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The Gospel Is Not Bound

The Church's Advance in Europe



Fruit After Five Years of Drought

A Stronger Solidarity: Growing the Church in Gdansk

Sent Ones: The New Missionary Class

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WHO IS ABWE?
ABWE was founded in 1927 as an independent Baptist mission. Supported by a network of more than 450 like-minded churches, we are a global family of ministries, dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission by multiplying leaders, churches, and missions movements among every people. Currently, nearly 1,000 ABWE missionaries are reaching the lost in more than 90 countries through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leadership development, and national partnerships.

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Editorial
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Secularism and Europe's Spiritual Hunger

BY: PAUL L. DAVIS
ABWE PRESIDENT



Paul and Martha Davis visit ABWE missionaries Adam and Emily Byerly (center) in Madrid, Spain.

Europe is filled with breathtaking cathedrals, historic churches, and reminders of a rich Christian past. But beneath the surface, there is deep spiritual emptiness. In many places, the gospel no longer shapes hearts, families, or culture. Christianity has become history, tradition, or architecture rather than a living faith in Christ.

I was reminded of this recently while visiting a European coffee shop. Across the room sat a young man with a massive Viking beard, a t-shirt promoting a death metal band, and Norse runes tattooed down his arms. I struck up a conversation and asked him about the tattoos. His face immediately lit up. He told me how fascinated he was with Viking culture, ancient Norse mythology, and the old gods of Scandinavia. He spoke about Odin and Thor with genuine excitement and curiosity.

The longer we talked, the more I realized this wasn't merely an interest in history. He was searching for meaning. He longed for identity and transcendence in a culture that has largely abandoned belief in God.

It struck me that modern European secularism has not removed spiritual hunger; it simply redirected it.

Europe today is one of the least evangelized regions in the world. In many countries, less than 3 percent of the population identifies as evangelical Christian. Churches that once shaped communities now struggle to survive. Millions of people have little understanding of the gospel or who Jesus truly is.

But this is not a story of hopelessness. God is working across Europe through the remaining faithful local churches and believers who proclaim Christ in difficult spiritual soil. They need help—not from outsiders who arrive with the assumption that nothing exists, but from brothers and sisters who come alongside the church that is already there to strengthen, encourage, and serve for the advance of the gospel.

What deeply encourages me as I reflect on that coffee shop conversation is a piece of information I left out: that shop is an outreach of missionaries serving in Europe. Believers are creating spaces for hospitality, building genuine relationships, and having gospel conversations day after day over coffee and pastries. They are partnering with national churches to engage spiritually hungry people who are searching for truth in all the wrong places.

This issue of Message is about these kinds of ministries.

As you read these pages, you will see how God is using ABWE missionaries across Europe to partner with local churches, disciple believers, equip leaders, and bring the hope of Christ to people who are searching for meaning and truth. The spiritual need across Europe is great. But the gospel cannot be bound, and God is still drawing people to himself. ■

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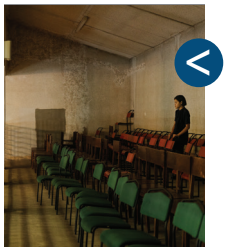
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Missionaries and local believers in Poland describe the qualities that matter most for gospel work in Central Europe.









ON THE COVER

A believer prays in the balcony of First Baptist Church in Gdansk, Poland.

Photo: Olivia Moormann

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The Reason We Stay

Even amid war and uncertainty in Ukraine, missionaries are seeing God save families and build his church.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS
LOCATION: UKRAINE

"Why would strangers I have never met want to help me?" Alexander wondered from his hospital bed. In the distance, explosions reverberated as Ukrainian air defenses combatted the Russian onslaught near his home in Kyiv. With a nod, he determined: "I should go visit the church again."

Alexander, better known as Sasha, had visited a Bible study at the home of ABWE missionaries Mike and Rachel Gustafson two years prior. A welder by trade, Sasha lived next door to Bible and Life Church, planted in 2000 by ABWE missionaries. Yet his guarded, dour demeanor kept the believers at arm's length.

The first air raid sirens in 2022 fractured his carefully constructed life. Sasha, his wife, Luba, and their two daughters frantically packed their belongings and fled the heavy shelling and rapidly advancing Russian forces. Nearly 2 million of Kyiv's residents—two thirds of the capital city's population—did the same. After only a few weeks, however, they returned due to another crisis: Sasha's heart was failing. Although only in his early 40s, he would die without emergency surgery.

"When we heard about Sasha's condition, we were able to allocate some funds from the ABWE Ukraine Crisis Fund to help him get that surgery," said Mike.



Photo: ABWE missionary

ABWE missionary Mike Gustafson (right) and a fellow pastor (left) baptize Sasha (center) after his salvation.

Awed by their care, Sasha and his family began attending the church on Easter Sunday 2022—the first morning it reopened after the evacuations.

"God just really changed his heart and life," Mike related. "He repented and followed Christ. We started discipling him, and he's truly seeking and learning more and more."

Luba also placed her faith in Christ, as did their teenage daughters. Sasha was baptized in November 2025 after completing a 13-week biblical training course. It took both Mike and a fellow pastor to immerse his stocky six-foot-three frame in the water—yet Sasha emerged rejoicing. His previously sullen manner transformed into a radiant personality that attracts others to Christ.

"If it wasn't for you," Luba tearfully told Mike, "I don't think my husband would still be alive to have this day of celebrating his faith in Christ."

"God had a purpose for your husband," Mike replied simply.

The ABWE team continues to witness God transform lives through compassionate care and biblical training. By God's grace, they see open doors for new missionary teammates and for partnerships between US and Ukrainian churches—including four new church plants launched this year.

"This is the reason why we stay," said Mike. "We continue to see God working, even through the uncertainty of the war." ■

Help Ukrainian churches share the hope of Christ. Give to the Ukraine Crisis Fund:

abwe.org/ucf

Seeing and *Serving* Hungary's Disabled

Ground-breaking disabilities ministries are growing the Hungarian church in numbers and in compassion.



BY: JULIA HARTMAN
LOCATION: HUNGARY

Hungarian church members build meaningful relationships with people with disabilities and their families during the Night to Shine event.

When missionary Anna Curby first introduced the idea of disabilities ministry to her Hungarian church, she was met with surprising resistance.

"They didn't even get it," said Anna. "They didn't see the need."

For Anna, an ABWE team leader, ministry primarily involved assisting a local Hungarian church with English class outreaches and women's Bible studies. However, these ministries did not extend to disabled people, who usually live separated from society, hidden by families who receive little support to care for them.

While the church may not have initially understood the problem, a small group of ladies discovered a shared identity as mothers of disabled children and established their own foundation to educate and care for disabled people and their families. When the local newspaper published an article about the foundation, more than 200 families reached out for support. Anna, a trained occupational therapist, jumped in to help.

