



Lithuanian Baptist News



The Baptist Union of
Lithuania

LBN

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

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Dear Readers of *LBN*,

Three months have passed since the first issue of *LBN*. Baptist life in Europe and worldwide experienced many interesting developments. The walls of the conference rooms in Sevilla, Spain, where the BWA General Council had its annual meeting, are still warm. Membership issues seemed to be truly at stake. It looks like the position of "aggressive evangelistic programme" that turned some Canadians and Filipinos into Southern Baptists may become a worldwide strategy after the upcoming BWA General Council in Korea.

In the rest of Europe the weather was rather very apocalyptic. The opponents of the idea of sustainable development have been able to see houses washed away by the floods in Germany and the Czech Republic. At the same time, Lithuania, the land of rain, has been almost called into the state of national alert because of the drought and the danger of ceaseless fires that Moscow citizens were also suffering from. Looking at the smoke over the capital of Russia, it is indeed hard to share the optimism of Kofi Annan about results of the Johannesburg meeting.

In the midst of that, Lithuanian Baptists live an interesting time of creating their form of life. Even 160 years of history did not help much in the

difficult time of changing historical circumstances, occupying armies and changing governments' political agendas. First ever our own Bible School is walking its baby-steps. A lot was done but even more is ahead of us. As it is often a case, the vision comes easier than its incarnation. Youth work seems to be always one step behind resembling a more or less organized entity. We had a sixth youth camp that brought a lot of encouragement as well as enough challenge organizing future events like this.

In this issue we will recall the story of our oldest and largest Baptist congregation in Lithuania, Klaipeda Evangelical Baptist Church, established in 1841. We chose to tell little known details of the first years of the life of this congregation. At a close look, this story resembles the stories we encounter today in international missions.

We also share something else from the past, the story of one of our leaders known not only in the East but also in the West, Jonas Inkenas. His virtuous character and a long-time ministry is once again calling to attention the primary needs of the Christian communities today which are often preoccupied with doctrinal cleanliness and forget more complex levels of the Christian life expressed in 'being' and not necessarily 'doing'.

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This year...next year...

- 11th & 12th of October we anticipate our annual conference during which the new Council and the Chairman have to be elected;
- By the end of December three of our Master students at IBTS are expected to graduate;
- Somewhere at the end of February 2003 we hope to start our first session of the Non-residential Bible Institute;
- In June-July we anticipate to host a group of volunteer missionaries from ABC, coming to help with major construction project that will enable us to expand a little our Union office and refurbish a room for the central office of the Bible Institute.
- In July we hope (again) to have youth camp, gathering from 40 to 70 young people from all over the country to live, learn and grow together in Christian witness.



Baptist Church in Klaipėda

ON THE SECOND of October, 1841, in the late evening, 16 women were gathered on the bank of the river Danė just outside the modern day city of Klaipėda (then Memel). These women were the first to be baptized by full immersion and constitute the first Baptist church in Lithuania. The next day at the other end of the city, in the Kurisch Lagoon, 9 men were baptized. The baptism was performed by the German Baptist Johann Gerhard Oncken upon the invitation of E. Grimm, a resident of Memel.

After the baptism of the first ethnical Lithuanian about 12 years later, the missionary work among the settlements of ethnic Lithuanians began. This work resulted in the establishment of 6 small rural churches most of which disappeared after the WW2. In 1860, the first Latvian Baptists were baptized in the Memel Baptist Church. According to some sources, by the 1875 the Memel Baptist Church had 27 mission points in Latvia only, with the total membership of approximately 2200 members.

Today Klaipėda Evangelical Baptist Church has 164 members in two distinct linguistic groups, Lithuanian and Russian. After the Independence, in 1991 Lithuanian government returned the church building to the congregation which had survived more than 40 years of repressions under Communists. With the help of the pre-war church members, the building was restored and refurbished to meet the needs of the growing congregation. Baptist Church in Klaipėda also serves as the headquarters of the Baptist Union of Lithuania.

