

My Testimony

A believer's testimony from Eastern European countries (Ashkenazic testimony from Poland)

By Kazimierz Barczuk

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me.

Is. 6:8

My Testimony:

My name is Kazimierz Barczuk. I am 57. I have been married for 32 years and my wife's name is Dorota.

I am the third generation of evangelical believers - of course, we can't inherit salvation but being born in such a family can bring you closer to God. The first person in our family who accepted Jesus as her Saviour was my grandmother. She was an Orthodox Jew. She lived in this part of Poland which now is in the Ukraine. Then her husband met Jesus and her children also (she had 12 of them). My mother was one of those children. Many people from their village were born again at that time, so they started a church where my grandfather was a pastor. It was before the War World II. When the War broke out, Ukrainian believers helped our family to hide. Each of the children was in a different family at a different place. Thank God, everybody survived. After the war my family settled in western Poland in Glubczyce. They started a small church there, where my grandfather was the pastor.

I was born there in 1953. Nobody at my home ever talked about our Jewish roots and so I found out that I am a Jew when I was an adult. As I have already mentioned, I was born in a Christian family and I accepted Jesus as my savior when I was 19. It was 38 years ago. For five years I served at our church in Glubczyce and then in 1976 I moved to Warsaw in order to study at a Bible college. And it has been 32 years now since I started ministering in Christian Fellowship in Warsaw as one of the pastors, with a 5 years' break (from 1986 to 1991 I was a pastor in a small church in Katowice). For the last 16 years, I have been in charge of Ostroda Camp, a holiday resort place that belongs to Christian Fellowship. Each year we organize Christian camps for children, youth, families and elderly people there.

About 19 years ago, God called me to the ministry among Jews. At first we met at our home and the beginnings were small, but now we meet regularly at the Christian Fellowship church's chapel each Friday evening. About 80 to 100 people come to these meetings, many of them have been born again and baptized. The main goal of our ministry is to bring Humanitarian help to Jews from eastern European countries like Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, etc. Many of people that we have ministered to are now born again, too. With our help, a lot of new Messianic congregations have been started.

When I finished the Bible College in 1978, I met a beautiful woman - Dorota Bajenska. We fell in love and we got married, and for 32 years we have been together. We have got

three daughters Estera, Marta and Karolina. Estera is already married, to Adam Panczak and they have got two daughters, Noemi and Miriam. Marta is also married, to Marek Pasnik, and they have two children – Benjamin and Jonatan. Karolina has also got married recently. Michał Kupczyk is her husband and they are expecting their first baby. Our children serve the Lord and presently they are all involved in a Christian Foundation - PROeM in Tomaszow Mazowiecki.

My wife and my children are a great support to me in my ministry and without them none of the things I do, would be possible. I am very grateful to God for all of them, and also for the fact that they are the fourth generation serving our Lord.

My Adventure with Christ

I am the third generation who love God and the Messiah Jesus in my family. My Grandmother was an Orthodox Jew. She once lived at the eastern frontier of Poland, which is now in the Ukraine. I got to know the story of her life when I was already a grown up man, from what Grandma's children, my uncles and my mother, would remember and tell us. Unfortunately, Grandma herself never talked about her roots, she would never tell us, her grandchildren, about her ancestors, her family, her life before or during the War. Listening to stories told by various members of the family I tried to put this story together.

Grandma Haika came from an Orthodox family, her father was an Orthodox Jew and in compliance with the tradition he had chosen a fiancé for his daughter. Just like in The Fiddler on the Roof, it was the father who decided whom his daughter is to marry. The father had a candidate – a rich Jew, but my Grandma didn't love him. She was in love with someone else. He was a business partner of her father, they bought and sold horses together, yet the father did not approve of the young Polish man.

My grandfather driven by his great love to Haika, didn't ask her father's permission to marry her but shattered the peace of the whole family by abducting his beloved on horseback. He came rushing to her house one day, put her on a horse he brought for her, and they escaped to the woods. The family were shaken and they chased after the fugitives. The young lovers hid in the woods for two weeks, and one night they ran into a swamp. Grandpa kept his beloved in his arms all night long so that she wouldn't get wet or dirty. Then they got married and it would be nice to say they lived happily ever after...

It all began like that. Grandma was working in her garden one day when a man came up to the fence and said: Haika, the Messiah who you are waiting for, has already come. It is Jesus. And then the man left. She stopped working, leaned on her hoe, looked up into the sky and said to her God: Dear God, you have seen that man and you have heard what he said. Tell me how it is.

