

## **THE EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH IN THE NEW POLISH CONTEXT**

by Charles G. Robertson, Jr.

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The Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland has been affected dramatically by the democratic changes and the new market economy that have been instituted since the collapse of Communism in 1989. As a minority among minority churches--approximately 4500 members in a country of 38 million that is over 90% Roman Catholic--it is particularly vulnerable to the changing times. At the same time the church's situation continues to be heavily influenced by the overwhelming presence of the Roman Catholic Church. On one hand the democratic transformation of Poland has brought with it genuine religious liberty and removed the restraining hand of the Communist state from religious expression. On the other hand it also has released a triumphalism in the Catholic Church, the unfortunate consequences of which go beyond damaging ecumenical relations among religious groups and affect Polish society as a whole.

### **The New Religious Freedom**

The benefits of the new religious freedom are common to all faith groups in Poland. Thus Reformed Christians are able to freely profess their faith, identify with their church, engage in ministry, and perform the duties of responsible church membership. The Reformed Church is free to pursue its mission both to the faithful and to the needy in the world. The church's monthly journal Jednota, once heavily censored, continues to be that voice for both the Reformed faith and the ecumenical movement in Poland and has become also a major vehicle for expressing the views of non-Roman Catholic religious minorities and an advocate for the rights of minorities in general. Pastors are free to exercise their ministries and to travel unrestrictedly. The church is free to focus on the spiritual formation of its children and youth and is concentrating a considerable amount of its resources on Christian Education, church summer camps, and youth work camps, retreats, and church-wide youth conferences. The church actively and freely participates in the work of the Polish Ecumenical Council and in programs provided for the youth of its member churches.

### **The Pastoral Situation**

The pastoral situation of the Reformed Church has greatly improved in the last few years. With ten widely-scattered parishes and seven preaching stations, known as the "diaspora", the church had in the former Communist years an aging clergy, empty pulpits, and difficulty encouraging a sufficient number of young men--the church does not yet

ordain women-- to answer the call to ministry and fill all its charges. It currently has eight pastors and five seminarians, two of whom should be ordained next year. Thus almost all its pastoral posts are in the process of being filled.

One of the major pastoral difficulties, however, is the geographical dispersion of the church. Of the ten parishes one is in Warsaw, six are at a distance of less than 90 miles west and southwest of Warsaw, and three are spread out over Silesia-- from 180 to 300 miles southwest of Warsaw. Yet most of the preaching stations are scattered throughout northwestern Poland. The pastor of the small parish in Zychlin, about 70 miles west of Warsaw, has a circuit of preaching stations which include Poznan, Szczecin, and Gdansk--a round trip of roughly 750 miles! Needless to say the eventual ordination of all the present seminarians and the calling of new ones would be a blessing allowing the church to fill all its present pulpits, organize new parishes, and replace the older clergy who should then have the opportunity to retire before infirmities or death call them from full-time ministry.

### The Ecumenical Situation

The ecumenical situation since 1989 has been a mixed blessing. The Catholic Church because of its size, presence, and influence in Polish society sets the tone for ecumenical relations. Yet Pastor Bogdan Tranda says the Catholic Church was and is a problem. While there has been no token of discrimination against non-Catholics on a personal level (some Catholic laity are simply not aware that anyone is anything else), the priests, he says, are in general very narrow-minded. This means the direction of ecumenical relations must be set by the hierarchy. Yet among some forty bishops ordinarily only two, Bronisaw Dembowski of Wrocawek and Alfons Nossol in Opole are clearly identified as openly and positively supporting ecumenical relations. However, the Polish primate, Jozef Cardinal Glemp, has made friendly gestures--receiving representatives from non-Catholic churches and visiting the Polish Ecumenical Council--though he has not advanced formal dialogue.

By far the most positive development in ecumenical relations was the fourth pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to his homeland in 1991. The pope visited the Orthodox Church in Bialystok and met with leaders of the member churches of the Ecumenical Council and preached at the Evangelical Augsburg (Lutheran) Church of the Holy Trinity in Warsaw. Both visits were broadcast on Polish television. In his sermon the pope stated emphatically that tolerance between the churches is not enough but rather that we must "forbear one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2)--understanding and forgiving one another, accepting and being in community with one another. While John Paul II appears to have slowed down interfaith dialogue and ecumenical relations in the West, Pastor Tranda says the ecumenical situation in Poland is better because of him.