Klaipėda Evangelical Baptist Church

Memel Baptist Church: beyond clear contextual boundaries

What is interesting about the historical Baptist church of Klaipėda (Memel) is that it is difficult to place it into clear ethnic or territorial field. It belongs to at least three historical contexts. This has to do with the political changes that the multinational Memel city went through. Originally the church was reckoned to be the first Baptist church in what was at that time East Prussia. Only for the past 80 years it has been seen as a part of the Lithuanian Baptist movement. At the same time, Memel historically belongs to the group of the oldest Baptist communities in Germany, being the 10th Baptist congregation in the continent.

In this wider context, it can be considered as an example of the desire of Johann Oncken, the Continental Baptist pioneer, to reach out beyond Germany. However, as with all of Oncken's activity, it came together with exporting the model of the Hamburg church.

Choosing a concept of the church: between grace and legalism

The story of Baptists in Memel started, however, with a local carpenter, Eduard Grimm (1808-1874), having found his personal faith in Zurich. Pentecost of 1839 became an initial point of inviting people to his home in Memel to share the Gospel. Grimm was not operating under the auspices of any church and it took two other years for his group and himself to become Baptists. With the arrival of Oncken in Memel to baptize the believers in October 1841, the Grimm circle was transformed into the Memel Baptist Church.

The new church continued to be persecuted the similar way as the congregation in Hamburg. As a matter of fact, outer persecution was not the only difficulty. The other problem was internal disunity. In November 1841, only one month after the formation of the Baptist church, the so-called 'Engberg party' split from the main group. E. Engberg, the owner of the meeting place in the Vitte ward, and some members, became dissatisfied with Grimm, wishing to have someone like Oncken as their leader. It is clear that some had expectations of Grimm's ministry that could not be fulfilled and this led to personal attacks on Grimm. Ekelmann* points out that Grimm was 'a man of faith, who emphasized free grace rather than legalistic strictness'. This became a reason for slanders, with accusations being made that he softened the demands of biblical teaching in order to attract more people. The inexperienced Grimm himself initiated a 'solution' to the

problem. During a community meeting he stood up and stated: 'Those who want to stay with me, stand up!' With those who remained by him, a minority of the whole group, he moved to a new gathering place. The split had a frustrating personal impact on Grimm. It was the Engberg group which Oncken recognized as the official Memel Baptist congregation. Due to this, Grimm found himself isolated. The pressure on Grimm led him to decide to leave for America in 1846. There he continued his ministry by starting new churches among the Germans. Shortly before his departure, the community chose F.W. Licht, the brother-in-law of Grimm, to be its leader. Licht ministered till 1856 and then also moved to America. His last activity in Memel was dedicated to the unification of the Baptist communities. Until this goal was achieved in the same year, both of the Memel Baptist communities experienced members leaving for the other group.

Finding its own identity: transcending the pattern of exported model

The circle that stayed with Grimm received the name of 'the second congregation'; Oncken's acknowledged group was named 'the first'. One can notice that during the first decade, the preachers of 'the first congregation' were not chosen by the local community but were both sent and taken away by Oncken. This played a major part in the shaping of the church according to the Hamburg model. The life of the church was essentially German. However, reaching beyond the pattern of being a German Baptist church took place in 1854. The earlier reports witnessed that Memel Baptists could not start a mission among local Lithuanians because nobody knew the language. In November 1854, a report already witnesses of brother Carl Albrecht, who 'stands at the pulpit every Sunday and preaches to hundreds of Lithuanians'. This was the beginning of the mission among Lithuanians. So, with the reaching of another major ethnic group in that area, the Lithuanians, a new period of Memel Baptist congregation began.

Ruta Lysenkaite, Baptist & Anabaptist History student at IBTS

*Much of this historical material can be found in Otto Ekelmann's *Gnadewunder* (Memel, 1923).

