

Name, Surname: Guntis Kalme

Sending Higher Education Institution: Luterā akadēmija (Luther Academy)

Field of Activity at the HEI: Assistant Professor; Editor of the academic journal *Credimus*

Mobility Country: Belgium

Receiving Institution: Evangelische Theologische Faculteit Leuven (ETF Leuven)

Address: Sint-Jansbergsesteenweg 97, 3001 Leuven, Belgium

Mobility Period Duration: May 20–22, 2026

1. Motivation to Participate in Erasmus+ Staff Mobility

The primary motivation for me participating in the Erasmus+ staff mobility programme at Evangelische Theologische Faculteit Leuven was to strengthen academic cooperation between Luther Academy and ETF Leuven, particularly in the fields of Systematic Theology, theological anthropology, and contemporary theological responses to postmodern culture. My colleague Dr. Kristina Ēce was exploring possibilities to cooperate in fields of missiology.



By the ETF building with my colleague Dr. Kristina Ēce

The mobility was also motivated by a desire to gain deeper insight into the academic structure, pedagogical methods, research organisation, and international cooperation strategies implemented at ETF Leuven. Special interest was devoted to the work of the Department of Systematic Theology and its engagement with contemporary theological and philosophical challenges.

Another important objective was to establish professional contacts with researchers and academic staff, analyse possible future cooperation in teaching and research, and explore opportunities for joint conferences, publications, Erasmus+ mobility formats, and long-term international networking.



Together with colleague Dr. Kristīna Ēce at the logo of ETF: *Fides Quarens Intellectum* with the signatures of the ETF graduates

2. Cooperation with the Sending and Receiving Institutions

The cooperation between Luther Academy and ETF Leuven was constructive, academically productive, and strategically oriented toward long-term collaboration.

Meetings with Prof. Ron Michener, Chair of the Department of Systematic Theology, focused on contemporary apologetics in the context of postmodern deconstructive theology. Particular attention was devoted to his doctoral research *Opening the Doors for Dialogue: Apologetic Reflections in View of Postmodern Deconstructive Theology* and its later development in the monograph *Engaging Deconstructive Theology* (Ashgate, 2007). Discussions addressed the challenges posed by postmodern thought to classical Christian theology and possible apologetic responses within contemporary European society.

Prof. Michener invited future academic cooperation, including participation in a planned course on Luther and the Holy Spirit in October 2026 or 2027, with the possibility of delivering guest lectures at ETF Leuven. Further communication regarding schedules, expectations, and academic coordination remains ongoing.



Dr. Ron Michener with me at his office

Meetings with Rector Jos de Kock provided valuable insight into the institutional structure and financial model of ETF Leuven. Discussions addressed institutional sustainability, research funding, and the balance between public financing, grants, and student tuition fees.



With rector Dr Jos de Kock

Significant academic discussions also took place with Prof. Dr. Jelle Creemers, Academic Dean and Chair of Religious Studies and Missiology. Topics included the structure of BA, MA, and PhD programmes, international student mobility, Open University formats, and the implementation of artificial intelligence policies in higher education. ETF Leuven applies a flexible but academically controlled approach toward AI use, emphasising transparency, student responsibility, and clear differentiation between student-generated and AI-assisted work.



Meeting with Dr. Jelle Creemers

Further cooperation discussions were held with Prof. Dr. Kobus Kok regarding long-term international research networking, collaborative conferences, and publication projects. During these discussions, the idea emerged to develop an international conference on military chaplaincy and trauma studies, potentially resulting in a joint edited academic volume involving researchers and chaplains from the Baltic States, Germany, Poland, South Africa, Ukraine, and other countries.



Meeting with Dr. Kobus Kok

Meetings with Erasmus coordinator Elsie Wilms focused on future student and staff mobility opportunities, including short-term Erasmus mobility, Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP), and summer colloquia. ETF Leuven expressed particular interest in cooperation within Biblical Studies and Historical Theology while emphasising the importance of strategic and focused international partnerships.

