

## **Fresh Green from Scorched Earth**

‘He will be like a refiner’s fire...then the Lord will have a people who bring offerings in righteousness.’ (Mal. 3:2, 3)

I had seen the vision months before: a blackened field, still smoking. A prophetic woman who knew nothing of the burning of many precious relationships due to my Catholic commitment in 2011 painted the picture. Before the vision, I felt alone in my suffering. When she gave it, I began to see God’s sovereign will in these losses. He was refining me for a new season. I thought of what John the Baptist said about Christ: ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire, and will burn up the waste with unquenchable fire’ (Matt. 3:11, 12).

What emerges from the fire became apparent during our first Living Waters training in Poland last week. After several visits to this most Catholic country (perhaps the most devout in all of Europe), and in solidarity with beloved Living Waters Directors in Lithuania (Vilma Kaveline) and France (Werner Loerschter), Abbey Foard, Ann Armstrong and myself helped launch the most strategic advance I have ever witnessed in a nation intent on releasing Living Waters.

What set this training apart? Might it have been the 15-member worship team whose voices combined to break strongholds of unbelief and despair every time we gathered? Was it the humble, smart team of Polish small group leaders who served each member with compassion and spiritual acuity? Was it the 8 Polish Catholic priests who joined our leadership team and who modeled how to exercise spiritual authority through one’s vulnerable humanity? For the first time, I realized that a priest could inspire growth in chastity through personal disclosure (instead of doctrinal reminders). We know the truth; living the truth is where we all stumble, priests included.

Perhaps the leadership of Father Joseph had most to do with this advance. He is well-respected throughout the nation and constructed a wise strategy from the start by building groups in key cities and tending well to their leadership teams. He works cooperatively with bishops to ensure that every group is wanted and protected. A local priest sits on each team. Understandably, interest in our training was high. We convinced Father Joseph to limit attendees to 100 and registration was full and processed three months ago. For us, a minor miracle.

Actually, the power and cohesion of the Catholic Church in Poland is the miracle. Poland’s resilience throughout her turbulent history is anchored in the Church, who has been both fighting father and nurturing mother for Polish dignity. The nation ceased to exist for one hundred years as three empires divided and conquered her; the bloodbath of the first World War granted her national independence, which was shattered in World War 2 as both Russia and Germany leveled her then subjected her to communist rule. The Church unified and inspired her during those darks decades. Now Poland emerges as the jewel of Eastern Europe, for which most citizens give God the glory. Is Jesus, through Poland, the hope of Europe?

A scorched land, out of which hope grows green. The first night of the training, God reminded me of the blackened field I saw months back. Only this time I saw rows of saplings emerging from the ground. Well-tended by group and priest, each Living Waters member represents a young tree. What a privilege to partner with Father Joseph and friends in displaying Jesus' splendor. May we increase the fruitfulness of His Church. May we become trustworthy witnesses of Jesus for a new generation of Europeans.

'Open your eyes and look at the fields; they are ripe for harvest.' (JN 4:35)

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