The Reformed Church has not had conflicts with the Catholic Church over church buildings as the Orthodox, Uniate, and Lutheran Churches have had. Rather, for example, in Strzelin in Lower Silesia where the small Reformed parish owned a large building it could not maintain, it sold the building to the Catholic bishop with the provision that

Reformed services could continue in a chapel. In the Gdansk and Cracow preaching points, Reformed services are held in Lutheran Churches.

Because of the disappointment and dissatisfaction of some members of the Catholic Church with attitudes of their priests and the hierarchy as well as with the political initiatives of their church, there have been some conversions to the Reformed Church, which ordinarily does not proselytize. Fourteen converts were received into the Warsaw congregation in the past year. Pastor Tranda reports that many of these new members have complained that the Catholic Church is much too involved in politics and devotes too little time to the spiritual life of understanding of matters of faith and how they relate to the problems confronting society.

The Reformed Church continues to serve the ecumenical community in Poland through its journal, Jednota, featuring articles dealing with ecumenical issues as well as denominational concerns. It gives space to prominent Roman Catholic and Jewish writers, and in one recent issue ran articles on the Church and anti-semitism from Polish Protestant and Catholic perspectives. Jednota includes a monthly review of international and national ecumenical and interfaith activities in addition to a chronicle of life in the Reformed Church.

One area of concern in the ecumenical situation is with the Polish Ecumenical Council, whose president is Bishop Zdzislaw Tranda of the Reformed Church. The Council is widely seen as having been used by the former Communist government and manipulated in an attempt to control the activities of the non-Roman Catholic Churches. Second, its purpose was to undermine the credibility of the Roman Catholic Church--in so far as that was possible--in presenting a more cooperative model of church-state relations such as in taking stands on social issues, more in keeping with those of the Communist regime. Third, the Council was to present a positive image of religious freedom to the West. This model of ecumenical activity is seen as having been harmful and is now considered irrelevant.

In effect the Ecumenical Council is seen as compromised by its cooperation with the Communist regime and, worse, one of its talented staff members is known to have collaborated with the authorities but has refused to leave his position. Leaders of the Reformed Church feel this situation is inhibiting the development of relationships with the Catholic Church which took a strong stand against the former Communist government and mistrusts anyone who was submissive to the authorities. Other Council leaders are asked, they say, why the Council continues to employ this person. Bishop Tranda was elected Council president in part because he is not associated with its past.

While genuine ecumenical work took place among the churches affiliated with the Ecumenical Council, with the Catholic Church, and with churches in the West, this work took place mainly among the hierarchies of the participating churches and was in fact banned by the Communist authorities at the grass roots. Thus there is lacking a tradition of ecumenical activity on the parish level, and it is not seen as a priority for ministry among parish clergy in general. As a result, what interdenominational activities that take

place locally--usually joint services during the Week of Church Unity--depend on the initiative of the exceptional local minister or priest.

### **Religious and Ethnic Minorities**

The Reformed Church has become an advocate for the concerns of religious and ethnic minorities in Poland and has opened the pages of Jednota to give them a louder voice. Last year it published a special issue on minorities in Poland with articles contributed by representatives of each faith or group. They included Baptist, Evangelical, Independent Protestant, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Reformed Christians, as well as Old Catholic Mariavites, Orthodox and Polish National Catholic Christians. Jewish, Karaites, and two Islamic groups--Shi'ites and Sunni Tatars--were included as well as the Byelorussian and Czech-and-Slovak national minority groups.

The situation of minorities in today's Poland--reduced from more than 35% in 1939 by the Second World War to 10% or less by war's end--has been characterized as that of mice taking a bath with an elephant. They are likely to be squashed, drowned, or washed out of the tub, and the elephant hardly notices their presence. Altogether the non-Roman Catholic religions comprise only 2-3% of the population, the largest of which is the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church of about 600-800,000 adherents. The religious minorities are outnumbered two to one by non-believers, agnostics, and the category "none of the above" at 6-7%.