Biography as Theology

Every believing community has those who have been especially important for its formation and growth. Their legacy is tightly interrelated with the way they were living their lives. At least this is the case with the baptistic type of communities for whom their Christian journey starts with a changed life, not a changed set of doctrines. This is what the now-late Baptist theologian, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., terms as "biography as theology." (*Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Remake Today's Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990). Theology that is not 'incarnated,' i.e. lived out with all its rough spots and blemishes in a particular context, is groundless. In the context of a Christian community, biography can (and perhaps also should) be "a mode of communal self-scrutiny", "the exercise in which the community holds a mirror to those it finds its finest in order to discover what God has been doing in its midst" (McClendon, *ibid.*, x.).

This is the reason for us as Lithuanian Baptists to look back at those persons whose lives were formative for our communities. One of such persons was pastor Jonas Inkenas (1905-1983). What follows is a brief reflection on the legacy of this Lithuanian Baptist 'saint.'

We will start with the end of Jonas' life. His funeral fell on a sunny day in October 1983. The procession with cars and buses slowly took off, jamming the local traffic, while militia, uninvited, attempted to control the stream. The inquisitive eyes of the neighbours were watching the endless row of cars and people. Those who did not know him were inquiring of others what kind of Communist Party functionary he was to have this crowd of people at his funeral.

But Jonas Inkenas was not a Party functionary. He was a pensioner whom they had often seen strolling to the grocery store. Some of the neighbours knew his wife was handicapped from polyarthritis.* Some also knew he belonged to a 'sect' called the Baptists. Only very few of them knew he had received his pastoral training in Riga, Latvia, and Andover Newton Theological Institute, U.S.A., had returned home to survive the Second World War, was sent to Siberia, then returned only to be refused residence in Lithuania, settling for 19 years in Latvia and serving the Baptist churches there. Only a few years had passed since he finally was able to return to his home country to be involved in the work in the Klaipėda Baptist church and also to serve as the senior presbyter of the Baptists in Lithuania,

continuing to travel extensively in Lithuania, Latvia, and the rest of the Soviet Union.

How could a person who spent so much of his life outside Lithuania have such an influence on the country's believers? Moreover, those who had had a chance to hear him speak say he was not an extraordinary preacher and teacher. The tapes with his sermons seem to confirm that: not too much thrill, no memorable illustrations, the style bordering tediousness. In one of his diaries, Jonas has complained over his inability to preach powerfully: "I cannot, just cannot say things straight and clearly as I so much would like." Those I have asked have all said the same: it was because of the way he lived, the way he cared for the people and for God's Kingdom, embodying a life changed by God's grace, and in all his doings retaining the modesty of a 'little one.' As one of those who knew Jonas has put it, "he was just what you would expect a Christian to be."

So simple, it would seem. At the same time, however, the respect Jonas had earned by simply being 'a true Christian' shows that we know how difficult it is to have an incarnated theology. Transformation of character into the likeness of Christ does not come easy. At times we become so skeptical about the possibility of such transformation that instead we choose to focus on building 'right' theological systems—whatever 'right' seems to mean for us. We hope that right beliefs will make for the lack of the reality of new creation in Christ expressed in the changing life of those who testify to have met Christ the Crucified and Resurrected.

But the life which has been changed, through Christ, by God's gift of newness (and continues to change further!) has concrete expressions or, to use trendy philosophical language, *virtues and practices* that mark the Christian way of life. A church becomes a church as, by God's grace, it engages into certain practices, certain communal activities that are distinctive for the followers of the Way. Such activities include their worship together as well as their witness to the surrounding culture, both by direct evangelism as well as integral social involvement. These activities are impossible without the presence of certain virtues, such as those described in the Beatitudes. At the same time, the churchly practices are the means of the shaping and development of these virtues. So, as Peter would put it, we should make every effort to add to our "faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;



and to knowledge, self-control" (2Pt 1:5-7, NIV); the list continues with perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Not possessing "these qualities in increasing measure," we are "ineffective and unproductive" in our knowledge of the Lord. In other words, our faith does not count much then.

This kind of theology is characteristic for the baptistic churches, though they may use different kind of language to describe it. What matters most is life itself, and what matters most about the Christian faith is whether it does result in a different kind of life.