One mother sent her young son, who Anna affectionately calls "Little T.," to the foundation unbeknownst to his abusive father. Anna worked closely with Little T. and his mother, and eventually the church helped the family to escape their abusive situation, sheltering them in the church building until they found an apartment. Little T.'s mother continued to attend the church. She placed her faith in Christ, completed a course for new believers, and plans to be baptized.

When Anna learned about Night to Shine, a Christ-centered prom experience for individuals with disabilities, she suggested to her pastor that they host one. This time, he was even more enthusiastic than she was.

While Anna would have been happy to have 30 "guests," as the disabled participants are called, her pastor would settle for no less than 80. She doubted so many would come, but on February 12, 2025, the first Hungarian Night to Shine was full to capacity.

Many church members who had never interacted with a disabled person volunteered as chefs, helpers, and buddies. They came away marveling at the similarities between themselves and the guests. The following Sunday, 10 Night to Shine guests walked to the church to attend the service.

In 2026, the church hosted a second Night to Shine. This time, nearly all the volunteers were Hungarian, showing just how much the Lord had changed the hearts of his people.

As the Lord continues to work, Anna is prayerfully planning future ministry to reach the disabled population and their families. ■

Help share Christ's love in Hungary. Learn more:
abwe.org/hungarymin

Photos: Sandor Balint (left and center), Peter Lazar (right)

‘We Cannot Fail’

An Ecuadorian special forces officer survives the bullets—then God transforms the man behind the uniform.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS
LOCATION: ECUADOR



Photos: Chloe Gard

Bullets pierced the air around the special forces unit, almost unnoticed in the chaos: 2,500 rioting prisoners were escaping six cellblocks of the Guayaquil penitentiary. The prison guards had fled when the armed criminals breached the first gates. Only the four-man reaction team, mustered by blaring alarms, remained to confront the uprising.

We cannot fail. Carlos repeated the motto of the National Police Intervention and Rescue Group (GIR) to himself as adrenaline drove him forward. He was the unit’s senior officer, and he felt indestructible.

“Watch your back,” he called to his men. Suddenly, he felt a burning sensation behind his thigh.

A colleague stumbled. “Stop, I’m bleeding,” he shouted to Carlos. Carlos searched for cover. Then dizziness overcame him, and he fell to the floor.

For the next 30 minutes, the two officers still standing courageously held off the prisoners until reinforcements arrived. Carlos was rushed to the emergency room. He fought to stay conscious through chills and convulsions from blood loss.

“I saw my wife’s face looking down at me, and that’s when everything broke down for me,” he later recalled.

A Fractured Family

“To be in special forces you have to be a little stubborn; you have to be a little tough,” he said.

That emotional hardness helped him survive danger and excel in his career, but it created barriers within his family. His son feared him. His wife grew angry at his behavior, and their relationship deteriorated with every argument.

One day while Carlos was on duty, ABWE missionary Jeff Davoll visited the GIR barracks and asked a surprising question: “How can I pray for you?” Carlos asked for God’s protection over himself and his family. He did not realize how much he would soon need it.

Jeff handed Carlos a Bible and a business card. Jeff serves with ABWE’s TACTICA ministry, reaching first responders. Since 2011, he has visited police bases across Ecuador to build relationships, share the gospel, and distribute Bibles. To date, Jeff and his team have handed out 15,000 Bibles—meaning that one out of six officers has personally received the Word and an offer of help.

“Chaplain ministry is a ministry of presence, of being available when they are ready to let their guard down,” Jeff explained.

Jeff and his wife, Deanne, began leading Carlos and his wife, Gabriela, in Bible study and godly counsel.

“I believed this was the answer I was looking for,” Carlos remarked. He had always believed in God, but now he began to understand the gospel. “Before, I thought that doing my job and helping people was enough, but I wasn’t realizing that I didn’t need God externally but rather internally. . . . When I really started to follow Christ

was when I had the confrontation in the Guayaquil prison."

After the riot, Carlos awoke in the hospital to more questions. The doctors did not understand how he was alive. A bullet had grazed his femoral artery without severing it. *Why am I still alive?* he wondered. *God must have some purpose for me.*

When Jeff visited his bedside to read Scripture, Carlos was ready to listen. He confessed his sins. For the first time, he prayed from the heart and submitted his life to God, whether he lived or died.

"It's been a 180-degree change in our family," Gabriela said. Their faith restored their relationship. Carlos committed to building a godly legacy for their children. He found new purpose in his work. Today, he helps lead TACTICA's Bible studies and seeks to share the gospel with others who desperately need it.

"I believe those people need a second chance like I had," he said. ■

Editor's Note: Carlos' and Gabriela's names have been changed for security.

Use your training to share the gospel with first responders in Ecuador. Learn more:

abwe.org/epm



Above: Carlos and Gabriela found new hope for their marriage and family as Christ transformed Carlos' life.

Below: ABWE missionary Jeff Davoll distributes Bibles to Ecuadorian police officers.



Fruit After Five Years of Drought

After years without visible results, persistent prayer gives way to new believers, baptisms, and hope for a church in western France.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS
LOCATION: FRANCE



"Why are we here, God?" missionary Tyler Betz cried out. "What are we even doing?"

For five years, Tyler and his wife, Kat, had labored in La Rochelle, France, with no visible spiritual fruit. In fact, their ministry seemed to be regressing. One of Tyler's fellow elders in their 30-member church plant had recently apostatized, and his example led others to deconstruct their faith.

Since arriving in France, Tyler had prayed for the opportunity to guide an unbeliever through a Bible study. He initiated hundreds of gospel conversations—with new friends, with parents at their children's elementary school, and with basketball players in the recreational league he joined. Each person gave a similar response: "That's great for you, but I'll keep doing what I think is right."

Today, only 1.3 percent of French nationals follow evangelical Christianity, despite the nation's strong heritage. By the fifth century A.D., France had become a fortress of Christian missionary activity, and the French Huguenots revitalized biblical doctrine during the Protestant Reformation. Yet that foundation has disintegrated. The national value of *laïcité*, or institutionalized secularism, has birthed a population in which 50 percent claim to be completely atheistic.

"There is a renewed interest in spiritual things, especially among the youth, but it tends to be toward traditional Catholicism or a growing fascination with the occult," Tyler observed. "And Islam is growing."

The desolate spiritual landscape drove Tyler to discouragement. In January 2025, he sensed the Lord convicting him to rededicate himself to concentrated prayer and fasting. Every Thursday morning, he gathered three mature believers to implore God to work in their church and in France.

"God does not have to answer in the way that we want," Tyler noted, "but he chose to work in some pretty cool ways."

God With Us

One month later, Emmanuel, a French man in his 30s, walked into their church and announced, "I need to be baptized."

