

P O L A N D

Poland, a former Communist country, struggles with Christian tradition while mourning the loss of John Paul II, the first Polish Pope.

story and photos by Tom Price



Pastor Kurt Kula teaches through Luke.

“Blessed are you, Mary. Happy are you.” Pastor Kurt Kula, a veteran Calvary Chapel missionary, taught through the first chapter of Luke. He ministers in Radom, an industrial city 60 miles south of Warsaw. “The word *blessed* carries with it the sense of happiness and prosperity. Elizabeth is declaring this to be true of Mary and of the baby in her.”

Within the congregation on this cool August morning were several local visitors whose curiosity had been roused over the previous week. German and American missionaries had lovingly cared for the neighborhood children with a vacation Bible school presentation.



Kurt and Kendall Kula with their four children, all born in Poland.



A Gypsy listens to traditional accordian music in Kazimierz Dolny, a Polish city located along the Vistula River. Poles enjoy a day off on a religious holiday that honors Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Kurt continued, “Mary was blessed in that she was given the great honor of birthing and caring for the Savior of the world. But it is very important this morning that we understand the word does not mean holy, and it does not mean sinless. It never has and it never will. It never says that in the Bible.” Kurt stopped and looked around. No one had gotten up to leave in anger yet. Aware that he was treading on years of tradition, he nevertheless wanted to gently but honestly share the Gospel as he taught through the Bible.

A sympathetic headmaster had offered the school auditorium to the evangelical ministry, close to the Kulas’ neighborhood. After a dozen years in Poland, Kurt understood that the Gospel would spread through personal contacts, one soul at a time. Several Polish men had recently thanked him for demonstrating how to interact with their children. Unemployment and alcoholism have wreaked havoc throughout the community. The Kulas had modeled an interested and loving parenting style on the playground for their high-rise apartments.

“Elizabeth is not declaring Mary to be sinless or holy. She is just saying, ‘You’re blessed.’ And Mary was. Many people in the Bible were blessed, not only her. But surely among women, of those who would bear children, no one was more blessed than Mary. What an honor and privilege to bear God’s Son, the Savior of the world.”

Kurt’s wife, Kendall, stood listening in the back of the school. She gently rocked their youngest of four children, all born in Poland. The couple had met at the Castle in Austria a decade before, while she was a missionary in Hungary. The years of ministry in Poland, which is deeply embedded in traditional religion, had been difficult. Change came slowly in a country still reeling from half a century under Communism, after enduring Nazi atrocities during WWII.

“Luke 1:45 tells us the reason why Mary was blessed. ‘And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.’ She is blessed because she believed God’s Word, not because there is some inherent character in her that makes her holier or better than anyone else.”



Calvary Chapel Radom meets every Sunday in a local junior high school.

Missionaries assisted newcomers to find their place in the Polish language Bible as Kurt asked the congregation to turn to Mark 14:3-9. He spoke of another woman who was equally blessed as she anointed Jesus’ head with oil.

“Jesus declared that this woman would be remembered throughout the whole world in every generation even as we are remembering her today. Jesus never said anything like this about His mother. As we study through the life of Christ, we really want to focus on what exactly the Bible says—what God says in His Word about these people because that is all that really matters.”

After the study several visitors engaged Kurt in conversation. Some hung onto their embedded traditions; others tried to



Kwidzyn Pastor Drew Hulem visits the Kulas in Radom.

grasp the freedom of the Gospel message. The missionaries always listen respectfully as Poles relate their national pride in the recently deceased pope. The Kulas’ six-year-old daughter, Abbey, summed up their hope, “Now that the pope is gone, maybe the people will worship God.”

“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

Mark 14:9



Kendall Kula gently rocks Rebekah while worshiping during Sunday service.

Cast Down but Unconquered

“Everything I expected the Lord to do here in Poland, He never did,” Kurt admitted. “Seeing the success of the VBS yesterday or a new person attending doesn’t move me. Only the Lord moves me now. That bubble has been burst so many times. It used to be quite discouraging. Now I just simply wait on God.”

Kurt remembers the early years on the mission field. Someone would get saved or something wonderful would happen. “I would often relate the ‘miracle’ in my newsletters. Then everything would soon fall apart.”

Two years ago, 25 young Poles stood up to receive Christ when a team from CC Costa Mesa came for a two-week outreach. A young man named Matthew was the only one who remained seated. All of the 25 who made that public decision eventually fell away. Matthew began attending a verse-by-verse study through Romans and several weeks later came to faith in Christ. He is now the main translator and worship leader in the church.