This year Jednota focused a special issue on the question of tolerance in Poland as it applies to its minorities. It notes that the tolerance of the majority is unwanted by the minorities for, in the words of the pope, it is not enough. Poland's minorities want full freedom and equality rather than a paternalistic relationship based on the power of the majority, which tolerance both implies and works out in practice. Relationships based on tolerance do not advance the status of minorities toward full freedom and acceptance. As a minority among minorities, though certainly not the smallest, the Reformed Church feels an obligation to speak on behalf of all minorities in Poland and abroad.

The Reformed Church as well as other minority churches are still to some extent dealing with the legacy of their situation under Communist rule. During those years the minority church existed in a difficult and delicate situation which was exacerbated by a tenuous and problematic relationship with the Communist state. They were the object of the state's attempts to undermine and marginalize religious influences and because of their small numbers and lack of any international hierarchical connections were easier to intimidate. Yet because the primary enemy of the state was the Catholic Church, with not only size and international connections but an enormous influence in Polish society and a legacy of resistance to Communism, the state could afford to treat its religious minorities more generously and use them as showcases of religious tolerance under Communist rule. At the same time any concessions to religious freedom made by the state in its struggle with the Catholic Church over the years were of benefit to the minority churches, too. The net result was that the minority churches benefited from a margin of freedom that derived from their extreme vulnerability and willingness to cooperate with the state

authorities, the state's policy of tolerance toward them, and the Catholic Church's ability to hold the state in check and gradually expand genuine religious liberty. As a consequence they were not taken as seriously by society as a whole. This legacy is being overcome by the fact that while they remain vulnerable as minorities in today's Poland, they speak out forthrightly and in good conscience on the issues of concern facing the nation.

### **The Economic Situation**

Among the changes in Polish society since 1989, the one affecting the Reformed Church and all other churches most drastically is the adverse economic situation resulting from the difficulties of the transition from a centralized to a market economy and aggravated by the worldwide recession. While the extreme inflation of the first year or so of decommunization had been capped and prices have been stabilized, the latter remain high. The inefficiency, inability to compete in the new market economy, and the privatization of state industries has thrown thousands of people out of work. These people who are unemployed, living on fixed incomes, or who are in professions traditionally underpaid under Communism whose wages still do not reflect the new realities find it very difficult to make ends meet. In addition to this most people with "adequate" incomes have little left in any substantial way after spending on the necessities of life. The church's financial life, of course, depends primarily on the generosity of its members, and there simply is not as much disposable income left for parishioners to give. An interesting sidelight on this problem is that the former president of the Synod Consistory, Włodzimierz Zuzga, who with his wife, Helena, left the state scientific publishing house "PWN", to open their own small publishing firm, "Semper", told me that since going into business for himself, he has had an entirely different perspective on church finances.

As a "church under Communism" the Reformed Church received important though discreet financial assistance from churches in the West, much of it channelled through the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. With the collapse of Communism and the fact that many western churches are struggling financially, too, in a world-wide recession, this outside support has diminished considerably. In addition, a \$100 gift by a visiting church person from the West simply does not go as far as it did in most places of the world even three years ago, thus the church has been forced to do some creative financing. In Warsaw, for instance, the basement of the church has been leased out to a store and warehouse.

### **Social Issues**

In the arena of Polish society the Reformed Church has affirmed its Calvinist heritage in dealing forthrightly with social issues. Four that have been prominent since 1989 are the new post-Communist constitution, religious education in the public schools, the abortion issue, and that of collaboration with the former Communist regime. In addition to the difficulties inherent in each of these issues is that fact that the genuinely held position of the Reformed Church on the first two of them was even before 1989 somewhat similar to that of the Communist government and opposed to the stance of the Catholic Church. That is to say that the Reformed Church has held positions similar to its sister churches in

western secular societies, as did the Communist state--the constitutional separation of church and state which would prohibit religious education in public schools. Also the former Communist authorities frequently used their progressive policies on these issues as a means to criticize the policies of the Catholic Church as reactionary and obscurantist. The situation left the Reformed Church, among others, in the somewhat awkward and uncomfortable position of appearing to be excessively cooperative with the Communist regime, despite its uniquely uncompromising position vis a vis the government.