3. Academic and Personal Achievements

The mobility resulted in several significant academic outcomes and future cooperation opportunities.

One of the most important achievements was the establishment of direct academic contacts with leading ETF Leuven faculty members in Systematic Theology, Missiology, and Biblical Studies. These contacts created concrete opportunities for future guest lectures, collaborative conferences, research cooperation, and publication projects.

The discussions concerning military chaplaincy and trauma studies opened perspectives for a future international conference and edited academic volume provisionally centred around themes such as hybrid warfare, PTSD, pastoral care, trauma theology, and contemporary chaplaincy models. The proposed project may eventually contribute to the development of new educational resources for military chaplaincy in Europe.

Another important academic achievement was gaining detailed insight into ETF Leuven's approach toward AI usage in higher education. This included practical and ethical considerations regarding AI-assisted learning, research transparency, academic integrity, and pedagogical adaptation to emerging technologies.

The visit to the ETF Leuven library also provided valuable research perspectives, particularly regarding Eastern European theological journals relevant to military chaplaincy and contextual theology, including *Bogoslovski Rozdumki: Theological Reflections: Eastern European Journal of Theology*.

On a personal level, the mobility strengthened intercultural communication skills, broadened international academic perspectives, and reinforced motivation for further research and institutional development within an international theological context.

4. Most Memorable Impressions

One of the most memorable impressions was the highly international and intellectually open academic environment at ETF Leuven. The institution combines strong confessional theological identity with active engagement in contemporary academic and cultural discussions.

Particularly memorable were the conversations concerning postmodern theology, apologetics, and the future of theological education in Europe. The willingness of ETF faculty members to engage critically yet constructively with difficult contemporary issues created a highly stimulating academic atmosphere.

The discussions on military chaplaincy and trauma theology were especially significant because they connected academic theology with concrete social and pastoral realities emerging from contemporary warfare and hybrid conflict situations.

Another memorable aspect was the institutional flexibility demonstrated by ETF Leuven through its Open University model, international PhD programmes, and innovative Erasmus+ mobility structures, including short-term intensive formats and BIP programmes.

The library visit and conversations with assistant Luba Hryshchenko, originally from Ukraine, also provided a meaningful reminder of the close relationship between theology, war, displacement, and human resilience in contemporary Europe.

5. Practical Advice for Future Erasmus+ Participants

Future Erasmus+ participants are encouraged to prepare mobility objectives carefully and strategically before the visit. Clearly defined academic goals significantly increase the long-term value of international cooperation.

It is particularly important to arrange meetings with academic staff in advance and to familiarise oneself with the institutional structure, research priorities, and study programmes of the receiving institution.

Participants should actively engage not only in formal academic meetings but also in informal discussions, networking opportunities, and institutional visits, as many meaningful cooperation ideas emerge spontaneously through personal interaction.

Future participants are also encouraged to remain open to interdisciplinary and international collaboration, especially in areas where theology intersects with contemporary social, ethical, political, and technological challenges.

Finally, it is advisable to document discussions, contacts, and future cooperation proposals systematically in order to facilitate long-term institutional follow-up after the mobility period.

6. Additional Reflections

The Erasmus+ mobility at ETF Leuven confirmed the growing importance of international cooperation in theological higher education and research. Contemporary theological challenges increasingly require interdisciplinary, intercultural, and international academic engagement.

The mobility demonstrated that ETF Leuven combines academic rigor with strategic institutional development and openness toward innovative educational approaches. Particular value lies in its international orientation, flexible programme structures, and willingness to engage with contemporary theological, ethical, and societal issues.

The established contacts and cooperation perspectives possess significant long-term potential for Luther Academy, especially in the fields of systematic theology, military chaplaincy, trauma studies, academic publishing, and Erasmus+ mobility development.

Overall, the mobility experience was academically valuable, professionally productive, and strategically important for strengthening international theological cooperation and future institutional development.