



SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN SLOVAKIA & CROATIA



BY TOM EDWARDS
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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.

In addition to serving in Slovakia, this mission included an invitation from the Catholic community of Nova Srce (New Heart) in Croatia. Bishop Đuro Hranić, of the Archdiocese Đakovo-Osijek, granted the community permission to host us.

We began with three intense days in Slovonski Brod, the sixth largest city in Croatia. It is located on the Savi River, which forms the boundary to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The city has been subject to many conflicts over the ages, with the most recent war in 1992 bringing the city under heavy bombardment and great loss of life.

The leaders asked us to focus on topics like Holy Scripture, the pro-life message, keys to walking in faith, holiness, and principles of unity. Our short time in Croatia seemed very fruitful. The power of the Gospel was tangible, and many responded in heart and

mind during the prayer sessions that followed. We were invited to several homes, where people invited extended family and friends to receive personal prayer.

The Novo Srce community consists of about one-hundred people. Many are families with three generations who all have a fervor for evangelization, growing in faith, and supporting one another through the trials of life. The community was born out of the trauma of a war-torn environment. Many of the original participants are still healing from the physical, psychological, and spiritual wounds caused by the

Our team shared the pro-life message at a Catholic electric engineering school in Slovakia. The students were mostly young men very interested in what we shared with them.



atrocities of war. Team member Marilyn Bergeron shared,

“The time we spent in Croatia with the Nova Scra community was the highlight of this mission trip.

Despite living through war and difficult times, they are amazing examples of resiliency and overcoming painful horrors through faith. They exude joy, genuine love, and great generosity. They were so appreciative of teachings and yet we feel that we learned so much from them.”

After leaving Croatia, we conducted several programs in the suburbs around the Slovakian capital city of Bratislava. Our first meeting was scheduled by a woman who had heard Tom speak at a FIRE rally in Presov twenty years ago. Many people from the parish and other walks of life attended. It was a great opportunity to reach people of faith as well as people not yet exposed to the faith. All were invited to commit their lives to Jesus. Most participants remained for a time of extended ministry by our prayer team members.

We also spoke at a variety of venues, including an evening of renewal for a local parish, a meeting with community leaders, and three different schools that wanted pro-life teaching for their students.

Jean Marie shared,

“Every mission trip is different, but this one threw me an unexpected curve. We were to speak on the pro-life message at an electric engineering school. I thought it was a mistake, but I discovered it was a Catholic trade school with mostly young men over twenty who wanted to know more about the subject. Since the door opened . . . we went.

“We spoke at two sessions, each with about twenty men and four women. The students were extremely attentive and had many questions. Before they left, we prayed with them. One teacher apologized for leaving and then returning during the first session. She didn’t want to cry in front of her students. During the second session, she came in again, spoke to Tom, and left. A few minutes later, five young men came in with their chairs. She later told us that when her next class came in, they had heard about the talk and asked if they could attend too.

“Our team was moved by the students’ honest hunger to know the truth about such a difficult subject. We were also grateful for such a caring, attuned staff. I learned a powerful lesson: never second guess our Lord; go with it and be in awe of what He does!”

Jean Marie spoke to leaders of the Maranatha Community in Slovakia.



We then traveled to the far north, on the border of Poland. Fr. Branslav has hosted us there several times over the past fifteen years. He has been building up community over the years and now has multiple ministries in several locations.

In Orava, our team conducted a retreat for about twenty staff members, an evening of renewal, and a retreat for forty-two local men. In Poprad, we shared the pro-life message with two public schools, one Catholic school, and an evening with two talks at the parish of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

Our twenty-sixth consecutive year of mission to Slovakia concluded with a teaching session for the leaders of the Maranatha Community. The community has grown to consist of six-hundred members, including 250 children. Our mission closed with our team joining heart to heart in prayer with all the new young leaders.

We spoke on the pro-life message at two public schools and one Catholic school in Slovakia.