### **The New Constitution**

The need for a new, post-Communist constitution is supported by all sectors of Polish society. The issue has been joined with the Catholic Church, however, on how the relationship between church and state should be defined. The formula separation of church and state has been opposed by the primate, Cardinal Glemp, because of its inclusion in the constitution of former Communist Poland and its use by the Communist regime and consequent association in the minds of believers as a pretext for persecuting the churches. While the Catholic hierarchy has indicated a willingness to agree to a compromise which recognizes that separation need not be associated with hostility, it is concerned with the connotations of secularism as well, maintaining that Poland is a religious, not a secular nation. Glemp has proposed that the constitution declare the respective autonomy and independence of the church and the state with the recognition of the Catholic Church as a person on public law. The Catholic hierarchy would also have the constitution declare the freedom of religious expression for all other faiths. The Reformed Church and other religious minorities object to this special designation of the Catholic Church in the constitution, feeling justifiably-- based on the constitution and practice of interwar Poland--that such would open the constitutional door to legalized discrimination in favor of the Catholic Church and against other faiths. The Reformed Church advocates a constitutional definition of the separation of church and state along the lines of the constitution of the United States and has devoted several prominent articles in Jednota to the discussion of constitutional issues.

### **Religious Education in the Public Schools**

The Reformed Church has taken a forthright public stand in opposition to religious education in the public schools, classes which are in fact, for Catholics, catechism classes. The former Communist government followed a strict policy of separation of church and state in this area, in large part because of its policy of diminishing and restricting as much as possible religious influences upon children and youth. Yet even during these 45 years the Catholic Church called for obligatory religious education in the schools, as was the case during the interwar period. After great struggles with the state and especially following the rise of Solidarity and the government's subsequent attempts to accommodate the Catholic Church, it succeeded in gaining permission to conduct after school religious education taught by religious personnel in church faculties. This privilege was granted by the state to other faiths as well. By 1989 the Catholic Church had an elaborate and well-staffed system established. Yet his church-based system has since been abandoned.

With the collapse of Communism the Catholic Church demanded and received a government decree mandating the provision of religious education for all youth in all schools, public and private. Public opinion polls on this issue have consistently indicated that while over 60% of the respondents approve of religious education in public schools in general, only about 25% support compulsory classes, roughly 40% support optional classes, and 30-35% are opposed to the idea altogether. Critics of the policy, including the Reformed Church, maintain that both the government and the Catholic Church are ignoring public sentiment on this matter and are riding roughshod over freedom of conscience and the rights of minorities. The Catholic Church, they maintain, is simply pursuing its own agenda and is not interested in the welfare of society as a whole.

Non-Roman Catholic religious groups may offer religious education classes for their students if the numbers of their pupils warrants it. If not they and non-believing students may elect to have a study hour instead. However because students must declare the faith to which they adhere--even if they are non-believers--which becomes part of their school records, this has the effect of stigmatizing and discriminating against all non-Roman Catholic Students. This and the requirement that students submit written statements indicating whether or not they want to take religious education classes violates the rule of silence in religious matters and is held by critics of the policy to be illegal and unconstitutional.

The Synod of the Reformed Church and Jednota, among others, have vigorously protested the actions and policies of the government concerning religious education classes. The synod recently protested a decision of the Education Minister introducing the financing of religious teachers (who are by and large priests, nuns, and other laity) with public money, making the teachers part of the school teaching staff, mandating that grades be given in these classes and be recorded on report cards, as well as allowing for the possibility of prayers during non-religious classes. The synod maintains that religious education should be left to religious bodies and should not be conducted in public schools facilities during school hours. It is interesting, as a matter of irony, that Protestant ministers who have been teaching these classes have generally been well received by the public school teaching staffs because of their high level of education (a university-level masters degree).

### **The Abortion Issue**

The abortion issue has been pushed to the forefront of social issues by the Catholic Church which had always opposed its legalization under Communist rule. There has been widespread public discussion on the subject, and public opinion polls consistently indicate that the majority of Poles would prefer that abortion be allowed to remain legal. Even more respondents would prefer to have a public referendum on the issue. The Catholic Church sees no need for referenda on moral issues and has made the abortion issue one of loyalty to the church. Over the summer the parliament defeated a `liberal' draft of the proposed law, which specified when abortion would be permissible, and when a referendum would be held on the matter. The draft law now before the parliament

would virtually outlaw abortion altogether and penalize physicians who perform them. The final vote will likely be held in the fall of 1992.