Emmanuel explained that he had been raised an atheist but had recently begun reading the Bible on his own. Compelled by its teachings, he placed his faith in Christ. He knew from the biblical example that he should be baptized, but he had never met any believers or visited any churches. He inquired at the local Catholic church, but the priest told him it would be a three-year process. Emmanuel turned to the internet, where his search led him to Tyler and Kat's church.

Emmanuel shares how God answered his prayer through a collection of Bible verses he found floating in the ocean.



Photo: Tyler Betz

"Even if I lose everything, it's okay because I have Christ—and he is all I need."

Emmanuel

"My coworker and I began discipling him and had the joy of baptizing him in April 2025," Tyler reported.

Emmanuel immediately faced opposition for following Christ. He lost his girlfriend, his home, and his job.

Ever since I became a Christian, my life has gone downhill, he thought. Plagued with doubts, he walked down to the shoreline where he had been baptized. A crystalline bottle tossed in the surf caught his attention. Scooping it up, he was astonished to discover strips of paper inscribed with Bible verses: John 8:36, Psalm 23:6, and Acts 10:43. The last paper stated, "Jesus really loves you." Assured of God's care for him, Emmanuel resolved to live wholly for Christ. He now plans to become a pastor.

"Even if I lose everything," he declared, "it's okay because I have Christ—and he is all I need."

Southern Gospel in Western France

As Tyler and the men from the church continued to pray and fast, they planned an outreach meal featuring southern gospel music, a style currently popular in France. In March 2025, more than 50 people attended the event, including 11 unsaved guests.

One of the visitors, Christophe, had been invited by a church member who babysat for his family. He discovered that his daughter attended the same school as Tyler and Kat's children. Two days later, he approached Tyler and said, "I'd like to start reading the Bible. Could you tell me where to start?"

"I'd been praying five years for this," Tyler rejoiced.

They began studying the gospel chronologically, from Genesis to Revelation. In December 2025, Tyler was walking to Christophe's house when he sensed the Holy Spirit directing him to teach on sin that day. At the end of the lesson, Christophe reflected that he had begun thinking of himself as a sinner for the first time. Tyler continued to pray.

Later, as they exercised together, Tyler revisited the topic.

"I've decided to follow Jesus," Christophe said. Two weeks later, he texted Tyler song lyrics he had penned in French: "Wash away our sins, our souls purify. On the cross you were crucified, for your glory resurrected. On the road with you, Lord, you guide my steps, you guide my heart. On the road with you, Lord, in you my faith, nowhere else."

Christophe was baptized in April 2026 in front of unbelieving friends. He began serving in the church and told Tyler, "My goal . . . is to find ways to reach our village for Jesus."

After years of spiritual drought, the harvest is ripening in La Rochelle.

"God is continuing to open doors to share our faith," said Tyler, "and we're praying for him to work in the hearts and minds of people in France." ■



Photo: ABWE missionary

ABWE missionary Tyler Betz (left) rejoices with Christophe (right) at his baptism.

Join us in bringing the gospel back to France. Learn more:

abwe.org/forfrance

Connections

STORIES FROM THE FIELD





CHRIS AND LAURA HILBURN
Scotland

"This summer, our church, Bo'ness Baptist Church, held our second annual Community Fun Fest. We intentionally found opportunities to ask people about their faith. While some told us they were just there for the BBQ or lawn games, others shared about their lives and struggles, and we were able to share the hope of Jesus with them. Many heard the gospel. And best of all, a few have returned for church on Sunday mornings."





RICK AND JEN PEACE
Ireland

"Over the last nine years, God has allowed Rick to have many gospel conversations with an individual who was part of the LGBTQ community and deeply involved in pagan spirituality (including Reiki, crystals, and worshiping goddesses and spirits). She recently let him know she has become a Christian, and God has transformed her life. She thanked Rick for sharing the truth of the gospel in a caring way—without endorsing her sin."





R. AND K.
Hong Kong

"It was a joy to celebrate 75 years of ABWE ministry in Hong Kong and 60 years of the seminary's work training ministry leaders. A field which once received missionaries now sends them. ABWE leadership joined our brothers and sisters in Hong Kong, with Paul Davis challenging the church to remain faithful to the Lord. Please pray as believers continue sharing the gospel while navigating increasing challenges with the government."





B. AND D.
Moldova

"We appointed a national leader for the Ukrainian ministry in Moldova, and we are encouraged to see it growing and flourishing. More and more refugees are attending the meetings, filling the hall with people eager to hear the Word of God. In this way, the ministry is fulfilling the Great Commission by proclaiming the gospel to many unbelievers and by providing opportunities for spiritual growth to those who repent and believe."

POLAND

A Stronger Solidarity:

Growing the Church in Gdansk

One donut shop, one Bible study, and one refugee at a time, an ABWE team is sharing God's grace in secularized, Catholic Poland.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS



A musician plays on the street in Gdansk, Poland.

Photo: Noah Johnson



Photo: Noah Johnson

Kuba stands in front of the donut shop where he works and where he met ABWE missionaries Nick and Jill Toothman.

"I knew you were different."

Kuba leaned over the wooden counter and stared at the couple standing, bundled against the cold, on the donut shop porch. Their previous conversation still echoed in his mind.

Kuba had met ABWE missionaries Nick and Jill Toothman two years prior, soon after they moved to Gdansk. Every day, the couple walked past the *paczki* bakery—a traditional Polish donut shop—where he worked.

"We wanted to form relationships with people in the community, and we did that by talking to anybody who would talk with us," Nick explained.

In December 2025, they brought Kuba a Christmas cake. Flustered, he told them he had nothing to give them in return. "That's not how grace works," Nick assured him, and the conversation shifted to Kuba's desire to visit his village, a four-hour drive from Gdansk.

Later that afternoon, Nick and Jill felt led to offer Kuba a ride home for Christmas. As they approached the shop, Kuba called, "I'm so glad you're back! I've been thinking about grace since you left. What did you mean by that?"

They explained the grace of God through the gospel. Kuba listened intently, then shared that a coworker had told him some of these truths two months earlier. He wanted to follow Christ but had no idea how to do that. Nick and Jill invited him to study the Bible with them in their home.

"We must do this," he exclaimed. "God sent you to me. I knew from the beginning you guys were different, and now I know why."

Kuba's faith grew through their discipleship. Raised a devout Catholic, he was amazed to learn that Jesus alone was enough to save him. Soon he was eagerly sharing the gospel with his parents and coworkers.

"God is orchestrating these relationships to build his church," said Nick. "And we're seeing it right here in our neighborhood."

Launching a Team

"I'm in. I'll go to Poland," Ron Davis told ABWE Executive Director Jeff Demerly after a sleepless night in 2020.

The day before, Jeff had mentioned that ABWE was praying for missionaries to reopen its work in Poland, a spiritually dark but strategically important country.

