



Pointing People to Christ

ANABAPTIST INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES

Winter 2015

Volume XV Issue 4

POLAND, LAND OF HEROIC ACTION

Enjoy a brief look at the unique history of Poland and updates on the efforts AIM is making to support and offer the refuge this land has been historically known to extend to people in need.

Poland: A Unique History

Melvin Lehman

Poland is a unique nation with a unique history. Situated on a vast plain in Eastern Europe, it hosts the fault-line between the ethnic Slavs and ethnic Germans. Along its eastern border Russian Slavs rub shoulders with Polish Slavs, sometimes in a very uneasy manner. Thus, this great land is no stranger to conflict and war.

A fascinating piece of Polish history is set in 14th century Europe. The Crusades had recently ended and Europe was adjusting to a revival of trade, the rise of nations, and the Renaissance. These things would change Europe forever. Then tragedy struck. A tiny, but deadly bacterium, *Yersinia pestis*, gained a foothold in Southern Europe and spread north across the Alps, leaping both the English Channel and the narrows of the Black Sea to infect all of Europe, England, and Scandinavia. Transported by rats and fleas, it left a wide swath of desolation in its path. Some villages in the path of the "storm" completely disappeared. It is

estimated that around 50% of Europe's population was wiped out.

But for some unknown reason, a relatively small area in Southwestern France and another larger area in what is today southwestern Poland was spared the plague. Why were they spared? To this day it remains a mystery to the human race, but God knows! Tucked away inside these events is an incredible story about the Jewish people.

The ethnic Jews of 14th century Europe were the only truly international people that had a distinct identity. There were Jewish quarters in every city throughout Europe. Their specialty was international banking. They became rich, and then hated, as rich people often are hated. To add to this anger toward the Jews, their quarters in the cities and beyond often were only lightly hit, if hit at all, by the Black Death. Their tendency to separate themselves from general society likely created a quarantine that protected them. Nobody understood this in that day, so naturally sentiment turned toward conspiracy theories and finger pointing. Tales of Jews poisoning the wells of Europe were rampant. Jews were hated

and pogroms became common in the land. Some cities rounded up the Jews and burned them in their own cemeteries.

Poland stood up in those days and took heroic action. They invited the persecuted Jews of Europe to their land and thus became a haven for a people pressed with false accusations and the hatred of most of Europe. Russia also became a place of rest for the Jews in the 14th century. And so it came to be that by the 20th century, a large population of Jews was spread throughout Poland and much of Eastern Europe. The stage was set for the Holocaust. But that story is told elsewhere.

Here is another part of the story. Poland, the land that became a haven to the 14th century Jews, also became a haven for another persecuted people in the 17th and 18th centuries. Dutch Mennonites had long been under pressure by governments in Western and Central Europe for their strange doctrines, especially their doctrine of suffering love as taught by Jesus. As German and French militarism increased along with their mutual antagonism toward one another, so did the demand for soldiers

grow. The result was that the Germans in particular began to go back on their promises of military exemption for the Mennonites. Again, Poland stood up among the nations and invited these persecuted people to their land. Admittedly, this invitation was likely self-serving in that the Poles around Danzig wanted the expertise of the Mennonite swamp-farmers to tame and

farm the swamps of northern Poland. But still, honor belongs to a nation that opened their doors to a despised people when nobody else would. And so there came to be a Mennonite presence in Danzig and south along the Vistula River in a significant number of farming villages. This would be the case up until World War 2.

The rest of that story is for another time.

But for now, we celebrate the land of Poland, which at critical times became a place of refuge for the downtrodden of the earth. Anabaptist International Ministries (AIM) seeks to bring an Anabaptist influence to Poland again. Pray with us that a voice for Jesus will be heard throughout the land.

--Melvin Lehman

Staff and Ministry Updates

News from

Laverns' Furlough

OUR FAMILY GREATLY ENJOYED reconnecting with family and friends this summer. We were in the United States from mid-July to late September. It had been four years since we were there as a family, so it was really special to renew acquaintances and get recharged. Thanks to everyone who helped make our furlough meaningful and refreshing.

AIM Financial Report July 1, 2015—September 30, 2015

Available balance July 1, 2015	\$20,726
Restricted funds July 1, 2015	\$3,637

Income

Unrestricted donations	\$14,372
Restricted donations	\$8,960
English lessons	\$998
Other income	\$1
Total income	\$24,331

Expenses

Labor	\$19,587
Administrative	\$511
Facilities	\$2,751
Personnel	\$5,761
Public relations	\$1,729
Publications	\$4,510
Supplies	\$927
Utilities	\$1,082
Syrian Refugees project	\$2,397
Other expenses	\$444
Total expenses	\$39,699

Net profit (loss)	\$ (15,368)
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Assets released from restriction	\$9,782
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Restricted funds June 30, 2015	\$2,815
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Available unrestricted funds September 30, 2015	\$6,180
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Update on

Gateway to English School

GATEWAY TO ENGLISH IS OFF to a strong start! We have a new logo, new signs on the building and fence, and a new and improved payment system! The students, teachers, and office staff love our new billing plan. It means less complication for everyone and more consistent income for the school.

