

Non-residential Bible School of the Baptist Union of Lithuania (NEBIM)

Advent - Christmas 2006

Dear friends of NEBIM,

Warmest greetings of grace and peace at this Christmas and New Year season! This season is also the time of looking back at what the Lord has granted us over the past year. We have concluded the year 2006 in Klaipeda Baptist Church with the 6th session on December 12-13, looking together at the story of God and his church throughout history. The lectures were part of the course called **History of Christianity I** and were delivered by Albertas Latuzis, former Chairperson of the Lithuanian Baptist Union, our main historian.



A couple of months earlier, on October 13-14, NEBIM called Diploma students and Seminar track participants for the **Introduction to New Testament I**. Our guest was the Revd Dr Parush R Parushev, the Academic Dean of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, a school which is our faithful friend and constant helper. We gathered in one of our usual places, the retreat centre of the Charity Fund "Samarija" in Siauliai, central Lithuania. It is always a delight to have Parush teaching but perhaps a special highlight this time was his passionate exposition of the book of Revelation read as a drama (based on the work of James L. Blevins).

On August 18-19 and then again on September 15-16 NEBIM called for a seminar on the subject of the **History of Baptists in Lithuania**. The history of Lithuanian Baptists is a long one—Klaipėda Baptist church, for example, owns the oldest Baptist church building that is still in use on the Continental Europe (1851) and had been one of the most vital mission centres during the 19th century Baptist movement. However, very little recording of that history has been done, especially the story of the Baptists during Soviet years, and we were grateful to have Albertas Latuzis, a passionate historian, as our lecturer.



"While listening, we ourselves felt a part of the "old" history of the Baptists."



Albertas is busy with writing up the history of Lithuanian Baptists and during the seminar has shared some of that work. One could see how much research is still needed. The students' homework for this session will probably be the most challenging of all, as it involves working with primary sources and in many cases utterly disorganised material found in church storages and the basements of some of our older members, written in different languages and reflecting the

tumultuous events of our little country which influenced the story of the Lithuanian Baptist believers.

On June 9-10 NEBIM Diploma Programme students, as well as those participating in the Seminar track, gathered in one of the smaller churches of our Union in Ylakai, North-West of Lithuania. This was the first time NEBIM event was held in this village congregation which has just begun counting its 101st year. Ylakai church is especially known for its hospitality and a very tasty



Sisters from Ylakai Baptist Church



food. Our lecturer this time was Joel Chiron, a French missionary working in Bulgaria, who led us into **Introduction to Old Testament II**. Joel is a recent graduate of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. With his passion for the Old Testament and contemporary mission of the church, Joel quickly befriended those taking part in the seminar.

Jumping back another two months: We vividly remember our two sessions on the **Art of Speaking and Preaching**. The first session (Šiauliai, "Samarija," February 24-25) was for the introductory matters in the field of preaching and communication and a discussion on the role of preaching in our own Baptist churches at the present time. On April 28-29, NEBIM gathered in Šiauliai again, to actually listen to a series of sermons of the Diploma Students. It can now be admitted that both teachers and students were approaching this session with nervousness, although for different reasons. Some of the students had to technically "preach" for the first time in their life, and even for the "old timers" this was an unnerving experience as every sermon was explored and discussed and parallels with other sermons and church realities made etc. The teachers were wondering if this experiment would indeed be constructive and encouraging for the ministry of the students. But this proved to be one of the most rewarding times together, ending up with an extended conversation about our theology of preaching and how the Word comes alive as the people of God gather to be surprised and transformed by it.



Such was our year, now quickly drawing to a close. We consider these special gifts of God with gratefulness, also thanking God for you, our friends, who in various ways uphold us in the ministry which is always worthwhile and much rewarding, but at times not that easy. As we share our joy with you, we also want to share some of our concerns and dreams. Perhaps you will want to remember them in your prayers.

- ✚ As this is not a school for "professional students" but for people most of who are already overworked and overloaded, one of the issues we are struggling with is the best way of incorporating the students' homework into their present or potential ministries. We have moved a long way away from formal written assignments only (which aren't a favourite in the Lithuanian context anyway – a culture rather different from other educational traditions such as German or Anglo-American), and then realised that too much freedom in homework might feel just as fettering as too strict coursework requirements.
- ✚ We would like to ask you to remember the financial situation of some of the students who have to work very hard to earn for their living and spend a lot of time serving the church with their gifts.
- ✚ For additional seminars and workshops under NEBIM care. One of those we hope to hold in the beginning of 2007 is a consultation for the musicians involved in planning and leading worship.

- ✚ For the work on NEBIM publications. This has been going slower than hoped but we now have a good collection of material, both original and translated, which we hope to publish as a working material for the students as well as to help us in shaping the 'face' of NEBIM.
- ✚ For identifying and drawing in new students and for the spreading out of NEBIM work. We are considering additional gatherings, perhaps in a form of retreat extending over several days. This idea arose from our experience with 'interim sessions' of NEBIM in the local churches. Such gatherings would help those attending to be refreshed and stimulated while granting a luxury of a haven from the immediate church worries.
- ✚ For the continuing and developing of links and partnerships with our friends and helpers.

With gratefulness and praying for the Presence of the Prince of Peace to all of you,

NEBIM Team