“A lot of missionaries have the calling but only hear the quick success stories,” said Kurt. “So many times the Lord has to do a work in us, having to break us before He can use us. Our pastor, Chuck Smith, labored for 17 years before the Lord led him to start Calvary Chapel and enjoy great fruitfulness in the ministry.”

“Seeing the success of the VBS yesterday or a new person attending doesn’t move me. Only the Lord moves me now.”

Pastor Kurt Kula



From left, Jake Gawel, Matthew Jarzabek and Gosia Burek lead worship.

Kurt began his work in Lublin, southeast of Warsaw. It lacked any sustaining fruit after two years of ministry. He felt ashamed. He wrote to Pastor Chuck describing the situation. To his surprise, Pastor Chuck wrote back a short note encouraging him to just love and feed those to whom the Holy Spirit had made him an overseer. This was a great encouragement to the Kulas. “Coming from a man who pastors thousands, that was something special,” recalled Kurt.

God brought Polish believers and raised up nationals to take over the work in Lublin. The transition was tough. “Like Abraham, we were called to go but didn’t know where. His life encouraged us tremendously during that time.”

A Baptist pastor invited Kurt to move to Radom to begin a new work. Radom had gained notoriety for its mass production of AK-47 machine guns during Communist days. For a city of 250,000, Radom did not

*Trust in the LORD
and do good; dwell in
the land and cultivate
faithfulness. Delight
yourself in the LORD;
and He will give you
the desires of your heart.*

Psalm 37:3-4 (NASB)



Jake Gawel, left, Matthew Jarzabek and Ulrich Tulla share some insights from the Word after the Bible study.



Gosia Burek (center), a Polish believer, makes the lessons interesting as she teaches the children, Polish and American.

Poland



CC Radom's youth listen intently during Sunday school. The lessons are taught in both Polish and English. Missionary children learn

the language easier than their parents.

have a significant Christian presence. Other confirmations led them to move there in 2000. For the last several years, Christian workers have walked through Radom's neighborhoods and prayed over the city.

Teaching English was an avenue of support and a way to enter the Polish culture. It also helped expedite visa acceptance. Both Kurt and Kendall taught at private schools. Now European Union laws make it more difficult for Americans to teach.

"I've worked for nine out of the dozen years I have lived here," said Kurt. "I felt like it was part of my witness. Poles could not relate to missionaries coming here and not holding a job. Now that we have a team, it has been necessary to help direct their efforts."

Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! Isaiah 54:1a

During the bleak days, the ministry did indeed feel barren to both Kurt and Kendall. The fellowship shrank from 15 people to just one person, Matthew. Kurt prayed in his discouragement, "Lord, we've been here three years and still don't have a foundation laid." That morning he flung open his Bible to 1 Kings 6:37. There he read, "In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid..." God's Word strengthened their hearts and encouraged

them to continue ministering. They realized that their mission field was their neighborhood where they played baseball with the neighborhood children. This opened a door to get to know the parents.

Soon after, others arrived to assist with the work. Ildi Bacsko came from the Bible College in Vajta, Hungary. Missionary families from the U.S., Gonzalez and Wilk, joined the team. Looking back, Kurt understands that the important lesson was to rejoice through the time of barrenness, believing God's Word would come to pass.

Isaiah 54:2-3 speaks of enlarging the place of your tent and stretching out the curtains of your dwellings. It also speaks of expanding to the right and left. A circus came to town, and Kurt studied the circus tent—its cords and pegs. He sensed God was saying that their ministry would spread out and bless others within and even outside the Calvary Chapel movement. Radom has since become an entry point for Calvary Chapel missionaries who want to serve in Poland, a place to adapt to the culture and learn the language.

For missionaries who are in the process of laying the foundation, Kurt wants to encourage them to stand on the Word of God. "It has been God's Word that has sustained us through the barren years. Abraham believed in what he didn't see. He staked his life on the promise of God and lived in tents, looking for a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God."



CC missionaries and national workers.



Missionary Chris Wilk, CC San Diego, listens to a Bible lesson with daughters Elisabeth and Olivia. He and his wife, Sandi, are part of the Radom mission team.



Ewa, wife of Pastor Peter Prunty from CC Oswiecim, comforts a young member of their congregation who had been teased by classmates after becoming a Christian.



The memory of John Paul II, the first Polish Pope, lives on in the hearts of the people. Posters adorn buildings in every town. Kurt will question, "The Pope is gone, but Jesus is alive. Do you know Him?"

