

Visit to Poland by Irish Methodist President, Rev. Roy Cooper

30th August - 8th September 2007

At the invitation of the British Conference I visited Poland along with my wife Joy.

During our stay we visited four parishes of the 38 and 20 preaching places which make up the Polish Methodist Church which is part of the Central European Conference. Our host for the major part of our stay was the General Superintendent Rev. Dr. Edward Puslecki. He had arranged for us to stay in a sports hotel not far from our Warsaw Church.

Itinerary:

While in Warsaw this included

- (a) Meeting with the Ecumenical Council of Poland
- (b) Preaching at Warsaw's Methodist Church
- (c) A visit to the General Secretary of the Polish Bible Society
- (d) A visit to Methodist property south of Warsaw near to the former Orphanage which the church formerly operated.

During the meeting with the Polish Ecumenical Council a discussion took place on the Polish now working in Ireland (the majority are to be found in Dublin). This has given rise to what they called "The Irish Syndrome" By this they mean that in considering the divorce rate in Poland, it emerged that it was higher among those who have one partner working and living in Ireland. They also had a concern to have a meeting arranged at which a holistic approach to Polish subjects living and working in Ireland. I suggested to the President of the Council that he write to me on this matter and that I in turn would refer the letter to the Irish Council of Churches. To date of writing this report no such letter has arrived.

Out side of Warsaw we visited Kielce, Katowice and Gliwice/bytom where there are Methodist Churches where Janusz, Andrzej and Pawel serve.

The Methodist Church:

According to figures provided by the General Superintendent there are 5000 Methodists in Poland formed into 38 "Circuits" and 20 "preaching places" and these are served by 21 active ministers assisted by 7 retired along with 5 probationers.

It seemed to me that as well as a depleted ministerial staff a large problem within the Polish Methodist Church would appear to be financial. In all the places we visited one of the common complaints was the lack of finance available to help the church in its witness. The source of financial income would appear to be three fold

- (a) What they receive from the UMC via New York



The Methodist Church
Country Visit Report, Poland, September 2007

- (b) The finance raised from the fees of the English language schools attached the various churches.
- (c) The contributions from the church members.

From listening to those ministers I met it would appear that the sources from (a) and (b) are diminishing.

The General Superintendent gave the impression that the UMC's financial aid was moving away from Poland and being relocated elsewhere. With the fall of Communism and the creation of a "free economy" the monopoly which the church had enjoyed vis a vis the English language schools had been broken with the entry of the larger language schools from Western Europe.

This financial loss/reduction has implications for the mission of the Methodist Church in Poland i.e.

(a) **Recruitment** of future Pastors. The current rate for starting is £250 per month

(b) **Mission:** The lack of financial aid is preventing essential repairs to be carried out in Gliwice & Bytom as well as an expansion programme to property envisaged by the society at Kielce

I found the pastors Andrzej Malicki , Janusz Daszuta and Pawel ? to be very keen to see the mission of the Church in Poland advance. Janusz with whom we stayed for two days is working very hard to create a youth ministry not just to his own Methodist young people but to the surrounding areas. Along with others he organized a very successful Youth Camp for two distinct age groups. Many of his young people were involved in the recent European Methodist event in Bratislava. Pawel ministers not only to his congregation but as a nurse specialist in a local hospital dealing with addiction.

Observations:

1. If the UMC finance is moving away and church partners in America have also ceased their financial support what questions are being asked and whose asking them e.g. could it be that there was no accounting reports sent to the partner churches showing where their money had been allocated and what had been achieved ?

2. The General Superintendent has just been re-elected (June 07) He is now in position for 19 years. It is felt by those I met that he is "tired" in his approach. The General Superintendent himself informed me that he wanted to retire but was persuaded by 26 votes to 13 to remain in Office as they felt there was no one able to replace him. My own observation is that in the limited time I was there and among the limited personnel I met I do not think that his is the case.

3. The property south of Warsaw which I visited (a gift from American Methodists) is in need of major repair. It is being looked after by a young couple who live on the premises. It was estimated that about £56k would be need to affect the repairs needed.



The Methodist Church
Country Visit Report, Poland, September 2007

4. The church in Bytom and that in Gliwice suffered from broken water pipes. Pavel has done the best he can but money would be needed to make good the damage in a professional way.

5. It would appear to me that the General Superintendent is de facto the leader of the Methodist Church in Poland. I'm not sure whether this is by office or by personal choice. I noted that he styles himself "*Bishop*;" with the explanation that in ecumenical circles it is understood more than "*General Superintendent*"

Also in the course of my visit to Katowicach I met with the Lutheran Bishop of that Diocese.

Rev. Roy Cooper
President, Methodist Church in Ireland.

13.11.07