It was the most important question in her life – tell me how it is. It is a crucial question to all men. If there are any questions deep down in our hearts, then God is the right and only person to address them to. If we turn to him with our doubts, He is sure to answer us.

Grandma turned to her God with an earnest request – God, tell me how it is. Is Jesus the Messiah? And God answered her. He filled her with the Holy Spirit. She began to pray. She had never experienced anything like that before, but she knew one thing for sure – Jesus is the Messiah!

Later on she spoke to her husband about what had happened to her. It was not easy to her, like it wasn't to any other Jew, who believed in Jesus. My Grandpa, a Pole, believed also that Jesus was the Messiah. And after that, many others believed in that village, and Grandpa became the leader of a new fellowship...

The War broke out. Hard times began for Jews and Poles. Grandma had twelve children, my mom was one of them. Each child was hid by a different Ukrainian family of believers. Grandma kept only the youngest one with her. The whole family, Grandma, Grandpa and their twelve children, all survived. After the war, together with many other expatriate families, they arrived in Poland and settled in Opole area.

When the War was over my Grandma changed her name to Klara. It was after World War II that many Jews, the first time in their history, voluntarily changed their first names and surnames. I think they did that out of fear, maybe they feared not so much for themselves, but for the generations to come. I had always known my Grandma as Klara. We never talked about Grandma's Jewish roots in the family. When I was 26, Grandma died. She died in hospital. When we claimed her personal belongings, one of the things the hospital staff gave us was Grandma's handbag. Never in our lives would we have dreamt of looking through Grandma's personal things, but now we did not have a choice. Among various feminine little things, my uncle found a black-and-white picture.

It was a picture of the Jordan River and it was taken in 1963. Grandma got the picture from a friend of hers, who in year 1963 visited Israel, his Land. He gave the picture to my Grandma, and twenty years later she still carried it in her handbag, among the most necessary belongings. I cannot say how often she looked at the picture, but I can imagine that she often thought about her Land, her roots, though she never mentioned it to her family. She had the picture with her since it had been given to her, until the day she died. I suppose that picture was the expression of her deep longing after the Land of her forefathers. When my uncle gave it to me, I wondered and asked what it meant. And then I learned I was a Jew. I just graduated from a Christian seminary, started my preparations for full time ministry, became a pastor, and then I learned I was a Jew.

I continued to serve as a minister in one of Christian churches... In 1991, I started to ponder the question of my calling in life. I began asking God important questions. One time, when I was reading the Word of God, I realized that I would really want to know what God's expectations from me were. I turned to him with those words: Lord, you know what is in my heart and I would like to know what is in yours. I wish I could learn what your dreams are, what you are thinking of. What is your joy and what makes your heart heavy? What causes you to be angry? And I told God again: You know my heart, I desire to know yours.

I remember how I started reading Paul's epistle to Romans 10:1 – **'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.'** Paul is often considered to be the apostle of Gentiles, but here he expresses his heart's desire, which is for the salvation of Israel. All of us, no matter of who we are or what we do, have insatiable desires in our hearts. Paul was the apostle to Gentiles, he ministered among them, but in the prayer to God, he expressed his dreams and heart felt desire – for the salvation of Jews.

I realized then that it was also my prayer to God, and I repeated after Paul: "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." And I also said to God: Lord, if this is also your desire for my life, I want to fulfill it. Later on I told my wife about it: Dorota, I said, something is going to change in our ministry. I will minister among Jews. She looked at me with fear in her eyes and asked if I was going to quit being a pastor. She asked: So what are you going to be from now on, what about our ministry, what about me? I answered that I didn't know what I was going to do. I communicated my decision to the elders and other pastors in my church. I told them: Let me go to my Brethren. I am not going to leave the church or quit my pastoral ministry, but I want to minister to my Brethren. I told them also that I had served them longer than Jacob did for Laban. You remember how Jacob fell in love with Rachel, Laban's daughter and he wanted to marry her. He had to serve Laban for seven years to get Rachel, but actually it was another seven years of service before he was able to marry her. /Gen. 29:18, 27/

My wife, Dorota, comes from church where I served as a pastor. I got to know her teaching mathematics to her as a tutor. I was a seminary student at that time and I gave private lessons to earn extra money. Six months later we met again at a winter camp in Karpacz, which I had helped to organize. On the New Year's night in 1977/1978, I took Dorota for a walk and right then I proposed to her. She said: 'Yes', and we have been happily married for 32 years now.