"But here's the difficulty," Jeff had cautioned. "It would just be you. We don't have any other missionaries there."

Ron had originally planned to return to Slovakia, where he and his wife, Riki, had served in the early 2000s. After Riki died of cancer, Ron realized he would be returning to Central Europe alone and prayed anew for direction.

He began researching which Polish cities most needed the gospel. Most missionaries had settled in Warsaw, Krakow, and southern Poland, while the north remained largely untouched. An unexpected email confirmed his direction. An ABWE partner had read about Ron's calling in Message Magazine. The partner offered to connect him with a Ukrainian Baptist pastor in Gdansk who had been praying for an American missionary to help with his young church plant. Ron now had the personal contact he needed to enter Poland.

Meanwhile, God was assembling a team.

Nick Toothman, a banker turned youth pastor, sensed the Lord redirecting his career while meditating on the apostle Paul's goal "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24 ESV). He

told his wife, Jill, "We could live successful lives just by being faithful to the Lord and spreading the gospel seed everywhere—generously—and trusting him."

Nick and Jill discussed their growing conviction with Ron, whom Jill had met while working at the cancer center where Riki was treated. He invited them to join him in Poland.

While raising support, Ron also invited an associate pastor named Micah Griffith to join the team. Micah and his wife, Emily, had to weigh their ministry in the gospel-rich American South against Christ's call to count the cost of following him.

"We took a step of faith," Micah remarked. "We said, 'Lord, wherever you want us to go in life, we will follow you.'"

Ron landed in Poland in May 2022. The Toothmans and Griffiths followed in mid-2023—but the team's work had only begun.

A Barrel of Salt

In Gdansk, history, religion, and culture are tightly bound together. Nazi Germany fired the first shots of World War II here on the Westerplatte peninsula as it invaded Danzig (modern Gdansk) in 1939. The rubble of buildings and lives remained long into the cold, hungry years of communist dictatorship.

Four decades later, Polish electrician Lech Walesa stood inside the gates of Gdansk's Lenin Shipyard and signed the agreement that launched Solidarity—the first independent trade union behind the Iron Curtain. The pen he used bore the image of Pope John Paul II, whose pilgrimage to his native Poland the year before had renewed popular fervor for Catholicism and challenged Soviet hegemony.

"Catholic identity was crucial to our national identity," explained Konrad, a Polish pastor. "If you weren't Catholic, you were likely betraying the nation and collaborating with the communists."

Today, Poland is still known as "Rome's most faithful daughter," and that heritage remains woven into the fabric of Polish culture. Even the growing number of atheists, who despise the priests' hypocrisy and lavish lifestyles, hesitate to turn their backs on Catholicism by considering evangelical beliefs. Meanwhile, many practicing Catholics believe they are already saved. They know Bible stories and Christian language but rely on rituals to take away their sin.

"Unless the Word really opens their eyes, they're blinded by all this tradition, by all this history," Ron remarked.

Yet tradition is beginning to erode.

"Polish people are so resistant to the gospel," Konrad added. "It's not that they're all strongly against it; it's just that they don't care. The country is secularizing rapidly and shifting its values.

A woman lights candles while praying in a Catholic church in Sopot, Poland.

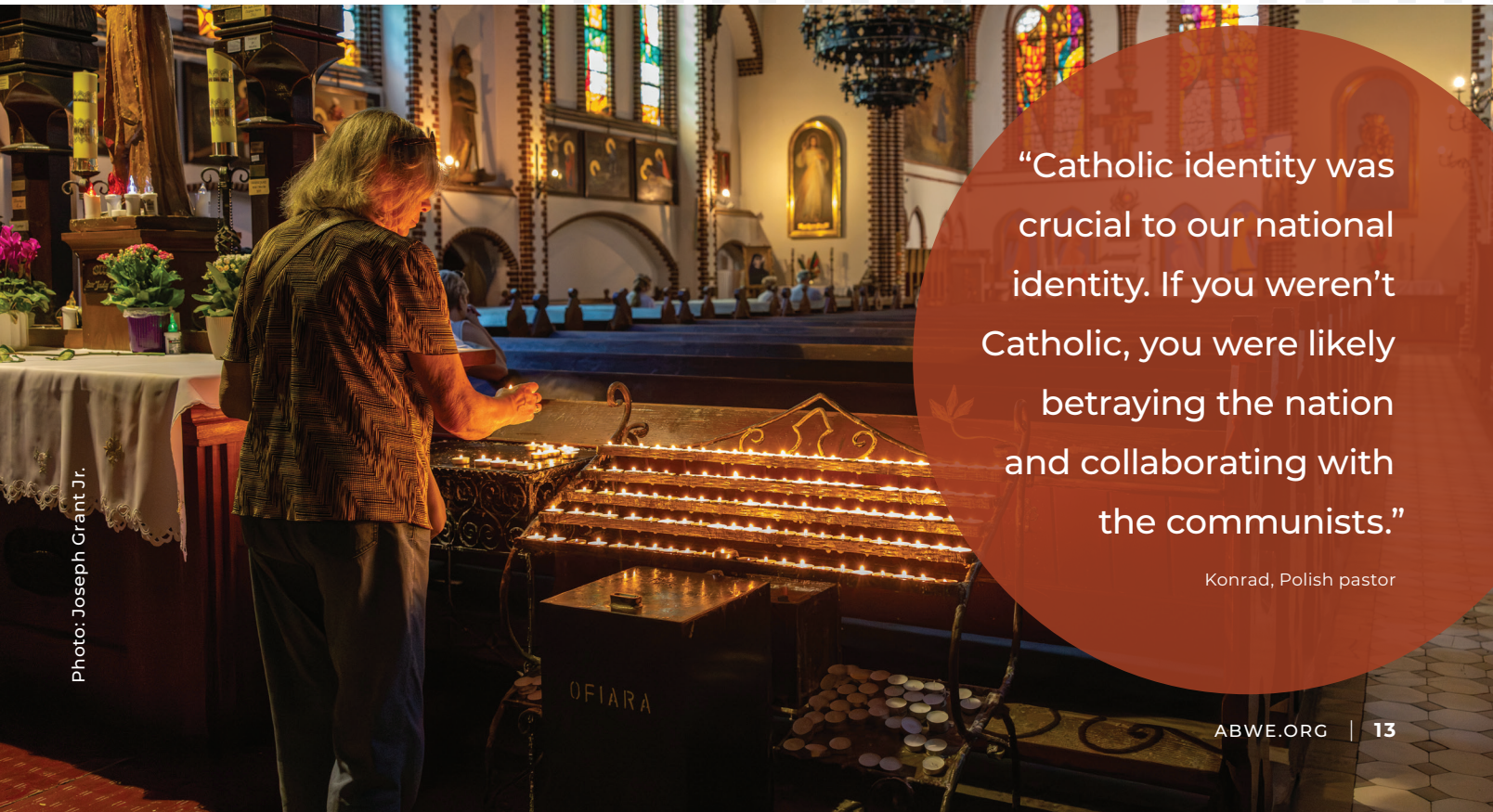


Photo: Joseph Grant Jr.

