



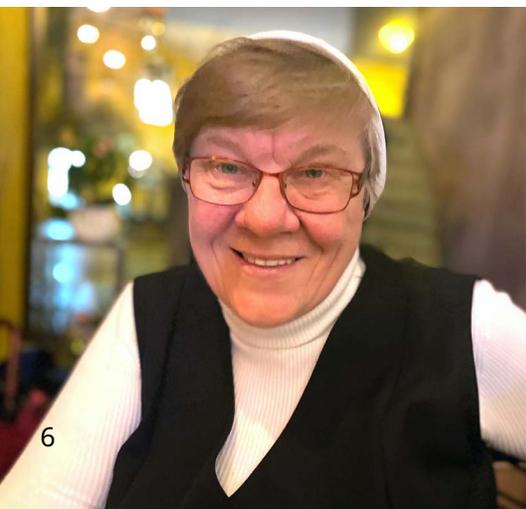
# SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN SLOVAKIA



**BY TOM EDWARDS**

**Country Coordinator for Slovakia**

Tom Edwards is Renewal Ministries' country coordinator for Czech Republic, Slovakia, 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, Jean Marie, make their home in St. Augustine, Florida.



Peter Herbeck asked me to serve as Slovakia's country coordinator twenty-five years ago—only two years after Renewal Ministries' first outreach there in 1995. At that time, Slovakia was just beginning to recover from many years of oppressive Communist rule. A generation of citizens had been doomed to godless atheism by the relentless indoctrination imposed upon them from childhood onward, but by God's grace, the Catholic Church had maintained a strong remnant of faithful believers.

During those dark years, bright lights were shining below the surface. For example, Sr. Helena Torkosova, a young religious sister working as a kindergarten teacher, and Fr. Michael Zamkovsky, a young priest who secretly maintained his ministry while working in a factory, were inspired by the Holy Spirit to begin a small home prayer meeting. Courageously, they took groups of young people on clandestine retreats in the forest. They dared to pray prophetic things like:

*"Lord, let us someday fill up that new Communist-built sports arena in Presov with Christians who will worship Jesus and burn with a fiery zeal for the things of God."*

Eventually, their work was discovered, and repercussions followed. Undaunted, they never lost their charismatic

fervor. Their selfless sacrifice and prophetic prayer were fulfilled in that first Fire Rally.

God has continued to use these same servants throughout the years and into the present. Almost every clergyman or layman in Slovakia or the surrounding countries has tremendous respect for them and the things that continue to unfold in the Church because of their service. It has been my humbling experience to continue to return to Slovakia with talented teams over the past twenty-five years, sometimes as many as three times per year. We have witnessed a fire of the Holy Spirit leap from city to city, town to town, village to village as each year we push to pioneer new avenues of outreach. No parish or group is too small for us to respond to. Vibrant communities continue to be birthed, all of which are firmly grounded in parish and diocesan life.

The Maranatha Community in Presov has grown from a handful of young people to over six hundred, with families and 250 children at the core. Effective evangelization programs are offered continuously, including Alpha for high school students, young adults, couples, and more. Hundreds of people are coming into the faith. Sr. Helena spearheaded the construction of the beautiful John Paul II Center, which

serves as an arm of a nearby parish and for many other purposes as well. Dozens of people who live in the flats surrounding the facility attend weekday Mass at 6:30 a.m. Hundreds attend the weekend Masses.

The community, having outgrown the facility, just finished building the Maranatha Arena. Last year, we presented the Fire Rally virtually from the unfinished building. This year, the full-fledged conference center was the site of our in-person Fire Rally, which also was live streamed throughout the country.

### FIRE "OHEN" RALLY

The 2022 Fire Rally was a two-day weekend event. I was asked to share four messages: *Fascination with Jesus*, *More Holy Spirit in Our Lives*, *God's Unrelenting Love*, and *Faith and Surrender*. Two of our team members shared testimonies. Each day also featured the Gospel presented in drama and mime. The very talented Maranatha musicians led dynamic worship sessions. Other testimonies by Slovak clergy and lay people conveyed a powerful witness of the work that the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of people. Flag ministry and dance, which incorporated people of all ages, promoted worship and gave glory to God. We celebrated Holy Mass each day. A mother and daughter from Ivory Coast also shared a moving story of deliverance and God's miraculous work in their harrowing escape from the ravages of war.

### ON THE MOVE

On this mission, we maintained an aggressive schedule that kept us on the move day and night for two weeks. We presented pro-life teachings in several elementary and high schools. We also reached out to those who have not experienced our presentations. Our itinerary covered over 3500 kilometers and included Catholic and Greek Catholic parishes in the towns, villages, and cities of Slovakia. In most places, we were able to pray with dozens or hundreds of participants who were thirsting for a touch from God.

### ORLOV

We were warmly welcomed in the village of Orlov by the Greek Catholic priest Fr. Jan, his wife Jana, and some of their eight children. Our arrival allowed for the area's first-ever evening of renewal. The parish sits near the Ukraine border, and life is somewhat difficult there. Nevertheless, the church was filled to capacity. We also were invited to share the pro-life message in the nearby government school. The crowded classroom included Ukrainian refugees just learning the Slovak language.

### TIBAVA

Fr. Rudolph stepped out in faith to invite our team to share the first evening of renewal in the little village of Tibava. The church dates to 1300 AD. He was concerned about whether the villagers would attend and be open to our team members praying for them individually. Once again, we found the people open and eager as they responded to the message, "Who do you say that I am?" Tears flowed like a river as they poured out their prayers and opened their hearts to the Spirit.

### KOSICE

Kosice is the second largest city in Slovakia. Its modern church was just opened after ten years of construction and an intense effort by its pastor. The church is surrounded by old Commu-

nist-built flats where thousands make their homes. I was led to share a particularly hard-hitting message, *Rooted in Christ*, which emphasized the dangers of modern-day popular culture. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Afterward, many young people encircled our team asking questions and sharing revelations and understanding that they have been gaining in their own prayer meetings.

### TVORDSIN AND ORAVA

We shared the pro-life message with several assemblies of students at a large Catholic high school. The pastor also arranged for both an evening and a morning of renewal with extended times for personal prayer. The beautiful church, which dates to 1770, was filled with several hundred people for both sessions. At the conclusion of the morning talk, people lined up for hours to receive personal prayer.

Team member Leila Benoit wrote,

"The Holy Spirit is moving in Slovakia! Many of the areas in which we traveled are already on fire for the Lord, but the Spirit continues to move there in a powerful way! What was particularly amazing to witness was the heart of the people in some of the smaller villages. For many of them, it was their first experience of a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit, and their hunger for more was truly moving. We witnessed so many hearts being healed as they were set on fire for more of the Lord!"

Our team shared a pro-life message in both a Catholic school and a large government-run school in Poprad.