The Synod of the Reformed Church issued a statement on abortion in May 1991. It affirmed that human life begins at conception, declared the necessity to protect that life, and deplored the existing wide-scale practice of abortion in Poland as a "social anomaly". Nevertheless it opposed the proposed Catholic Church backed parliamentary bill as punitive and judgmental. It stated that "Christ did not come to judge and punish but to save people from evil." It called the Christian Church to act out of the gospel of love to change human behavior through preaching, teaching, and ministry, focusing especially upon the development of moral values among the youth. This statement was printed in Gazeta Wyborcza (The Electoral Gazette), the leading Polish daily, side by side with the statement on abortion of the Roman Catholic bishops. The Reformed statement was positively received by the public at large as well as by many Roman Catholics. Gazeta Wyborcza received many favorable letters expressing the opinion that "at last Christians are speaking [on the abortion issue] in a Christian way."

### **Collaborators**

The issue of collaboration with the security services of former Communist regimes is one which has affected all post-Communist East Central European societies but has only this May and June surfaced in Poland in a significant way. The affair began as an attempt by one party in a coalition government to discredit its opposition and especially former leaders of Solidarity with a list of 64 names of government members who had collaborated in the past. It quickly appeared that only a minority of those on the list were former agents, and the majority were present-day politicians who the Security Service had tried and failed to recruit. The affair resulted, in part, in the dismissal of that government and the possibility of charges being brought against the former prime minister and his minister of internal security who prepared the list. The whole affair, however, traumatized the country because such smear tactics were reminiscent of the all too recent efforts of the former Communist government to discredit the democratic opposition.

The Polish religious community was especially fearful of its vulnerability because it had been the special focus of Communist penetration and manipulation. Its fears were heightened by the widely publicized revelations over the past year or so of the depth of penetration of churches in neighboring former Communist countries by their security services, for example, the widespread collaboration of church leaders with the "Stasi" in the former East Germany and the virtual control of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy by the K.G.B. in the former Soviet Union. Jednota translated and reprinted a long article on the former and has included information on the latter in its "Ecumenical Review" section. As noted above, the degree of alleged compromise on the part of one person on the staff of the Polish Ecumenical Council has appeared to some to have severely affected the effectiveness of its work altogether.

Pastor Bogdan Tranda wrote an editorial in the June issue of Jednota this year calling for caution, prudence, mercy, and safeguards for those who may be unjustly accused in the pursuit of this affair. After all, he stated, the lists were made up by the Communist security service of people it considered dangerous. He said also in an interview that on the whole the leaders of the Reformed Church and other churches have not been discredited. This is despite the fact that all religious leaders were vulnerable and especially those of the minority faiths. One had to apply for passports and visas through police agencies and was subject to interviews as to the purpose of the travels abroad. And upon return to the country, there were questions about people met while traveling. One was subject to arbitrary penalties for refusing to conform to the demands of the regime. For instance Pastor Tranda was denied an opportunity to study abroad as a result of having allowed a sermon to be read in a Catholic Church during a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity after having been warned not to participate at all. Each person, he said, had to decide where to draw the line in terms of cooperation and how much and what kind of information the authorities had a legitimate right to know.

The majority of church leaders took the position that while one personally may not have felt that the results of the Yalta agreement were just, the Polish Peoples Republic was a legitimate, internationally recognized government. Although the People's Republic frequently did not abide by its own constitution and laws in the exercise of police power, it nevertheless deserved the basic support and allegiance of its citizens, and especially of Christians. Even if the government acted illegally, that did not give people the right to act illegally. The Reformed Church was a legal, recognized entity by the state, not an underground church. Thus lines were drawn between acceptable cooperation and information and unacceptable informing and collaboration, which would include any information or activity that was harmful to other people or illegal. Whether there is more fallout in the religious community in Poland on this issue remains to be seen.

