes obvious. Recently visiting Lithuania for the first time in the history of American presidents, George W. Bush seemed to embody such messianic figure in the dreams of many Lithuanians.

What about *the* Messiah?

This observation of the christs of our culture is

“always Coca-Cola...”?

not foreign to most of us. One of the greatest challenge to our churches today is the lack of alternative outlook to the values upheld by our societies. Too often our Christ resembles the affluent christ of bourgeois middle-class families' understanding of Christianity.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Nachfolge Christi* in the time of menace of Hitler's armies is equally valid in today's onslaught of consumerist culture through media, education & even charity. GM seed in Africa is perceived as one of such attempts of importing these “values” into this continent of multiple cultures and their formative narratives.

So, as we anticipate the re-enacting of the birth story of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us also be sober of the competing christs of the culture. By that we do not mean sectarianism as the means to remain pure and undefiled by the sinful world. Rather we encourage all to adopt the same attitude as that of apostle Paul who saved the passengers of the sinking ship on the way to his trial in Rome by taking the prophetic, pastoral and pioneering stand in the face of the dangers of annihilation. He opened a new life for many of them at the price of self-sacrifice and for the sake of the “God so loved the world.”

Blessed Christmas to all. LBN

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this year...

**THIS YEAR:**

- On the 20th of January we dedicated a new building of the ŠiluteFree Christian Church in the town of Šilute, not far from the boarder with Kaliningrad;

- On first of April in Klaipeda our Union Song Festival "Cantate" took place. 250 people came to hear songs and hymns sung in various languages and representing different musical traditions;

- In April and May we have ordained two pastors, Arturas Rulinskas for the ministry in Vilnius Free Christian Church and Vladimir Stasenko for the ministry in the Russian speaking Baptist congregation in Visaginas;

- A group of Swedish pastors led by Tomas Arvidson of the Swedish Baptist Union visited us on their annual trip to Lithuania;

July 1st through 5th we held our annual Union youth camp drawing young people of different ages together for the time of fellowship and learning. About sixty people attended camp this year;

-At the end of September we had a series of evangelistic concerts with group "Cairos" from Cuba. Latin sounds of the music were not unfamiliar to the people who are used to Latin American souperas! This familiarity attracted many people to the concerts where the Gospel was shared during and after the performances;

-Finally, we were glad to have been visiting with us our faithful friends and supporters George Campbell from N. Ireland, Joel Costa from Brazil, Helmut Freimann from Germany & Stephen Scott-Pearson from Great Britain.

**PLEASE PRAY FOR:**

- In the Annual Conference of our Union in October 2002, a new Union Council and Chairman were appointed. The Revd Albertas Latuzis was again elected to serve as a Union President (Chairman) for the period of three years. We ask for your prayers for him and all the Council as they serve the coming three years in important areas of Baptist life in Lithuania;

- From February 2003 we hope to start our Non-residential Evangelical Bible School (NEBI). Please pray for a suc-

cessful beginning and provision of necessary funds that we still lack. We have invited Dr. Parush Parushev, the Director of Applied Theology programme at IBTS, to deliver the first series of lectures in the field of practical theology in the Central-Eastern European context. Another set of lectures will be presented later by the Revd Keith G. Jones, the current Rector of IBTS, in the area of Baptist identity. We expect this to take place at the end of May/ beginning of June;

- About the same time we hope to launch the Baptist & Anabaptist Research Centre (BARC). This unique enterprise was designed to fill in the vacuum of historical knowledge about the life of Radical believers of our region. The first objective of the Centre will be the sorting out of many archive materials that were being collected through the years. In the coming two years we plan to prepare enough materials for the publication of the history of the Radical Reformation in Lithuania and the neighbouring countries. Ms Ruta Lysenkaite, our soon-to-graduate Master student in Baptist & Anabaptist history, will be leading the start of this project;

- Another student in Certificate in Applied Theology programme at IBTS joined the Lithuanian team there from September. Sandra Daktaraitė is a third year student of theology at the department of Evangelical Theology in Klaipeda University. She took an academic leave to have this special academic and spiritual experience of becoming a part of IBTS community for the next nine months.

- We seek your prayer support for our mission in the towns of Kretinga and Palanga. We hope to start a new church in this area and need funds for a Lithuanian missionary family which has already started working there. We have entered into the partnership with Brazilian and Swedish Baptist Unions to support this mission.

**OUR NEEDS:**

- Scholarships for our students at the Bible School (NEBI) are needed. When fully developed, we estimate a need of approximately 3000 US\$ / 3200 Euros per year to run the school with approximately 30 students on board;

- We are looking for the help of 1500 US\$ / 1620 Euros for the Union youth camp in 2003;

- Most churches struggle in one way or another with sustaining their ministers. To help these needs we have established a Pastoral Fund to

help smaller churches in difficult moments. We have discovered that we need to begin considering the situation of retired pastors. We sense our responsibility for these people who faithfully served through the Soviet occupation period and lost a lot of their social benefits because of the nature of their work. Some may not even have a family to support them. Current government will not take any responsibility for the deeds of the Communist time.

- Modestas Gaubas, a former student at Moscow Seminary of Evangelical Christians, started his full time ministry in a small congregation of 21 people on the west-coast in the town of Šilute. As this church is not able to fully support their minister, we are trying to help with some funds. In agreement with the Brazilian Baptists we have arranged some support for him. There is still a lack of funds to cover the growing needs for this mission. They have recently moved into their new building and we expect the growth of work in this town.

**THANK YOU:**

-Bristo Baptist Church of Edinburgh, Scotland for their limited but very timely and needed involvement in supporting the ministry in Šilute.

-Central Baptist Church, Luton, Bedfordshire, UK for their contribution to the Youth Camp in July.

-The Revd Michael Banfield, Chaplain in the Luton Airport, UK for his heartfelt interest in Baptist work in Lithuania and a gift to the young people towards their Camp needs.

-The Baptist Union of Great Britain for their support in our efforts to begin the Baptist & Anabaptist Research Center (BARC) in Klaipeda, the historical place of Baptist life and mission in Eastern & Central Europe.

- The Baptist Union of Scotland for their sincere interest and financial help in starting BARC;

-Br. Peter Gehri from Switzerland for his long and significant support enabling us to provide some help to the elderly people in our congregations (more about this in the February issue of LBN).

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