

THANK YOU FROM POLAND

Thank you for your prayers for Poland and for Evangelical School of Theology. The last few weeks have truly been surreal in Poland, almost like a sequel to the story of Job in the Old Testament. At the Evangelical School of Theology we had such great expectations for the second Festival of Protestant Culture. We spent months on planning, inviting, organizing, writing proposals, printing materials, etc. We had invited various Protestant communities in the area to organize and participate in the Festival. There were Lutherans, Pentecostals, Baptists and Free Evangelicals working closely together. It was true ecumenical work. The Mayor of Wroclaw, General Consul of Germany, and Governor of Lower Silesia took patronage over the Festival. The media wanted to participate in and record the event.



Well, the reality was much more cruel. Two weeks prior to the Festival the Poland presidential plane crashed in Russia near to the place where 70 years earlier more than 20,000 Polish officers and intellectuals were executed by the Soviet Secret Police. On April 10, 2010, 96 people in our country died in a few seconds as they flew to Russia for a memorial service for those who died at Katyn. Instead of the joy of coming spring, the whole country sank in grief.

The Polish Parliament declared one week of mourning and all cultural events were cancelled. Even though our Festival was planned one week after the end of the mourning period, it was obvious that we could not go on with our Protestant celebration. It was clear that it would take a long time to identify all the bodies and then funerals would follow. A few of the politicians were from Wroclaw and very popular here and we knew that there would be special celebrations for them. Our plans crashed together with the plane...



In this context we decided to call off the Festival of Protestant Culture and instead we would organize an ecumenical, mourning service and music at the Lutheran Church. And at EST we would plan a service and concert with reflection on reconciliation. At least we could do that much to show our grief, willingness to serve and prayers. We waited for our international guests (that had been invited earlier) to show a broader scope of the care for our nation.

...and then the volcano erupted in Iceland. All the flights across Europe were instantly cancelled. Our plans failed again at least when it came to our special guests from abroad. With all the posters, fliers, phone calls and the whole promotional action done in an extremely difficult environment we thought what should we do. Cancel everything? Well, we prayed and decided to go on with the plans. Again, with all the hard work done within a few days everything seemed again to be well planned... at least in the context of the events happening around us.

...and then a Lutheran Bishop from Lodz was killed in a car accident. Bishop Cieslar was a key figure in the Lutheran Church in Poland and very well respected. He was driving back home from an ecumenical service in Warsaw for those killed in the plane crash and hit by a drunk driver and died on the spot. It was a real shock for the Lutherans and other Protestants in the country. One of the key Lutherans was killed in a plane crash, the other in a car accident while going back home from the service organized to commemorate the tragedy.

What was difficult is that the funerals for the bishops were planned exactly when EST planned its two events. It was difficult not to ask questions: What does it mean? What should we learn? What would be next? In this surreal context we could not help but ask these questions. Should we call off everything? We prayed, we talked to people, we thought of the situation in the country... and we thought that a voice of Protestants was really needed at this time. A voice that would show our tears and our pain with the rest of the country but at the same time our hope in the almighty and loving Father.



So, we continued planning the services and invited pastors, priests, and leaders from various churches, officials and presidents of universities, politicians and everybody else. We just wanted to be together, pray together, think of the situation and seek to God in our grief. About three hundred people came for the ecumenical service, including a Catholic cardinal, Eastern-orthodox priests, various pastors, Jewish leader, Muslim Imam, Vice-Mayor of Wroclaw, presidents of various universities, officials, etc. The service was very encouraging. It was like a beautiful song to God, like our offering to him, showing our unity and our hope in Christ. There was a sermon, music, and words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pictures of those who were killed and short testimonies from their friends. I could not think of anything more wonderful at that time.

Two days later there was the concert at our school on the exact day when the funeral of the bishop was planned in Warsaw. We knew that Wroclaw's bishop with others had to be at the funeral, so we were not sure how many people would show up. We just waited and thought that any number would be fine. Well, the whole chapel was full. Our students, invited guests, and people who were simply interested... so many of them came. We were all amazed. The Director of the "Krzyzowa Foundation" gave a beautiful and touching lecture on the Polish-German reconciliation process since the fall of communism. Finally we listened to Bonhoeffer's poetry and there was music... ah the music! Heaven! Candles, beautiful flowers, two sopranos, fiddle and organs. Amazing! For a while we could just forget all the tragedy around us and sink in the poetry and music. If only the moment could last! We sought to do our best in this difficult situation and we tried to be the best possible witnesses of hope. Even if there are no immediate answers to questions, tears and grief, there is always hope.



Now it seems that the country is slowly waking up. Almost all the funerals are already behind us. The investigation into the crash is still in process. The election of the president of the country is coming soon (June 20), and the politicians who were killed are slowly being replaced by new ones. The grief and loss will always be a reality for family and friends of those who were killed. A tragedy happened. We remember it and we try to learn from it. But we have to go on in our pilgrimage as faithful as possible. Now – at least for the moment – realizing better that our strivings here may end at any time.

Thank you for your words of encouragement and for being with us in these difficult moments. We thank God for all of you.

Yours in Christ,
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April 29, 2010

Evangelical School of Theology needs to raise an additional \$7,500 a month for the work of this ministry. Funds are needed either in one-time gifts or in monthly support.

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