"Catholic identity was crucial to our national identity. If you weren't Catholic, you were likely betraying the nation and collaborating with the communists."

Konrad, Polish pastor



Photo: Trevor Laycock

ABWE missionaries Ron and Svitlana Davis (lower left) lead a Bible study at the home of Vitali (upper right) and Jana (upper left).

The economy is strong, and people are focused on climbing that ladder. So when you try to discuss spiritual things, they say, 'Cool story; leave me out of it.'"

The Joshua Project estimates that only 0.3 percent of Poles are evangelical Christians—a smaller percentage than in Saudi Arabia. Poland has only about 5,000 Baptists in a nation of 38 million.

The ABWE team faced a daunting task. In a country so indifferent to the gospel, where would they start?

"We understood that God works through the local church, so we chose a pathway for church planting that mobilizes where there are already believers and works out from there," Micah said.

The team invested in building relationships to share the gospel. They also partnered with Gdansk's few but faithful believers to equip them and expand their reach. In Poland, both take years.

"We need to be consistent in people's lives not only to share our faith but to reflect its effects in our lives," said Nick. He explained that a Polish friend once commented that, in order for someone to trust you, you must share a barrel of salt. "When you have dinner with somebody, how much salt do you put on something? Just a sprinkle. So it takes a lot of meals, a lot of time together to form trust."

Refugees Reaching Refugees

The team arrived in Poland to the chaos of Europe's largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, 1.5 million Ukrainians sought asylum in Poland. Millions more flooded through its borders.

Ron immediately joined Maksym, the Ukrainian pastor who had invited him to Poland. Together they handed out humanitarian aid and shared the hope of Christ with refugees shaken by trauma and loss. Their Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking congregation swelled from 60 members to 200 nearly overnight. Aware of the need for long-term ministry, ABWE teammates later led efforts to plant a daughter church in a neighboring city.

Turmoil elsewhere in Eastern Europe brought yet another people group. About 35 Belarusians—many of them political refugees fleeing their country's oppressive regime—arrived at their congregation, Fourth Baptist Church.

"We minister to whoever God brings into our path. We give them the gospel in every way we possibly can," Ron said.

Once again, God was preparing believers to serve alongside them—this time from among the refugees themselves.

"These believers are the fruit of previous generations of missionaries who sowed the gospel in Eastern Europe," Ron commented. "They're part of the wider picture of how God is working in Europe today."

Olga, a pastor's wife, guided her four children out of Ukraine through air strikes and dangerously cold temperatures. Once in Gdansk, she began



Svitlana (left) and Olga (right) serve together at Fourth Baptist Church in Gdansk, Poland.

Photo: Olivia Moormann

teaching Sunday school to reach the many refugee children—and their mothers—now filling the church. She was joined by Natalia, a single mother from Belarus. Natalia had been forced to flee after a photo was published showing her protesting the regime's violent crackdown following Belarus' disputed 2020 election.

The third teacher became a surprising answer to Ron's prayer for more missionary teammates.

An Unexpected Teammate

One day while traveling with Ron, Maksym suddenly asked, "Do you know Svitlana? She works in our Sunday school." Ron did not. Pausing briefly, Maksym leaned over and suggested: "You should."

Svitlana was born on a Soviet military base and raised in schools steeped in communist ideology. "We saw cartoons depicting God as an old man sitting in the sky, and we mocked that old man in the sky," she recalled.

The collapse of the USSR opened the floodgates for the gospel. Missionaries built churches and distributed Bibles, even in Svitlana's stark Ukrainian village. By the time her mother invited her to church, Svitlana felt hopeless. Betrayed by her husband, she struggled to provide for her two children.

"The whole church atmosphere captivated me," she said. "I heard a sermon about Jesus and wanted to come back."

She eventually responded to the pastor's invitation to follow Christ. The following year, she studied in a seminary led by missionaries. Looking for work, she moved to Gdansk and began serving

> "God showed me how powerful he is in my life—that he is willing to lead me through life-threatening circumstances simply so that I can share the gospel."
>
> Pasha, Ukrainian believer

at Fourth Baptist Church—where Olga later arranged for her to meet Ron. Ron and Svitlana married in 2024.

"God has cared for me so faithfully and made it possible for me to serve the church alongside Ron," she remarked.

Training for the Future

As the wave of refugees settled into life in Gdansk, so did the ABWE team. Even while spending long hours in language study, the team built a growing network of relationships for evangelism, discipleship, and leadership development. Bible studies proved especially useful for training new leaders.

Nick and Jill led one small-group Bible study in their home. They quickly noticed Pasha, a young construction worker from eastern Ukraine.

"Pasha stood out as someone who wanted to learn more and was just grabbing at every opportunity to serve," Nick said. "So, prayerfully, we taught him how to study the Bible and how to lead a small group."

Pasha had first heard the gospel in a youth group in Ukraine. The week before he was to be baptized, his grandmother took her own life.

"During her funeral, I started swearing at God and shouting, 'I don't believe in your sacrifice. I don't believe in a God who takes the most precious things from me,'" he said.

Pasha turned to a life of alcohol, theft, and street fighting. He took risks to drown out his unrelenting sense of conviction. When he turned 23, Russia invaded Ukraine and occupied his village. Without food or work, he reluctantly returned to the church. The pastor's compassion drew him back to Christ.

He began traveling with the pastor to visit churches—even sharing the gospel with Russian soldiers at the checkpoints. One night, a Russian patrol detained Pasha. When they discovered church photos on his phone, they threw him into a basement, covered his head with a sack, and beat him. "You're not going home. You're as good as dead," they said.

The commander came to interrogate him, but the line of questioning shifted unexpectedly.

"I told him that Christ is the Son of God who died for us," Pasha said. The

ABWE missionary Nick Toothman (right) disciples Pasha (left) and prepares him to lead a Bible study.



Photo: Christine Tan

commander began asking in-depth questions about God and the gospel. He released Pasha the next morning.

"God showed me how powerful he is in my life—that he is willing to lead me through life-threatening circumstances simply so that I can share the gospel," Pasha remarked.

Pasha fled to Gdansk in 2023 after Russian forces breached the Kakhovka Dam, flooding his home. The only possession he managed to save was his Bible.

Ron recognized Pasha's passion for God and trained him to teach in the church, while Nick and Jill began discipling him. After focused training, he and another faithful man took over the Bible study. That freed the Toothmans to help lead a small Polish church plant in another city.

