

Gospel expansion in Latvia

The Baptist Union of Latvia has developed an excellent model for missions and its vision for church planting may be inspiring for others!



Latvia is populated by about 2,3 million people, 60% speak Latvian language, however Russian is also popular. Latvian is derived from an ancient Baltic language and much favored in the country. The confessional structure of this Baltic nation is mainly composed of Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodox and Baptists.

The Latvian Baptists trace their roots to the second half of the 19th century when a spiritual revival happened. The

date of September 9, 1860 is viewed as the first beginning of the contemporary Latvian Baptist movement and since then many local congregations were established.

The Soviet era brought persecutions when thousands of believers and particularly leaders were deported to the labor camps and church buildings were confiscated. However hardships didn't stop the Christians from worshiping God, also lectures in theology were offered and Christian books were printed.

After the collapse of Soviet Union the Latvian Baptists have regained long desired freedom and started dynamic mission work. A Latvian Christian Radio, Publishing House and Union Offices but primarily the Baltic Pastoral Institute found their location in the reclaimed historic building that serves now as the Baptist Center in Riga.

There are 90 local Baptist churches in Latvia with a total membership of about 7000.

Vision of church planting

The reverend bishop **Kaspars Sterns** leads the Latvian Baptists and coordinates the church planting movement in this Baltic country. He shares: *"The church planting program for the last 10 years has been a great experience. It was started as a reaction to our reality and later a strategy has been developed. We have learned from some mistakes and our practice is to assess all candidates in order to select those who will lead others to productivity. We also learned to take into consideration demographic and geographic conditions, i.e. we see better growth in cities and regional centers.*

Right now there are 16 church plants that are mentored by some of our best mentors. We continue an annual church planting forum where we gather all leaders and teams. It helps us to connect with each other, evaluate the past and set future goals.”

Bp Sterns explains that the union’s vision is to build a network of missional and reproducing communities. The vision of mission work overlaps very much with the church planting. The training program consists of 4 modules of teaching called “M4” as the acronym stands for: Master – Mission – Multiplication – Movement and is based on the personal mentoring and regular conferences for church planters. This church planting initiative draws many talented people who discover their calling and passionately involve in ministry. They truly form a church planting movement!

Church planting in Liepaja

One of the 16 earlier mentioned church plants is located in Liepaja, a town on the Latvian coast. It was started in 2017 with an initial group of 20 people. In the first year the church plant has doubled in numbers and Sunday attendance rose to 50-70. A discipleship course was started and 12 new converts were baptized. Youth ministry has grown tremendously, from 10 to about 40; it is successful ministry but also comprises many challenges. The Sunday school class grew to two age groups and 4 teachers. The capacity of a meeting hall forced the group to look for a new place.



The church planter **Toms Bermaks** wrote in his report in 2018: *“Last summer we organized our first youth camp for one week where 40 persons participated. It was great experience and 10 people got baptized after, so we will do a similar camp next summer. One of the issues we are facing now is that church attendants are not very active in ministry and we are preparing a training course for them. Every Monday morning we have a prayer meeting for our city, on Wednesday night we do a Bible study, on Friday is a youth night and on Sunday morning the worship service with children’s Sunday school. Once a month married couples come together to discuss some practical issues. Once a month the men meet for breakfast and talk about topics related to men and God. We plan to start a similar women’s ministry.”*

The Baptist union of Latvia helped to establish a relationship with one church in Oklahoma, US. The goal was to do some evangelistic events in Liepaja. They together had an action of distributing Christian tracts with some Bible verses and church info among people on the streets during national days of Latvia and other holidays. They also brought 200 children’s Bibles to local hospital for children. The new planted church

rents a public hall 315 square meters. They raise over €1000 monthly to pay the bills and in addition about €500 monthly for the support of church planter and his family.



Toms wrote again in 2019: *“We are out of space again and are looking for a new place to meet. Every Sunday worship service draws some new people as members invite their friends, family, neighbors etc. which provides an opportunity to get to know us. We have become more stable and started to settle in like a church. We began 3 small house groups for people to meet during the week, so our people can connect more with each other. In July our church sent 9 people to do a mission trip to Romania where they helped local church organize a summer camp for children. It was our church’s first ever mission trip and turned out to be very successful. In October we went to another town called Valdemarpils where we helped them do a youth night in their city, more than 100 youth came to this event. We also have plans for next year to help them start regular youth nights. In November we took 17 people from our church to a Christian conference where we all learned how to be better leaders.”*

It is a special joy to witness and be a part of such dynamic activity! The EBF has facilitated a number of church plants in Latvia, including the one in Liepaja.

Pray that:

- The new planted congregation in Liepaja may continue growing and expanding;
- The church planting vision in Latvia may be implemented successfully and positively influence the union;
- God may call more leaders who will be able to mentor church planters and build new church planting teams.

In Christ,

Daniel Trusiewicz
EBF Mission Coordinator

Planting new churches together!
For the glory of God!

