



itp International Teaching Partners

APTS, Baguio, Philippines
November 2017

Dear family and friends,

The new building for LBC has finally been opened! This is the college (Latvian Biblical Centre) where we have now taught each year since 2012 (apart from 2015) in Riga, Latvia.

We were able to be present for the special celebration service on Sat 30th September. This was a major milestone for the college, the fulfilment of a vision that had seemed impossible, a provision of a much more suitable space, and an opportunity for ministry in a poorer area of Riga.

We had met Victor Petrenko, the director of LBC, and his wife Ester, the academic dean, back in the early 2000s when we were all doing our PhDs in Durham. Victor comes from Latvia, from a Russian-speaking family. His father was imprisoned for his Christian faith when he was young. Most of his family have now emigrated to USA, but Victor felt called to come back to



Latvian Biblical Centre, Riga



Cutting the ribbon: official opening of the new LBC building. Victor is in the centre.

help rebuild the country after the 50-year Soviet occupation. For him, spiritual rebuilding is of prime importance. LBC was meeting in rooms rented from a church, but this space had become too limited. Victor prayed about building in a new location, and one day he happened to look over at a derelict building and sensed God say that this old building would become LBC's new home. He asked about the building and discovered it was built nearly 100 years ago as a Bible College, but the Soviets took it over, and, after using it for accommodation, let it go to ruin. It was owned by the Baptist Union. The leaders of the Baptist Union were very pleased to allow LBC to rebuild it and use it – bringing it back to its original purpose. Rebuilding required overcoming many serious obstacles. The building needed to be totally demolished on the inside, and the foundations and brick walls had to be strengthened. The cost appeared prohibitive for a country like Latvia, where

there is a lot of poverty. Dilapidated buildings abound and contribute to the post-Soviet legacy of depression. But here and there a new or a renovated building brings a visible sign of new hope and new life. This one now stands out like a beacon! Many times along the way the project appeared impossible to complete. Now it is done, the college is functioning in the new building, and we stayed in the small guest apartment there on the top floor. In addition, some other Christian groups plan to reach out from this building into this poor neighbourhood to give hope. This year Stuart taught a class on the background to the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts, and then we taught a class together on Paul's letters.



Kathleen enjoying a conversation with students. One could act as translator.



Stuart teaching Gospels and Acts



Some of Kathleen's students at the Baltic School of Ministry

While Stuart was teaching his first course, Kathleen taught John's Gospel in another college in Latvia about an hour away—the Baltic School of Ministry, in Ozolnieki. There young people who are aged from about 19 to 26 are trained for a year, somewhat like YWAM (Youth With A Mission). It was a pleasant surprise to have students who could speak some English there, so it was much easier to converse with them out of class time even though there was translation in class. Teaching English in high school is part of Latvia's new focus away from Russian dependence. In all of our classes students were very eager to learn and to be better equipped to follow God as he leads them. Kathleen also preached in a Russian Baptist church that has welcomed us before.

This last week we made a 3-day journey. We flew from Latvia to England, then from England to the Philippines, then were driven from hot Manila up to the mountains of Baguio in the north. On the way to Baguio, we stopped to meet our new sponsored girl at Rehoboth Children's Home, where we visited a few years ago. See the photo of us with Mary Rose, in a modern shopping mall, where we met to have lunch. Baguio is much cooler than the rest of the Philippines, so it is a pleasant temperature for us. So far it has reached about 21 degrees each day—perfect! No cardigans required most of the time, but sometimes at night. On Friday everyone was complaining about how cold it was with the rain, and many people had winter clothes on, but to us it still seemed too warm inside for a cardigan. We have both had periods of being tired from jet lag, so teaching for 4 hours Saturday afternoon was a bit hard. Kathleen needs to stand in her class so that all 15 students can see her and she can see them. Stuart can sit as he has a small group of only 5 more advanced students. The students here at APTS (Asia Pacific Theological Seminary) come from many countries: Philippines, Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Papua New Guinea, India, Vietnam, Nepal, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Australia (a Samoan). They are all doing Masters degrees, so they have studied somewhere else before. We are about 5,000 feet high here so it is a bit like Mussoorie in India, which is 6,000 feet. Because of the altitude and the steep hills, we need to take our time walking anywhere. The whole campus (which is large) is built on the side of a very steep hill. The first day someone drove us up the hill to our classes, but then we managed by ourselves by wheeling things in one of our small black cabin bags. The scenery looking out at the mountains is beautiful. The traffic down town was terrible yesterday. That is because President Trump is in Manila at the moment so some roads and government offices are closed in Manila. That led many people who live in Manila to decide to have a holiday in Baguio for a few days. Many won't even be able to get to work in Manila because of the road closures, so that seems a good enough excuse to get out of the city. When Trump leaves things will gradually return to normal.



With Mary Rose in Tarlac, Philippines

Many thanks for your interest, your support in various ways, and your prayers.

Kathleen and Stuart

skrochester@gmail.com 36 Baynton Street, Kingston TAS 7050

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