"When we moved here at the height of the Ukrainian crisis, people for the most part viewed themselves as victims," Jill reflected. "Now, we see God working in their lives, and they're realizing, 'What's happening in my country is terrible, but God has placed me here. So how am I going to serve him where he has me?'"

Meanwhile, Ron began preparing Vitali to lead another Bible study. Vitali came to Christ three years ago when believers in his hometown showed him the truth about Jesus—truth that had been hidden from him beneath the saints, rituals, and relics of Eastern Orthodoxy.

"God really touched his heart to become a leader and to teach," Ron said. "I've had the opportunity to spend time mentoring him, working with him in his Christian walk, and helping him learn to develop sermons and to share his faith."

After a Bible study on evangelism, Vitali was inspired to form a flag football team to reach men in the community.

"When you play together as a team, you develop a sense of trust," he explained. "In that setting, it becomes easier to discuss difficult topics."

The football team has drawn several men from the community, and Vitali has seen their interest in the gospel grow.



Photo: Gary Chapman



Photo: Noah Uechi

Top: Trevor Lacock (left), a short-term ministry partner, helps Vitali (right) coach the flag football team he started as an outreach.

Bottom: ABWE missionary Micah Griffith (left) works with Konrad (center), a Polish pastor, and his wife, Katarzyna (right), to develop leadership training.

To more fully equip local believers like these to reach their nation, Micah is working with Polish pastors to develop a training program to prepare others to plant, revitalize, or shepherd churches into the future.

"Fifty percent of Polish churches don't have a pastor," said Konrad. "There is a great need but not enough opportunities to learn."

The ABWE team itself is branching out to support church plants in Gdansk and the surrounding region.

The Heart of Europe

Person by person, God is working in Poland. He is drawing his people into his harvest field and uniting them in a new kind of solidarity—one that confronts Central Europe's spiritual strongholds with the pure gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Poland is right at the heart of Europe," said Ron. "If we could see a revival here, Poland would be an incredible platform to share the light of Christ in Europe."

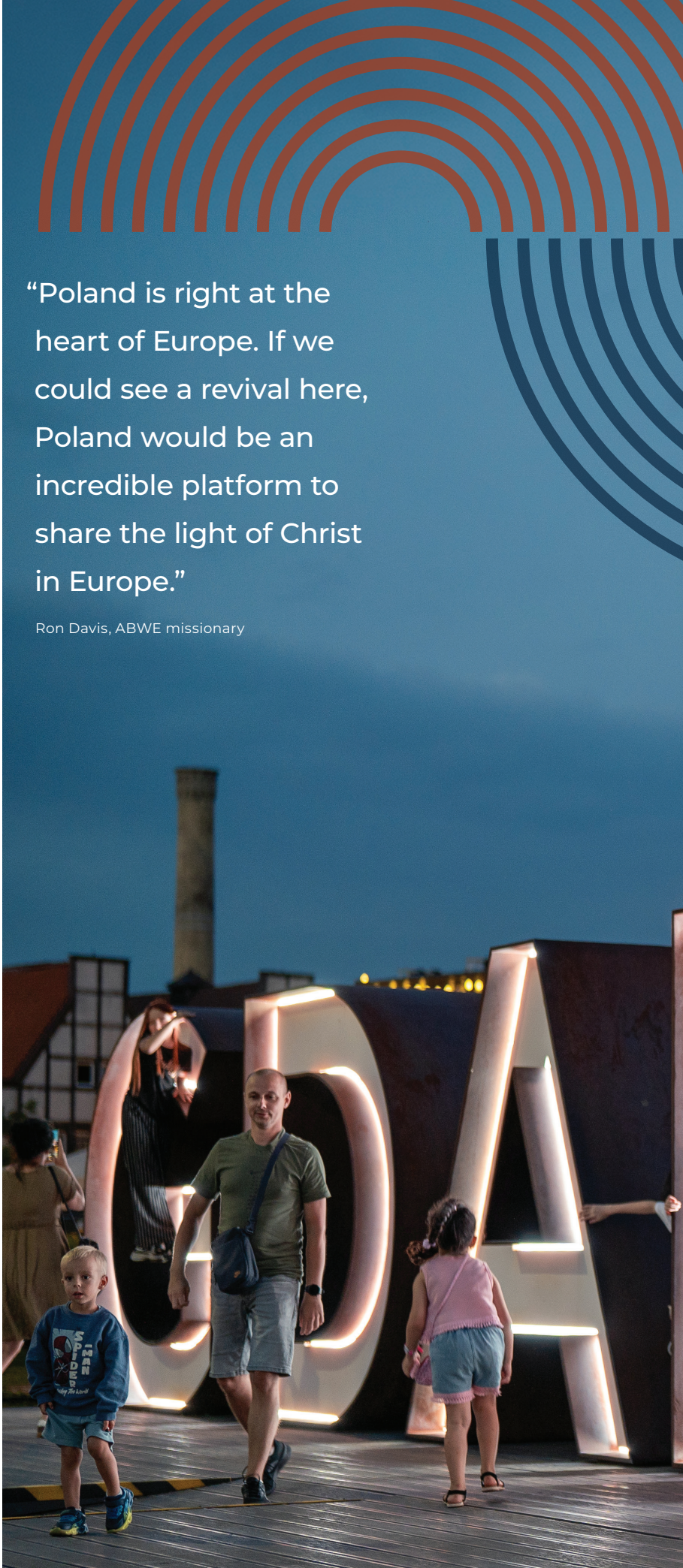
Yet there is much to be done. Poland's few believers and fewer missionaries cannot reach an entire nation alone. They need others to commit their lives to sowing seeds of the gospel, whether they fall on fertile or fallow soil.

"Even if our family goes through all this to come here, and the one person we've seen place their faith in Christ is the only person we ever see saved, it's truly worth it," said Micah. "We are praying that God will continue to produce fruit here in Poland as we follow him as a team." ■

Help Send More Missionaries

Millions of people in Europe and around the world still need to hear the good news of Jesus. Your gift to the Global Gospel Fund helps take the gospel to people and places where it is needed most. Visit:
abwe.org/europeggf

Photo: Noah Johnson





A family plays around the Gdansk city sign.

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In our generation, 2,000 years after Christ first commissioned his disciples to "go into all the world and proclaim the gospel" (Mark 16:15 ESV), God still deploys his people to the nations.

In July 2026, 32 new missionaries joined ABWE to carry his message throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Yet even as they prepare to uproot their lives, adapt to different cultures, and communicate in difficult languages, they understand one important truth: the mission is not theirs alone.

The local church—and all believers within—buttress the endeavor through prayer, encouragement, and financial support, sending these workers in "a manner worthy of God" (3 John 6). Likewise, national believers on the field—however few they may yet be—receive the missionaries, partner with them, instruct them, and learn from them in order to advance Christ's kingdom among their countrymen. Missionaries may stand on the frontlines, but advancing the gospel in enemy strongholds requires all of God's people working together with all of their skills, giftings, and callings.