The atmosphere at school this year is very positive, with outstanding rapport and camaraderie among the students and teachers. The group of students that visited the U.S. in September developed close relationships with each other and they provide a core group who create a warm and friendly atmosphere, especially at our English nights.

Last week our English night was focused on American Thanksgiving. We served homemade apple and pumpkin pies, hot spiced cider, turkey appetizers, and popcorn. There were about forty people all together and we all had a great time. We have a lot to be thankful for.



Welcome

Sharon Spicher!

SHARON SPICHER, WELCOME to Poland!

Sharon arrived at the end of July to begin her two year term with AIM. She is from Belleville, PA where she taught school for seven years. As soon as she arrived, Sharon jumped into intensive Polish lessons and into life in Poland with admirable enthusiasm. Several of her highlights so far have been picking up garbage in the forest with friends and exploring Warsaw.



Journey to the USA: Our Story

Dervin Martin

The idea to take a group of Gateway to English students to America was first born when a few students asked me if our school organized tours to the states. We American teachers get to see into the lives of our students and also experience their culture, but our life story is based in USA, why couldn't it be switched, letting the Polish people experience our culture? Plus they could practice their English!

After some discussion, Marlin Hostetter and I agreed to lead a group and automatically became tour guides! The dates September 28 to October 12 were selected for our trip, mainly because Marlin and I both had friends getting married and were planning on returning to the states, and by leading the group we got to extend our stay in America by 10 days! Marlin and I are both from PA, so our trip was based from Lancaster, PA.

We had a total of 13 people join our group with the youngest student being 15 years old and the oldest 71. Only a few of the students knew each other before our trip, so the question of group dynamics was always present on the mind! The months before our departure date were filled with creating and signing documents, planning a schedule, finding host families, filling out visa applications, filling out documents for guardianship of our two minors, trips to Warsaw for interviews at the US Embassy for visas, lots of researching, making reservations, and answering many, many questions!

Our group met two times before we left for America. It was fun to see all the excitement for our upcoming trip, but we were all a little nervous. This was the first trip for each of the Polish students that wasn't part of a travel agency, and they each would be staying with American families where they would have to speak English!

So after a few shaky moments, such as: running and just so making our connecting flight in Frankfurt, Germany; after arriving in Philadelphia, PA not knowing where two ladies (who had traveled separately from our group) were, and having two pieces of luggage missing, we were finally beginning our tour in USA!

Brief Schedule of Trip:

Monday: arrived in USA; Tuesday & Wednesday: time spent with host families; Thursday: day trip to Philadelphia; Friday thru Sunday: Small group went to Niagara Falls; Monday: Washington, D.C.; Tuesday: day with host family; Wednesday & Thursday: NYC; Friday: day with host family; Saturday: Evening cookout and hayride with host families; Sunday: left for Europe in the afternoon; Monday: arrived home in Mińsk Mazowiecki at 3:30pm

The host families were such a blessing to me! I loved watching how willing they were to open their homes to total strangers and be a friend, showing my Polish friends around Lancaster, plus quickly learning how

to communicate through simple English at times!

On this trip I got to do something that I'd never done before, and that was to travel to three major cities in one week! Each city was different and most of the Polish people loved New York City the most, though some said they were ready for a quieter atmosphere after spending 2 days in the city.

When asked what they like best about our trip to America, most will continue to say that their host family is their favorite part. Something different for them on this trip was forming friendships with people, who happened to be Americans, and for me this is special because these were not just ordinary Americans; these host families are Christian Americans!

New York City is another top favorite, mainly because the Polish people have seen the yellow taxis, Times Square, Wall Street, Central Park and Brooklyn Bridge in films and we got to see and be at these places in real life!

Each place we visited holds special memories for me and the others in our group, from taking group pictures in front of dominant American landmarks (yes, you can imagine the craziness that happens taking group photos), trying new American foods and restaurants, walking in Central Park, driving/riding in a maxi-van for 2+ hours, experiencing the American train/subway

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system and comparing it to the modern European system, enjoying a cookout and hayride together on our last day in the states, spending a few hours in Times Square, laughing together, exploring cities, experiencing American culture, walking Brooklyn Bridge, being part of our host families' lives, taking photos in Love Park, Philadelphia, introducing families, and much more. The thing that is most special is the group bond we created and feel even today! We enjoy getting together at English nights at GTE and randomly going out to eat as a group here in Poland.

Thank you to those who helped plan and offered support to the details of our trip! Our families, host families, and friends were a huge help! Thank you!



Blessings!

--Dervin Martin

WE NEED THREE VOLUNTEER TEACHERS to provide instruction in conversational English at Gateway to English, starting in August/September 2016. We are looking for two men and one woman to commit to two-year terms. Teaching experience is preferred but not absolutely required. To volunteer or to recommend someone for this position, please contact:

Shannon Lehman at 814-789-2812 or
personnel@aimpoland.org

Response Form

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State ____ Zip _____

- Monthly Sponsorship:**
____\$100 ____\$50 ____\$20 ____\$10 _____ (Other)
____ **Gateway to English** school
____ **Seed of Truth** magazine
____ Staff Support
____ General needs

- One-time donation:** \$ _____
____ **Gateway to English** school
____ **Seed of Truth** magazine
____ Church Library/Literature Fund
____ General needs

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