CC Oswiecim

Peter and Ewa Prunty minister in Oswiecim, historically known as Auschwitz, where 2 million were killed by the Nazis in WWII.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Colossians 3:2

The Germans called the town Auschwitz. The WWII concentration camp is a museum of Nazi monstrosity, something the Poles would rather forget. It is the home of the first gas chamber and crematorium as well as the "wall of death" where thousands of prisoners were shot. Two million were murdered here—Jews, Gypsies and dissenting Poles.

Peter Prunty and his Polish wife, Ewa, felt called to begin a CC ministry in her hometown. On an overcast autumn Saturday, five new believers wanted to be baptized before leaving the area. As they walked down to

the river, a warming sun broke through the clouds. Sharing from the Gospels, Peter felt his soul soar as he immersed the new believers. He sensed their lives beginning anew as their beaming faces came up through the water. Later he realized the baptism occurred directly across the road from the "wall of death" at the former concentration camp. Where thousands had been murdered, a new life in Christ had broken through the burden of tradition.

Speaking of the Polish people, Peter commented, "We just try to point them to the Word of God. Jesus told the Pharisees that they held the doctrines of men higher than the doctrines of God. That is the struggle for the Poles." Peter watched a drunken man stagger down the street. He still managed to stop, take off his hat, and genuflect as he passed the church.

Peter had attended CC Appleton, WI pastored by Dwight Douville. There Peter met his future wife, Ewa. Born in Oswiecim, Poland, she had come to the U.S. two de-

acades earlier. She had been granted political asylum due to her involvement in the Solidarity Movement. Ewa had lacked a desire to return to her homeland until her sister came to Christ. There was no one to teach the new believers. During trips to visit Ewa's family, Peter saw that the Poles needed a personal relationship with Christ.

They continued praying while the CC Appleton church elders confirmed their call. After a semester of preparation in Vajta,



There are three Calvary Chapels in Poland: Radom, Oswiecim and Kwidzyn.



Kendall Kula, left, talks with the Hulems about their newborn twins. Drew Hulem, right, leads the new church plant in Kwidzyn. Missionary Sandi Wilk, CC San Diego, right.

Hungary, the couple moved to Ewa's hometown in Poland. Ewa's sister had witnessed to several people and had already begun studying the Word. Today, the Bible study moves among the various houses. Several husbands have forbidden their wives to attend. One husband eventually started to come, after previously denouncing the Bible study. "It is very faith-strengthening as we see miracle after miracle begin happening in the families," said Peter.

A Polish man attended the Bible study. Peter had to ask him to leave when he became disruptive, high on glue and alcohol. He returned a month later—clean-cut, sober and eager to study God's Word. The man became a great encouragement for other wives whose husbands have resisted the Gospel.

CC Kwidzyn

God revealed the second step after Drew and Sabina Hulem made the first.

"... We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 14:22b

"There are believers in Kwidzyn without a shepherd," a pastor's wife told Drew and Sabina Hulem. After traveling there they understood the validity of that statement. Drew had been taught at CC Costa Mesa to take the first step and then God would reveal the next. "We moved to the north of Poland, Sabina's hometown, not knowing where we would end up," said Drew. They

soon sensed the Lord's direction to Kwidzyn after the exhortation from the pastor's wife. A teaching from Pastor Chuck on Acts 8 had been an encouragement: Philip had listened to the voice of the Lord and went toward the south to Gaza. Only after Philip obeyed the first step did the Lord reveal the next.

Drew had attended the CC Bible College and the School of Ministry at Costa Mesa. "My desire was to serve the Lord where there weren't many churches." Drew began praying about Poland. He visited Kurt and Kendall in Lublin. He returned to assist and later married his translator, Sabina. Last summer they had twins.

Drew understands they are experiencing a time of breaking. He had shared with a Polish pastor that he felt he was in an uphill battle in the country. The pastor responded that in Poland the battle seems almost vertical. Drew remembers how Paul exhorted Timothy, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry."

"We long for helpers in the ministry," said Drew. Since each family has several youngsters, they have a need for children's ministry. Local evangelical pastors, lacking teaching resources and godly examples, pray that experienced Bible teachers would consider coming. Several Poles have become part of



A man in Kazimierz spends his holiday visiting different religious sites.



Missionaries Frank Gonzalez, left, CC South Bay, CA, and Peter Prunty, CC Appleton, WI. Peter leads CC Oswiecim in southern Poland, and Frank assists in Radom.

the church as they have sensed a potential life transformation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Drew added, "We press on, believing in the love of God for the Polish people." 🙏

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