What is your role in this great partnership of missions?

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Christina Acree

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term | **Giving**: abwe.org/m/0173291
Sending Church: Faith Baptist Church | **Location**: Germany

A visit to Germany revealed closing churches and spiritual apathy—but Christina's calling first meant trusting God to overcome objections about finances, health, and marital status. She will use her experience to reach Germans and assist churches in Mannheim.



S. and S.

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term | **Giving**: abwe.org/m/0173211
Sending Church: Pearl Baptist Church | **Location**: Bangladesh

When a friend introduced this couple to ABWE, they were amazed to hear of critical needs in Bangladesh that dovetailed with the husband's 25-year career in maintenance, construction, and project management. He will oversee facilities at Memorial Christian Hospital to undergird its life-saving outreach.



Joshua and Colette Eby

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term | **Giving**: abwe.org/m/0173201
Sending Church: Mack Avenue Community Church | **Location**: Togo

The Ebys' passion for surgical ministry led them to a two-year post residency elsewhere in West Africa, then, after political upheaval and evacuation, to Togo. Joshua serves as a surgeon and surgical instructor at Hospital of Hope, where their family reaches and disciples African leaders.



Dennis and Shawna Gomez

Ministry: ABWE GO and Beautiful Feet | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173301 | **Sending Church**: Immanuel Baptist Church
Location: Costa Rica

Dennis has seen the gospel's power firsthand. Now, through TACTICA, he will use his Marine Corps and law enforcement experience to train first responders in Latin America while sharing the gospel. Shawna will serve families through pro-life ministry.



T. and A.

Ministry: ABWE GO and Beautiful Feet | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173321 | **Sending Church**: Rocky Bayou Baptist Church
Location: Southeast Asia

A.'s grandparents, longtime ABWE missionaries, prayed that God would call another generation of their family to missions. Today, A. and T. are preparing to serve in Southeast Asia, where T. will direct an international school and A. will minister to families through prenatal care.



David and Julie Hackley

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173311 | **Sending Church**: Grace Fellowship Bible Church
Location: Colombia

David and Julie's passion for teaching Scripture led them from elementary education to a second career as missionaries. They will provide theological training, discipleship, and counseling at a Colombian seminary to teach believers to reach the unreached in their nation.



G.

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173331 | **Sending Church**: Shawnee Hills Baptist Church
Location: Bangladesh

Meeting medical missionaries inspired G. to become a nurse and use her skills to meet both physical and spiritual needs. After serving on short-term trips, she is now preparing for long-term ministry at Memorial Christian Hospital in Bangladesh.



Steve and Katie Hoyt

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173231 | **Sending Church**: Hallmark Church
Location: Togo

Steve, a family physician, and Katie, an OB/GYN, spent five years in West Africa using medical ministry to break down barriers among Muslims. When a security crisis prompted relocation, they moved to Togo to serve unreached people groups at Hospital of Hope.



G. and A.

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173341 | **Sending Church**: Grace Bible Church
Location: North Africa

Immediately after coming to Christ, G. and A. purchased passports for their family, burdened to share the gospel in least-reached places. They completed seminary and church-based training and plan to engage North African Muslims through hospitality and church planting.



N. and S.

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0170421 | **Sending Church**: Faith Bible Fellowship Church
Location: Central Asia

Ten years of pastoral ministry, refugee work, and missionary care reignited a passion for missions that N. and S. had first sensed as young adults. They will develop sports and English outreaches in Central Asia to establish churches among unreached Muslims.



Joel and April Otero

Ministry: ABWE GO | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173351 | **Sending Church**: Christ Fellowship
Location: Japan

A trip to Japan led to years of international student ministry in the US and a love for introducing people from other nations to the gospel. After returning to Japan in 2025, the Oteros sensed God calling them there full time to help plant a church in western Tokyo.



G. and S.

Ministry: Live Global | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0194491 | **Sending Church**: Shawnee Hills Baptist Church
Location: Global Partnerships

Twenty years of teaching PE in Bangkok, Thailand, instilled in G. a passion to use sports to break down barriers to the gospel. From their base in the US, G. will equip national believers to begin sports outreaches, while S. serves through special education and counseling.



L. and C.

Ministry: Live Global | **Track**: Mid Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0194881 | **Sending Church**: Morrison Heights Baptist Church
Location: Spain

Through L.'s employment in accounting and C.'s seminary studies, the Lord impressed upon this couple an urgency that now is the time to pursue missions. They are embarking on an apprenticeship with Live Global to explore business and sports ministry in global contexts.



J. and K.

Ministry: Live Global | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173281 | **Sending Church**: Red Oak Church
Location: Global Partnerships

Convicted that their lives should be defined by serving God, J. and K. gained experience through trips to Latin America and joined Live Global to connect North American churches with indigenous partners so they may be mutually encouraged, enhanced, and equipped.



J. and S.

Ministry: Live Global | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173251 | **Sending Church**: Gather Church
Location: South Asia

God brought J., an American, and S., who was saved out of Hinduism, together as both served cross-culturally with CRU for eight years. They are preparing to return to South Asia to open a coffee shop as a platform for building relationships, initiating gospel conversations, and making disciples.



D.

Ministry: Live Global | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0134881 | **Sending Church**: Shelby Road Baptist Church
Location: Global Partnerships

God changed D.'s life plans when he led her to M., a veteran pastor and Live Global missionary. Now married, they connect the North American church to ministry leaders around the world to empower and equip them for ministry in their own communities.



Nicole Joseph

Ministry: ABWE Healthcare | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173241 | **Sending Church**: Valley Forge Baptist
Location: Worldwide

As a nurse, Nicole prayed for an opportunity to serve in long-term missions. God led her to ABWE, where she will lead short-term medical trips, mobilize healthcare missionaries, and use medical ministry to bring compassionate care and the gospel to communities around the world.



Thomas and Joanna Kubiak

Ministry: ABWE Member Care | **Track**: Long Term
Giving: abwe.org/m/0173191 | **Sending Church**: The Oasis
Location: Worldwide

Early in his 40 years of pastoral ministry, Tom wished he had more seasoned believers to encourage and guide him. Now, he and Joanna will draw on their experience to care for ABWE missionaries and lead member care cohorts that help them thrive on the field.

The Jesus He Thought He Knew

A missionary family's outreach to Muslims in Germany reveals the limits of Europe's pluralistic culture and the need for the gospel among locals and immigrants alike.

BY: WILL MCAULIFFE | **LOCATION:** GERMANY



The McAuliffes' daughter paints a Syrian child's face during an outreach in Berlin.