At that time, I wasn't quite sure what my ministry was going to be. I was asked if I wanted to leave for Israel, or for the United States, or maybe for the Soviet Union (still in existence then). Where are you going to look for Jews you want to minister to?, many asked. I would reply that I did not plan to go anywhere, that I wanted to minister to my Brothers right there and then. ... I began to have Sabbath meetings at my home. Step by step, I started to learn Jewish traditions, which I should have been familiar with but I wasn't.

I remember the first Sabbath I had with my close family – just my wife, daughters and myself. We lit the Sabbath candles, put 'chala' on the table and prayed to God with traditional Sabbath prayers. Next time we invited a lady who used to work at a Jewish Theatre in Warsaw. She accepted our invitation. During the supper she told us that she had not celebrated the Sabbath meal since World War II. It was for her the first time after the War. She asked if she could bring her friend the next time. We were not sure if we would continue to have those meetings but her words encouraged us to do so. And so the next Sabbath evening we spent together again. Thanks to this couple, we got to know

many wonderful people of my Nation: Jewish War Veterans, Holocaust Children and also those, who during the War helped to rescue Jews and have then been honored with the Award of A Righteous Among The Nations.

When I started thinking about this ministry, I didn't know any Jews. Thanks to these two influential people who took part in our first Sabbath meetings, I could meet more and more Jews. There was one problem, however, they were mostly quite advanced in age, and the time was short. I wanted to meet them all and reach out to them with what is the most important things of all... There were more and more participants of the Sabbath meetings, our flat became too small. We started meeting at our church in one of the classrooms but in the course of time that place proved to be too small to hold us all. So I organized regular Sabbath meetings in the main hall of our church. This tradition has been continuing for many years now, and each Friday evening we meet in the meeting hall of Christian Fellowship church in Warsaw.

The Sabbath meetings are attended by Jews and non-Jews, by believers and non-believers. They are open to everybody, but I have set one conditions: If you want to take part in our Sabbath celebrations, you have to be a Jew, if you are not, you have to like Jews.

My idea was not to start any Messianic congregation, but to have Sabbath meetings at a Christian Church for Jews and non-Jews, who want to learn the Words of God together. I was successful in achieving two goals through my ministry. One is to send good signals to Jews that there are Christians, that there is a church that want to meet them and take care of them. I was often asked why we had Sabbath meetings at Christian Fellowship. I was glad to give the answers. Organizing the meetings at church was a way to send signals to Jews that there was a Christian church that cared for them, and the other important message was addressed to the church – the church should feel responsible also for Jews. This way I can teach the church that it is our responsibility and our task. And I can say that throughout years of my ministry many Jews and Christians had the opportunity to meet at my church. I must say that it is not easy for Jews to go to church, to enter it, but all those who come to visit us learn that this church is friendly to Jews.

In the beginnings of my ministry, to encourage the church to co-operate, I used to organize special Jewish events – once a month we had Jewish music concerts. At first they were held once a month, and now every Sabbath, in the main hall of Christian Fellowship in Warsaw, at 114 Pulaska Street, Jews and Christians meet with the cross in the background and by the light of menorah, to pray together and learn from God's Word, and to understand the calling of God. Also, there are annual meetings of the Society of Jewish Veterans, Children of the Holocaust and the Righteous Among the Nations held in the main chapel of our church.

As I have mentioned earlier, it is not easy for a Jew to go to church, but at our Sabbath meetings we have had lots and lots of visitors, who know this church is friendly to them. Some of these people have become our close friends and many shared the stories of their lives with us. I remember one elderly lady – a Jew from Vilnius. I once talked to her

about the Holocaust and I asked why, in the wartime, they didn't knock on some door and ask for help. She replied: who were we to knock, who wanted to help, who wanted to open their door... Who?... When I heard those words, a desire was born in my heart to encourage the Church to open its doors, to make room for Jews so that they know they can come to Church for help at any time. I am not saying that Jews need help today, I just want the church to send signals to Jews that they are welcome, that church is a good address for them and they can always knock on its door.

Today I would like to encourage all Christians to open our homes and churches, to make Jews welcome, to convince Jews that our phone numbers are the right ones for them to call in times of need. That our elder Brethren would know they can call and they will receive help... I have a dream for our churches to be friendly and willing to help, for our homes and churches to have open doors, to be ready to express friendship and provide help, for our personal and church telephones to be ready to respond when someone calls and asks for help. I wish Jews could know that this is a good address, that this is a good phone number to call, that they will surely receive help there...