



By Bruce Rooke

TEAM MEMBER FOR 2018
MISSION TO HUNGARY,
Slovakia, & Poland



Bruce is pictured above
with his wife, Julia.

Spreading the GOSPEL in Europe

A Trip Through the Land of Saints and Martyrs: HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA, AND POLAND

*“The world is charged with the grandeur
of God.” –Gerard Manley Hopkins*

After two weeks in the land of saints and martyrs, we touched back down in Detroit.

Peter and Debbie Herbeck, my wife Julia, and I had travelled through Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland, engaging with different leaders and covenant communities; sharing Word, prayer, and Pentecost with students and believers; and immersing ourselves in the deep living history of faith these countries hold.

When you come back from a mission trip, it can be like carrying a candle. You hope the fragile light of those smiles doesn't flicker out in the rush of your return and the demands of your to-do lists.

Fortunately, we carried back a bonfire.

The Spirit is strong here. Strong enough to break the iron bars of a dark Nazi cell in Auschwitz and outlast another forty-five-plus years of Communism. But what you remember—what stays with you after you walk the horrors of Birkenau or kneel before the blood-stained cassock of St. John Paul the Great—is not the weight of the crosses, but the resolute joy of St. Maximillian Kolbe and the Holy Father's echo of the angels:

“Do not be afraid!”

And even though the people here are now facing many of the same challenges that we face in the West, there is longing for a God who is stronger than their fears, a God who dreams big.

Bruce Rooke speaking to Catholic high school students in Podolinec, Slovakia.



BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Julia and I got a head start on some of those dreams by going to Budapest first, where we spent a wonderful time with Country Coordinator Deacon Zoli Kunsabo and his wife, Panni, at their “Only One” homeless shelter. The place resounded with transformed and transforming lives, and one chorus was heard over and over: “There was just something different about this place than all of the other shelters.” Deacon Zoli and Panni continue to dream big with God, as they pray with energetic excitement (as only Hungarians, like my wife, can!) for what God has next for them and their community.

“We think evil is basically good. We think we need it, at least a little, in order to experience the fullness of being. We think we can bargain a little with evil, keeping for ourselves a little freedom against God. But the truth is that only the person who abandons himself totally in God's hands becomes, not his puppet, but one who is truly himself. He becomes not smaller, but the greater.”



Pope Emeritus
Benedict XVI



Youth playing outside at the opening of the River of Life Community Center.



The Voice in the Desert Community created vibrant worship paintings.



Debbie Herbeck speaking at a Pentecost conference.

PODOLÍNEC, SLOVAKIA

After picking up Peter and Debbie, we drove with Bohuš Živcák, country coordinator from Slovakia, and another community member, Marek, to Podolíneec, Slovakia, where we stayed in a 375-year-old Redemptorist monastery that once served as a concentration camp for hundreds of religious during the Communist oppression. There is a great sense of peace and welcome here.

The same can be said for The River of Life community that makes its home here. Founded by Bohuš and Redemptorist Fr. Michal Zamkovský, it continues to gather in and renew more and more lives. We had the honor of being with them at their amazing new community center that operates like a loving invitation to the abundant life. Children of all ages play together in the large outdoor space (without mobile phones or boredom!), and inside, the worship and deep prayer is somehow both public and personal. But as its name testifies, The River of Life is more than a reservoir, as it now flows out beyond its walls to love the ones He loves: from a nearby Catholic school, where a number of members are teachers (and where Debbie and Peter elevated and challenged both high school students and faculty), to the far reaches of Nairobi, Kenya, where they are now building new relationships in mission.

KRAKÓW, POLAND

After a Lord's Day hike in the High Tatras, following in the footsteps of John Paul II, we moved on (with aching legs) to Kraków, Poland. We took in the majesty of the John Paul II Sanctuary and its breathtaking mosaics, then went "next door" to kneel before the relics of St. Faustina within the Shrine of The Divine Mercy, bathing our prayers in the red and white rays emanating from the heart of the Merciful Jesus. We were with members of The Voice in the Desert, a vibrant young Charismatic Catholic community in the heart of Kraków. Later that evening, we joined in their bi-weekly open meeting, where 150 young people and families (leaving their shoes at the door!) worship, pray, dance, and, yes, even paint their way through the night. Hungry for experienced teaching, they sat rapt as Peter passionately showed them their place in the history of the Charismatic Renewal. The Spirit was especially strong in the hearts of men there, as Peter and Bohuš called them to stand as chosen sons, stop cowering in their hidden sins, and seek the freedom and power that they have in Christ. The Heart of Christ beats loudly in this community, as evidenced by their radical hospitality and the many times the image of a heart is portrayed in the paintings they create, real-time, throughout the worship.

BIALYSTOCK, POLAND

A six-hour train ride then took us to our last stop: Bialystok, Poland, and the Pentecost Life in Freedom conference. Beautifully hosted by the Ezechiasz (Hezekiah) Covenant Community, Peter and Debbie inspired the 300-400 people who gathered, in talk after talk (after talk!), that we are free to live large in Christ because we are chosen, we are saved, and we are sent sons and daughters of the King. Julia and I were privileged to share the testimony of our marriage, which proves, yet again, "jak e wspaniały jest nasz Bóg" (How Great Is Our God). The Spirit descended in the many prayer sessions we had throughout, from praying over the young people there, to the Charismatic call of Father George during Mass, to the many private Unbound and healing prayers that we had the honor of experiencing throughout the weekend.

Behind it all towered a twenty-foot-tall image of St. Faustina's Merciful Jesus that served as the backdrop for the stage. As we stood dwarfed before it, its size seemed to capture perfectly how we felt throughout this trip:

**Our God is one
very big God
indeed.**