### **The Ministries of the Church**

Two major ministries of the Reformed Church are the re-foundation of a Protestant Hospital in Warsaw and the diaconate of the Warsaw parish. For more than two hundred years, 1736-1944, a Protestant hospital existed in Warsaw. It was destroyed by the Germans during the Second World War. As early as the 1970s emigré Polish Protestants in Switzerland, Germany, and England initiated the idea of rebuilding the hospital. In 1982 a rebuilding committee was formed, which met for the first time in 1983. Among the members was (and is) an emigre Polish Reformed pastor from Detmold, Germany, serving the German Evangelical Reformed Church in Detmold. Ironically the Nazi S.S. General Jürgen Stroop, whose troops blew up the hospital during the war, was from Detmold, also. German participation (both church and government) is seen as an act of reconciliation and Christian solidarity. In 1988 a foundation to raise funds for rebuilding was established and plans were drawn up to build a 500-bed general hospital in the Ursynow district of Warsaw on ground given to the foundation by the local municipality. Intended to be a completely modern hospital in terms of facilities and procedures and serving all people regardless of faith, its realization depends upon the hoped for support

of the Lutheran Church in Poland and contributions in Poland and from abroad. It is hoped that the first patient will be received in 1996.

The diaconate of the Warsaw parish serves as a model for ministry for the entire church. It serves people of all faiths in the Warsaw community as well as members of the Reformed diaspora throughout Poland. In conjunction with the Zinzendorf parish of the Evangelical Church in Berlin and with the cooperation of Warsaw physicians, it operates a pharmacy of imported medicines and drugs not generally available or otherwise extremely expensive in Poland. The diaconate works especially close with people who are old, ill, or living alone, helping them with their medical examinations, directing them to specialists, taking them to hospitals, and providing food, clothing, medicine, and items of personal hygiene when necessary, as well as crutches, wheelchairs, and walkers. Much of this latter work is done with the cooperation of members of the Lutheran Church. They also work with other groups, such as the First Aid Center, the Single Mothers' Home, the friends of Children Society and other children's homes, and especially with handicapped children, and Roman Catholic religious orders. Recently they sent a sum of money to assist with difficulties in Lithuania.

### **The Needs of the Church**

When I asked Pastor Bogdan Tranda what were the primary needs of the Reformed Church with which the churches in the West might be of assistance, he smiled and said there were three: "The first is money; the second is money, and the third is money." His sincere humor accurately reflects the economic consequences of the changes in Poland in the last three years and the anxieties economic instability have brought. While seeking Western economic assistance for specific major projects, such as the Protestant Hospital, at the same time the Reformed Church seeks economic self-sufficiency and independence. More practical assistance is asked for, however, in terms of overcoming the twenty or thirty year cultural gap between East and West as a result of the restrictions imposed on the church and society by the former Communist regime.

The Synod Library of the Reformed Church which serves pastors and the laity as well as Reformed seminarians studying at the Christian Theological Academy is desperately in need of books in Reformed theology and contemporary Biblical studies. Only two books of recent Reformed theology exist in Polish: a translation of works by Dietrich Bonhoeffer by the late Roman Catholic theologian Anna Morawska and a study of the christology of Karl Barth by the Bishop Alfons Nossol. Not even John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion are in Polish, nor are there copies available in French, Latin, German, or English. Until major works of the Reformed tradition are translated into Polish, additions to the Synod Library of such books in English, German, or French would be of great benefit as most Reformed pastors read and all Reformed seminarians study one of these three languages.

In the area of preparing people for ministry and the continuing education of its clergy, the Reformed Church faces difficulties because of the low academic level of the Christian Theological Academy as compared to, for instance the Academy of Catholic Theology in

Warsaw and other Polish theological institutions of university calibre. (Another worry of the present situation is -- it is felt by some -- that less committed and possibly less capable individuals are now able to prepare for ministry.) While the Theological Academy serves the denomination represented in the Polish Ecumenical Council--from Orthodox, Mariavite, and Polish Catholic to Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed--there is no Reformed presence among the faculty; thus, courses and seminars to supplement the education and training of Reformed seminarians and open to parish clergy as continuing education are needed, as well as workshops in the practice of pastoral ministry. Such offerings could be arranged through the synod office in Warsaw and conducted by qualified Western church people who are willing to travel to Poland and spend anywhere from two weeks to a semester. These classes, held in English, German, or French, would also serve a second purpose of providing a practicum in the language of instruction.

