Participant: Laila Čakare, Lecturer of Old Testament Courses

Sending Institution: Luther Academy, Riga, Latvia

Host Country: Slovakia

Host Institution: Department of Theology and Christian Education, Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

Mobility Duration: October 19–23, 2026.

Motivation to participate in Erasmus staff mobility and BIP

The theme of the Blended Intensive Program (BIP) organized by Matej Bel University – the Creation account in Genesis – was closely connected to the courses I teach at Luther Academy (LA). I was particularly drawn to the Department of Theology and Christian Education's emphasis on Systematic Theology and Biblical Studies as the foundation of its educational approach. This aligns closely with the educational vision of LA and motivated me to meet our Slovak colleagues and take part in the program they had developed.

Cooperation with the sending and receiving institutions

Cooperation with both institutions was very positive. I would especially like to thank LA's Erasmus+ coordinator, Ineta Kristovska, for her support in preparing the documentation and her advice on travelling to Banská Bystrica.

The representatives of Matej Bel University were welcoming and accommodating. At the request of the LA group, a visit to the Faculty of Education was included in the program.

The BIP opened with a panel discussion in which representatives of the participating institutions introduced their institutions and explained the role

of the Bible in their curricula. At the end of the program, each group had an opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions.

One element I missed, however, was a dedicated meeting for academic staff from Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary and Romania, together with our LA colleagues. Such a meeting could have provided further opportunities to explore future cooperation.

Academic and personal benefits

In line with my professional interests, I attended the following lectures:

- **Genesis 1 – from textual interpretation to creation as temple, and its implications for our metaphysics and social imaginary** (Todd Patterson) — three sessions.
- **Temple as Transformer of Perspective in the Old Testament** (Bohdan Hroboň) — one session.
- **Creation as Temple in Everyday Life: Intersections of faith with society, science, and work** (Ben Uhrin) — one session.

These lectures encouraged me to reflect on the unity of the Old and New Testaments and the continuing relevance of the Old Testament message today. Participating in the lectures and discussions was particularly rewarding, as I also draw on these principles in my teaching at LA.

An unexpected personal highlight was **Teaching Genesis 1 to first graders** (Jana Patterson) — one session. Its learning-by-doing approach was creative and stimulated the imagination. This method is well suited to teaching biblical themes to different age groups in Sunday school.

Another personal benefit was getting to know the other members of the LA group better, both through academic discussions and through spending time together outside the sessions.

Most memorable impressions

My most memorable impressions include the lively discussions and engaging, challenging tasks, as well as the beautiful, compact city centre of Banská Bystrica. The excursion to the historic mining town of Banská Štiavnica was another highlight, alongside the mountains and the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape.

Practical advice for future Erasmus+ participants

Make the most of the opportunity! For students and colleagues alike, Erasmus+ offers a wonderful chance to step outside everyday routines, establish contacts for future cooperation and gain fresh perspectives on seemingly familiar subjects.

If possible, choose accommodation close to the programme venue. This will save time and make day-to-day arrangements easier.

Additional reflections

The greatest challenge on this occasion was travelling to Banská Bystrica. As we were a large group, we decided to travel in private cars and a minivan. Although this gave us greater flexibility than flying, the journey of approximately 15–16 hours was very tiring.

Banská Bystrica is a beautiful city, especially in mid-October, when the weather is still mild and the surrounding mountains are rich in autumn colours.

The Baptist church where the lectures took place proved to be a very suitable venue, as the faculty's teaching rooms could not accommodate such a large group. I was also impressed by the layout of the faculty library, which provided space both for individual study and for informal conversation and creative exchange.

Our visit to Banská Štiavnica, with its former gold and silver mines, offered an insight into the historical importance of the region. The town's magnificent and varied architecture remains a visible legacy of its former prosperity.