Jonas Inkenas was an outstanding example of this kind of approach to the Christian faith. It was the presence of distinctively Christian virtues and wholehearted involvement in the Christian practices that built Jonas' authority in the circle of believers—and outside it as well. The strangely large crowd gathered at his funeral was a sign of the reality of a life changed by the resurrected Christ, a witness to God's doings, through Jonas, in our midst.

Lina Andronoviene, a granddaughter of Jonas Inkenas and a Master student of Applied Theology at IBTS.

*Jonas' wife, Marija, is still alive. Now 96, she has spent almost 50 years in a wheelchair. For many years she has been keeping massive correspondence, reading widely in Lithuanian, Russian, English, Latvian, and German, as well as translating Christian books into Lithuanian and typing them out on her typewriter. Currently due to the weakened sight her reading and writing has diminished, but she has retained a deep interest in the life of the Church

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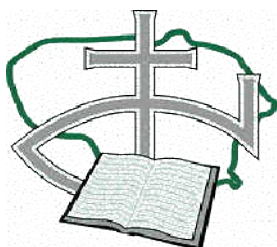
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Prayer requests & other needs

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Annual Conference of our Union in October 2002. A new Union Council and Chairman should be appointed;
- From February 2003 we hope to start our Non-residential Evangelical Bible Institute (NEBI). Please pray for a successful 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.
- 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 many archive materials that were being collected through the years without any particular system or purpose. 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.
- Another student in Certificate in Applied Theology programme at IBTS joined a Lithuanian team there. Sandra Dakaraite is a third year student of theology at the department of Evangelical Theology in Klaipėda 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.

OUR NEEDS:

- Scholarships for our students at the Bible Institute (NEBI) are needed. We estimate a minimum need of approximately 3000 US\$ / 3200 Euros per year to run the essential track of this school with approximately 30 students on board;
- We are looking for the help of approximately 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. Currently this fund is not far from the nil.
- We seek support for our mission in the towns of Kretinga and Palanga. We are trying to start a new church in this area and need funds for a Lithuanian missionary family which has already started working there. Currently we estimate the need of 3000 Euros per year to cover half expenses related to this church planting mission.
- Modestas Gaubas, a former student at MSEC, is starting his part time ministry in one of our smaller congregations on the west-coast in the town of Šilutė. As this church is not able to fully support their minister, we are trying to help with some funds. We thank Bristo Baptist Church of Edinburgh, Scotland for their limited but very timely and needed involvement in supporting this ministry.

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camps, camps, camps...

From the moment we began our preparation for the camp, our young and inexperienced team was struggling with fear that somewhere things should go wrong. Churches did not respond on time, young people seemed to be disinterested, etc. It has always been like this. We knew that. The camp did go well. Behind this spacious word 'well' there are still many stories to tell. The whole event more or less resembled what we would usually understand as "a Christian camp." Sometimes, though, it looked like a much stranger "animal." Campers aged from 14 to 27, both Russian and Lithuanian speaking, which sometimes made communication difficult. For the younger generation, Russian is not a *lingua franca* any longer. Seminars, worship & Bible study time, sketches, puppet theater and even "street evangelism" - all that was scheduled to take place during the five days in Vievis, a common place for youth camps in the eastern part of Lithuania. The lake nearby was a mixed blessing. Clean

water and a pleasant walk through the freshly manured fields attracted many, but the troubles seemed to be always near, especially watching the youngest members of our intentional five-day-community. We were blessed with many things that week. There was a lot of sunshine, good team to lead the camp, interesting speakers and quite bearable listeners. This being the sixth camp since the Lithuanian Independence, it was, as always, different from the previous ones. Issues of the changes in society and churches had been reflected throughout the camp discussions and seminars, marriage and friendship being a perennial one. Overall this time together brought our Baptist communities closer together. It also revealed the needs of young adults and teenagers. It has been an important event and we thank our Lord and those friends whose gifts enabled it to happen this year.
Sandra Dakaraite