With the kind of practical assistance suggested above, the Reformed Church would be enabled to move more rapidly toward meeting its needs for pastoral leadership. While there is an increase in the numbers of people preparing for ministry in the Reformed Church, for instance, it will still be several years before all the present pastoral needs are filled. Specifically more permanent pastoral work is needed among the scattered preaching posts -- which is now done by lay elders -- so that these could possibly develop into self sustaining parishes. Several elder clergy in the established parishes are nearing retirement age and successors need to be trained. The overworked pastor of the 400 member Warsaw parish who serves also as editor and writer for Jednota, an ecumenical representative for the Church, and a host to foreign visitors like this author needs at least one associate pastor, if not two. And looking further into the future, the Reformed Church eventually needs to move beyond the pressing need to provide pastors for all its people in order to allow for, prepare, and make places for those who may be called to serve the church and the ecumenical community as theologians and professors in such institutions as the Theological Academy.

## **Conclusion**

The Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland is struggling to cope with the enormous economic, political, and social changes which have occurred over the past three years and with the continuing transformation of life and institutions which has issued from them and is part of an open democratic society. The transition from a Communist society and a centralized economy to a democratic society and a market economy is unprecedented, unpredictable, and aggravated by the present world economic slowdown. The church struggles with the difficulty of moving toward financial self-sufficiency because of Poland's present economic problems, although it is very likely to achieve this independence as Poland's economy strengthens and improves. The church is confronted as well with new social forces unleashed by these changes, some of which were repressed by the former Communist regime and now find free expression and others of which have gained nearly unrestricted access in society with the collapse of Communism. As the initial shock that was part of the sheer joy accompanying these almost overwhelming and somewhat traumatic changes passes, the church recognizes that the present transformation will continue indefinitely and that change is a basic aspect of a free

society. Thus the church seeks stability, normality, and orderly change in the new Polish context.

For more than fifty years, counting the years of the Second World War, the Reformed Church has been in a survival mode. Now it has the opportunity to live a normal existence, recognizing that what was considered typical under Communism was nonetheless abnormal, as were war-time conditions. Yet while what becomes normal for the Reformed Church in the new Polish context may have many similarities with its sister churches in the West, there will continue to be substantial differences because of the uniqueness of its experience under Communism. Among these differences is that of dealing with attitudes and behavior conditioned by forty-five years of Communist rule and imposed social patterns--habits which ordinarily do not change rapidly. At the same time, without the clearly defined threat to its existence that Communism posed, requiring a discriminating faith and a deep level of commitment, the church is faced with the lower levels of commitment. It also is confronted with the challenges of rising consumerism and more appealing forms of materialism and secularism than prevailed under the former regime. In the face of these it must focus the message of the gospel on what it means to be a Christian and a church in a different kind of alien society.

The Reformed Church has much to offer in applying the gospel and its experience to the new Polish context, for despite its present difficulties it has the opportunity to strengthen and expand its mission. In its ministry it offers a Christ-like model of self-giving and service to people in need regardless of condition or creed. It is taking leadership in developing ecumenical and interfaith relations at the grass-roots level, fostering common ministries at all levels, and providing leadership and a forum for dialogue at the level of the Polish Ecumenical Council. Thus it is giving the ecumenical movement in Poland needed depth and integrity. More uniquely, however, though it still experiences constraints deriving from its status as a minority church, it finds that this situation has providential aspects. While it now enjoys the blessings of religious freedom in its own life, the constraints it continues to experience in Polish society serve to temper any tendency toward triumphalism. Although it has moved from a half-century of oppression and repression, the church now experiences a situation of (unwanted) tolerance and occasional expressions of intolerance (mainly in the social arena). In this new situation it continues to move toward full freedom and equality for itself and other religious and ethnic minorities. The Reformed Church provides a critical and responsible element in Polish social discourse, while bringing to bear the time-honored though largely unrecognized tradition of the Polish Reformation. In being faithful to the gospel it is called to proclaim, the Evangelical Reformed Church makes a vital contribution to Polish society as "the church reformed and always reforming."