

SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN SLOVAKIA



BY TOM & JEAN MARIE EDWARDS Country Coordinators for Slovakia

Tom Edwards is Renewal Ministries' country coordinator for Slovakia and Tanzania. He 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's wife, Jean Marie, is a retired teacher and lifelong missionary of the Gospel of Life who now serves with Tom, teaching the dignity of the human person and human sexuality all over the world with great effectiveness. They make their home in St. Augustine, Florida.

We began our time in Slovakia with the annual two-day FIRE Rally. FIRE Rallies have been taking place in Slovakia since 1995. FIRE stands for Faith, Intercession, Repentance, and Evangelization—themes that remain very much at the heart of the rallies.

The wave of renewal that began in Slovakia in the 1980s was birthed out of a small prayer group that met secretly while under Communist rule. It has produced hundreds of ministries and vocations, nationwide radio and TV outreaches, a huge social media presence, and countless international missionaries. One fruit of our early days in Slovakia is the Maranatha Community, which consists of about six-hundred people, mostly families. Community members are active in the leadership of many ministries in Slovakia and beyond while also remaining involved in their home parishes, bringing a healthy vibrancy to the whole Church.

SHARING THE KERYGMA AND THE PRO-LIFE MESSAGE

After the Fire Rally, we began a vigorous and demanding ten-day outreach. Our schedule included five schools, parish events, and prayer appointments with individuals and couples with serious needs.

We shared the kerygma and gave dynamic presentations emphasizing the value of life from conception on to nineteen classes, all of which were made up of believers and unbelievers. We discussed the baby's development: the amazing, tiny heart pumping blood to the growing cells and developing systems around five weeks; digestive juices working in the second month; and unique fingerprints being seen in the third month. We use models to show the baby's growth each week that always make the students smile!

Jean Marie shared the pro-life message with high school students, who were very moved by the presentation.



Then comes the heartbreaking part. There's no pretty way to kill the baby. And pain and heartache always come to the parents. We present this part in an age-appropriate manner and with permission from the school. It becomes clear by the look on students' faces that we all need to know God's heart and his forgiveness, mercy, healing love, grace, and strength.

BRINGING HOPE TO A HARD PLACE

We visited one small village that most young people leave to find better opportunities. Even secular circles know the village for its negativity and opposition to anything new. No prior evangelization efforts had ever been welcomed there. However, a parish leadership change resulted in a last-minute invitation. We had met the new pastor and a neighboring pastor on past visits to Slovakia, and they both welcomed us.

Prior to our visit, the priests had expressed concerns about how parishioners might accept this first presentation by outsiders. They were hoping for at least twenty attendees. Surprisingly, seventy-five people attended! Our message on hope resonated with them. There was a lot of pent-up pain in their hearts and minds. When invited to come forward for personal prayer, no one moved at first. However, when

one person dared to respond, a stream of others followed. Almost everyone burst into tears as they approached us to share their needs. The Holy Spirit was moving!

THE POWER OF PRAYER

We served for two full days in the northern region of Orava. Tom was asked again to share the message on hope. After a time of corporate prayer, the participants joined in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. We stayed with a couple we have come to know well over the years. Lajzo and Jana's home is a true epicenter of evangelization. It is their custom to invite their neighbors in this small mountain village to come to their house by appointment to pray with visiting missionaries. The appointments began in the early morning and continued into the afternoon.

Most of those we prayed with were dealing with very serious issues that caused much suffering. One young husband carried in his wife. She was the local gym teacher, and they had a three-month old baby, when she was suddenly struck with multiple sclerosis and was almost totally paralyzed. Although we did not see any physical healing, they experienced an obvious spiritual healing and left with a desire to begin reading the Bible together.

One unchurched couple, fearful of the unknown, came with their forty-year-old son. We prayed with the son first. He was perplexed as we began to pray. Then, he tearfully shared that he had been in prison and worked for organized crime. His life had been a series of catastrophes. We asked if he would like to surrender his life to Jesus. He shook as we prayed, and the Holy Spirit filled him. His entire countenance transformed.

Next, we prayed with his father. The dark years of Communism and corresponding poverty had forced him to be away from home for most of his married life, earning money for his family by doing manual labor in foreign countries. Consequently, he felt like a failure as a husband and father. As we began praying, tears came to his eyes and his worn facial features softened. While sitting on the couch, his eyes closed, and he rested in the Spirit for twenty minutes. We left the room and allowed him to soak in the Spirit. The people who saw them later were amazed to see both the father's face and the son's face glowing. We later prayed with the mother, who was deeply touched. With no prompting, they said they were going to begin praying and reading the Bible as a family. This one demonstration of Jesus' love and power made the whole mission worthwhile.

The team shared the kerygma and gave dynamic presentations emphasizing the value of life to nineteen classes comprised of both believers and nonbelievers.

