



By Tom Edwards
COUNTRY COORDINATOR
for SLOVAKIA

Tom is Renewal Ministries' country coordinator for Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Tanzania. Tom began full-time ministry in 1974; it soon evolved into an international outreach of lay Catholic evangelization and mission with an emphasis on preaching and teaching Scripture. Tom and his wife, Pam, live in Florida and have two children, nine grandchildren, and a great-grandson.

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Spreading the GOSPEL

in Eastern Europe ▶ Slovakia, Romania, & Hungary

Thanks to invitations from fellow country coordinators, Tom Edwards was able to tie-in his recent mission to Slovakia with outreach in Romania and Hungary.

» SLOVAKIA

We met with Mayor Andrea Turcanová shortly after our arrival in Presov, Slovakia. After her recent election, she helped reinstate the Fire Rally at a large, city-owned sports arena. Renewal Ministries first introduced the Fire Rally in the mid-nineties, and they occurred annually until 2007.

Renewal Ministries was invited to organize a team for this year's rally. Fr. Graham Keep, from the Diocese of London, in Ontario, Canada, and Tom Edwards were designated speakers. Other team members were Jean Thompson, Steve Harrington, and Bohdan Novak, from Slovakia. Bishop Stanislav Stolárik, of Rožnava, Slovakia, celebrated the liturgy and expressed his gratitude for the 5,000 people in attendance.

Our team held a morning of teaching in preparation for the rally. Fr. Graham gave the homily, and Tom spoke on principles of leadership from the Book of Joshua. We participated in a Jericho March, going seven times around the sports arena.

Talented musicians kicked off the rally by leading the crowd in a tremendous time of praise and worship. A number of dignitaries attended the rally, including those from the mayor's office and four members of the National Parliament—two of whom were dancing with joyous abandon in the front row.

After the talks, hundreds of people streamed to the thirty prayer teams for personal prayer. Hundreds of teens and young adults committed their lives to Christ and worshipped with abandon. Mass was broadcast live on Slovak Catholic Television throughout the country. When I asked the mayor her perspective of the day, she answered, "Perfect!"

After the rally, we joined a man who has been a leader of the Light and Life Movement from his youth, in the days of secret meetings in the forest during the Communist oppression. During the evening gathering, Steve and Jean shared moving testimonies, and Fr. Graham spoke on "Receiving the Holy Spirit." As we moved into prayer ministry, the Holy Spirit descended gently upon many, with not a few moved to tears.

Jean, who has a powerful story based on years of fighting for the unborn, was invited to speak at a gathering of Slovak pro-life workers. She has participated in many of our Renewal Ministries' missions in Eastern Europe and Africa. She represented the "pro-life" arm of our mission team and came prepared to preach and pray, while being well-equipped with posters, life-size fetal models, and other educational aids. Jean has also been active in prison ministry for many years.

» ROMANIA

Tibi Majoros, the Romanian country coordinator for Renewal Ministries, had invited our team to visit. In Oradea, Romania, we gathered with people from Emmaus Ministries and several surrounding communities. Fr. Graham celebrated Mass, there was a testimony and talk, and then we moved into an extended time of personal prayer and empowerment ministry. Many had come with heavy burdens and concerns. We witnessed the Holy Spirit touching lives in profound ways.

The next day, we spent several hours producing programs for Ave Maria Radio, a powerful outreach to all of Romania. We produced a team interview and separate programs with Tom, Fr. Graham, and Jean.

We then departed for the city of Cluj—a three-hour drive. Our evening meeting was scheduled at a large university. These young Catholics valiantly gather as a faith community with an emphasis on renewal and evangelization. As Tibi explained,

these students get little support, are often mocked in class and sometimes are labeled in very demeaning ways.

We gathered with about twenty students. Our meeting began with five skilled musicians leading praise and worship. For forty non-stop minutes, we entered into what could only be described as "high praise in the Spirit"—the room was rife with the presence of God.

Fr. Graham shared an excellent teaching on baptism of the Holy Spirit, the catechism, and the past five popes' powerful support of the renewal. Tom shared a brief exhortation on "Stepping Out," followed by a time of prayer and empowerment ministry to these students who received it all like thirsty sponges. Jean had placed her display of "pro-life visuals" on a small table—and many of the students were attracted to them like magnets. They seemed to delight in the fetal models.

People told Tibi, "We need this fire here again." He said he "kept receiving feedback about how amazing (the student event) was; the whole community was set on fire."

» HUNGARY

Renewal Ministries' Country Coordinator Deacon Zoltan Kunzabo, who helped found the New Jerusalem Community in Budapest, invited us to participate in three very busy days of outreach. Country Coordinator Deacon Steve Thomashefski, and his wife Lucia, were also present.

Our first evening began with an hour of praise and worship before the Blessed Sacrament, followed by Holy Mass, a testimony, and teaching. We were able to personally pray with many participants. We witnessed the Holy Spirit move profoundly in many lives, with blessings of healing and deliverance.

One afternoon, there was a mini-Fire Rally, with Bohdan sharing a moving testimony about his conversion from a life of rebellion and addiction. A "call to the Cross" brought several people forward to commit their lives to Christ. Following Mass and a time of praise, the prayer teams prayed for people late into late evening.

We thank Zoli and Tibi for opening the door to our team and allowing us the privilege of participating in the movement of the Holy Spirit in Hungary and Romania!



THE MISSION TEAM IN ROMANIA | PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Steve Harrington, Bohdan Novak, Jean Thompson, Fr. Graham Keep, Tibi Majoros, and Tom Edwards.

Reflections from the team...

► "It was electrifying to see so many young people eagerly praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We who were gathered in an 'upper room' (with university students) praised God in a manner that seemed like we were made present to the very event of Pentecost. I experienced in these students a great commissioning that the Holy Spirit was giving them. They needed both the intellectual encouragement of solid teaching and the experiential encounter with the living Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is exactly what happened."

—Fr. Graham Keep

► "Meeting many people of all ages who are living their lives with that hunger for our Lord and being able to walk with them and encourage them was a huge blessing."

—Jean Thompson

► "I felt that God put us together from different countries and made us one. Everything fitted perfectly—our testimonies, teachings, father's homily, and our prayer with the people. I saw a new fire and a new passion pouring in people's life and I hope that decision they made will bear much fruit."

—Bohdan Novák

► "I had the opportunity to watch Jesus restore broken hearts, encourage those weary from the spiritual battle, and bring the lost home. This is what I saw: our God the Mighty Warrior saving people" (Zep 3:17).

—Steve Harrington



► A university student holds one of Jean Thompson's fetal models. The students delighted in them!