

## Mission to Slovakia and the Czech Republic

By Tom Edwards



Our mission to Slovakia and the Czech Republic included seven team members from the U.S. and Canada and we were joined by other key people from Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Our team was diverse and included several with strong teaching skills, thus multiple venues were planned and at times the team split in half in order to reach a maximum number of people. We began in the city of Presov, presenting a weekend retreat for the Maranatha Community held at the new Pope John Paul II Evangelization Center. Most of our team gave a talk or testimony, offered prayer ministry and the retreat was greatly blessed and appreciated by many. On Sunday afternoon, our team split and John Kazanjian and I traveled to the capital city of Bratislava while Mary Shaw facilitated an outreach with the rest of the team to Northern Slovakia and the towns of Tristan and Orava.

### **Bratislava City Mission**

A massive evangelization effort had been planned for the capital city of Bratislava. In the first week, 70 Catholic missionaries from around Slovakia engaged in outreaches to all the schools, from first grade to University students. The blitz included various kinds of street ministry and nightly concerts in the main plaza of the city center. The second week consisted of simultaneous parish missions throughout the city. We were involved in the ministry to elementary and high school students (including both public and Catholic schools) for several hours each day and conducted ministry to students of a large Catholic university on Monday evening. These venues went quite well and we were able to present the gospel to an estimated 2000 students during our time there.

Bohus Zivcak, country coordinator for Renewal Ministries from Slovakia, served as one of the chief organizers of the Bratislava mission along with Redemptorist priests Fr. Michael Zamkovsky and Fr. Rasto. Bohus brought some known performers in for the nightly concerts.

### **Orava & Tristan, Slovakia**

Mary Shaw details the three days of ministry in the northern town of Orava as follows: *We stayed with Fr. Brano Kozuch at the youth retreat center. Since our last visit a year ago, the community living there has grown from about seven to twelve and most are in need of support for problems with addictions. Father invited us to present evenings of renewal in his two parishes. We traveled to the nearby town of Tristan where we ministered in 2009. The church was filled for evening Mass concelebrated with Fr. Graham Keep who also gave the homily. After Mass, I presented a talk on Forgiveness and Healing followed by a testimony. Our team stationed themselves around the sanctuary and for more than two hours people came forward for prayer. Compared to a year ago, more people came for prayer and they appeared much more open to the Holy Spirit. Many were moved to tears as the*

*Lord touched them. We held a similar program the following night in another parish, and again people responded openly and deeply to prayer.*

*Much of the two full days we were in Orava were spent in schools. We ministered to children from grade to high schools, both Catholic and public. We shared testimonies, answered questions, and presented the basic Gospel message. Fr. Graham Keep served as a powerful witness to the working of the Lord as he shared his call to the priesthood. His unique sense of humor with a message brought many laughs and received undivided attention from the students everywhere we went. The team was also invited to speak to a group of social work students and we were able to share how a relationship with the Lord and knowing His healing power and love compliments the work of health care professionals.*

### **Ruzomberok, Slovakia**

This was the third year that our Renewal Ministries team conducted events at Ruzomberok Catholic University. A small band of graduate students forms the leadership of a community which has been engaged in a very active ministry to students over the last eight years. This includes a large weekly praise and teaching meeting in the campus church and an intense three year discipleship program. Wednesday nights an open meeting is attended by many adults from the surrounding area. On Friday night we participated in one of their outreaches to a Franciscan parish in the ancient town of Levoca. We also presented workshops for their leaders and small group animators.

### **Brumov-Bylnica, Czech Republic**

In 2007, Renewal Ministries conducted a mission for the parish in this small town in the Moravian district and the surrounding villages shortly after Fr. Karol Matlock had assumed his duties there, and he expressed a deep desire to bring spiritual renewal to his parish. Upon our arrival this year it became apparent that Fr. Karol's desire for renewal is coming to fruition. Saturday night marked the first evening of our five day parish mission. We began with the monthly Praise Night, an event that is now springing up in a number of parishes in the Czech Republic. This session involved many teenage and young adult musicians but was attended by entire families with younger children, as well as a number of elderly from the town and beyond. Fr. Karol is a skilled acoustical guitarist and he was fully involved, along with visual aids, flag ministry, and free flowing contemporary worship songs, all combined to bring the candle lit church into a symphony of prayer and worship. The three hour service seemed but a moment as people of every age and walk of life entered into worship.

The next morning our team spoke at five Sunday Masses, encouraging people to attend the afternoon programs in the villages of Nedasov and Brumov, followed by five nights of talks and prayer ministry. On Monday and Tuesday mornings we had opportunity to present programs to every student in the Brumov public school. Many of the students also attended the parish mission. Each night the church was full and really packed on Tuesday for the Mass with healing prayers for families.

### **Outreach to Ostrava, Czech Republic**



Fr. Graham shares the following from his experience in Ostrava: *We were invited by Fr. Bogdan Stepan to conduct a two day parish mission in the midst of a city which is largely atheistic, economically*

*poor, and highly populated with Gypsies. The parish mission began with Mass in the main church followed by a gathering in the chapel of the rectory. There were approximately 30 parishioners who attended the first evening. The session included testimonies by our team on the ordinary missionary call of a lay witness, followed by a talk on John Paul II's call for the New Evangelization. The next night over 50 people attended the Mass, a witness talk, and a teaching on baptism of the Holy Spirit. Following Participants were then invited to receive prayer from team members and everyone asked to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Many who were prayed with experienced a new ardor of the Holy Spirit. A gentle, but powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit was experienced by all. This parish is poor and could not afford this kind of outreach without the generous support of Renewal Ministries and its donors.*

### ***Ministry in Brno, Czech Republic***

On one of our previous journeys to the Czech Republic our team members prayed with a lady name Dana who is an English teacher in the Catholic high school in Brno, noted for its academic achievement. Dana extended an invitation to visit her school and speak to her English classes. The students welcomed us by sharing some of their amazing musical talent and they were very responsive to our ministry.

In conclusion, our ministry remains highly valued in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic and many opportunities remain. Both the clergy and laity are highly receptive and welcoming and the thirst for sound teaching continues.