Photo: Will McAuliffe

The bright flowers our daughter painted on a little girl's face, and the butterfly on her sister's, sharply contrasted with the horrific scenes their mother described to my wife, Beth, from the war they had fled in Syria.

We met the family during our church's Easter outreach in Hermannplatz, a busy square surrounded by one of Berlin's largest Arabic-speaking communities. Mohamed, his wife, and their two daughters were visiting from Austria.

While the girls enjoyed the activities, Beth spoke with their mother in Arabic. The young woman, still in her 20s, described the violence and killings that had come terrifyingly close to her home. She had escaped the war but still carried its trauma. In fleeing Syria, she had left behind not only the danger but also the life and dreams she once held.

Meanwhile, Mohamed and I talked about Easter. He seemed curious about Christianity, though his questions reflected Islamic teachings. Muslims believe Jesus is in heaven, he reasoned, and Christians believe Jesus is in heaven. Were our religions not essentially saying the same thing?

His question revealed how similar words can conceal profoundly different beliefs. I began explaining that the Christian message is that the Son of God died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose bodily from the grave. Islam denies this essential truth. Without Christ's atoning death, there is no satisfaction of divine justice; without his resurrection, our faith is futile and we remain in our sins.

Before we could go much further, the commotion of the square interrupted us. I was painfully aware that these truths require more than a hurried conversation. Mohamed needed time with believers willing to listen, boldly proclaim truth, humbly answer questions, and patiently open God's Word with him.

Before he left, I gave him a gospel booklet and a beautiful Arabic edition of the Sermon on the Mount. He received them gratefully. As the family walked away, he carried the words of the Jesus he thought he already understood.

Their visit reminded us that unreached Muslim immigrants live not only in Berlin but are scattered throughout Europe, often in places with few churches prepared to reach them.

We are thankful that God has brought people from restricted-access nations into cities where we can freely place Scripture in their hands. Yet we also mourn Europe's abandonment of its Christian heritage that limits its own people's opportunities to encounter the gospel. Biblical worship has increasingly been displaced by secularism, revived paganism, and Islam. Europe may offer refugees physical safety, but its pluralistic culture cannot offer pardon for sin, hope of eternal life, or reconciliation with God.

In Europe, God has brought the nations to our doorstep. May we seize this moment to place his Word in the hands of Europeans and immigrants alike and proclaim the life-giving hope of Christ to their hearts. ■

Join us in reaching unreached immigrants in Europe. Learn more:

abwe.org/refugees

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Learn more at **abwe.org/noncashgift** or contact Greg Heath, ABWE's director of Legacy Giving, at greg.heath@abwe.org.

When Europe's Old Gods Return

As paganism resurges across Europe, Christians have an opportunity to answer the continent's spiritual hunger with the truth, power, and hope of the gospel.

BY: ALEX KOCMAN



In the 20th century, the remnants of European Christendom fractured. Old empires dissolved into secular, democratic, bureaucratic states. Now Eastern Europe is again torn by war and faces the possibility of wider conflict.

At the same time, some Europeans are returning to their pagan roots. In England and Wales, those identifying as pagan increased from about 57,000 in 2011 to 74,000 in 2021, while shamanism grew more than tenfold.

Why?

Europe faces an identity crisis. After centuries of nominal Christianity, followed by wars, scandals, hypocrisy, and empty churches, Christianity can appear to have failed. Meanwhile, the mystical past calls. Paganism claims to offer ancestral identity, mystery, and a world filled with spiritual power.

C.S. Lewis described pagan myths as "good dreams" that anticipate the true story of Christ. He also observed that a pagan may be more convertible than a post-Christian. Perhaps Europe's return to paganism could become, providentially, a step toward Christianity.

Modern European Christianity has too often been drained of spiritual power. Yet people are rediscovering that the world is more than matter. The spiritual realm is real. Demons, principalities, powers, and spiritual forces exist. Those who seek them may find them, but they are ancient and evil.

Christianity offers something better: the true re-enchantment of the world. This is part of the enduring appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. They awaken a cultural memory of a world in which the boundary between visible and invisible reality feels thin. Biblical Christianity gives us the reality to which those stories point.

What should Christians do?

First, **we cannot neglect Europe**. The greater concentration of unreached peoples elsewhere does not mean that Europe is sufficiently evangelized. Generations of Europeans have never seriously encountered robust biblical Christianity.

Second, **Christianity must lead in re-winning the West**. Europe faces a civilizational question: Who are we? Secular abstractions cannot adequately answer it. Christians cannot retreat from cultural engagement because questions of history, migration, and national identity feel controversial. Europe cannot understand itself apart from 2,000 years of Christian influence, and its deepest identity crisis can only be answered in Christ.

Third, **we need missionaries with the courage of Boniface**. In the eighth century, the Christian missionary Boniface entered pagan Germany and felled Thor's sacred oak. The watching pagans expected their god to destroy him. When nothing happened, they surrendered to Christ in faith.

Whether confronting revived European paganism, ardent secularism, or the religions brought by migration, we need humble, courageous Christians willing to challenge idols and proclaim without apology: Jesus Christ is Lord of the nations—including those of Europe. ■

What Kind of Missionaries Does Central Europe Need?

Missionaries and local believers in Poland describe the qualities that matter most for gospel work in Central Europe.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS
PHOTOGRAPHER: GARY S. CHAPMAN
LOCATION: POLAND

Every year, tourists flock to Central Europe for its rich history, picturesque streets, and modern lifestyle. But with its vibrant culture come cold, gray winters and an even darker spiritual climate. Missionaries and local believers pray for more workers to join them in reaching this stony field.

"The greatest need is for prospective missionaries to have a love for God and for the gospel," shared Ron Davis, missionary to Poland. That love should make them willing to do whatever God asks—even if it stretches their skills or comfort—to reach whomever they can.

They also need endurance. Learning Central Europe's difficult languages can take years, even decades. So can building relationships and breaking through centuries-old misconceptions about the gospel. "You can easily get discouraged without proper expectations and the trust that God is working even when you don't see it," said missionary Jill Toothman.

Missionaries must also be willing to humbly partner with the believers already in Europe. And they need to be theologically grounded and equipped for ministry. Local pastors in Poland say they especially need missionaries who can teach systematic theology and ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church) and introduce resources that were banned under communism.

Finally, missionaries must be willing to sacrifice. "The one thing that missionaries exemplify so well is that God is worth *all*," said Katarzyna, a pastor's wife. "They leave behind absolutely everything . . . and find a deeply rooted trust and identity in our God. How wonderful it is for them to teach us that way of life."

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. So pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. ■



Pedestrians walk through the Gdansk Old Town.

Explore opportunities to serve in Central Europe. Learn more:
abwe.org/reacheurope

Gary S. Chapman has covered humanitarian stories in more than 80 countries, helping organizations create awareness, express their vision, and build their community. His wife, Vivian, assists him on assignments.



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