

Jamey Simmons 2024 ICX Jazz Mission to Poland

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you very much. If somebody's new here and they don't know me, everybody just calls me trumpet player. So, but my real name is Jamie Simmons.

And I'm a musician. And earlier this summer, this spring, I should say, I was involved in a kind of a unique ministry opportunity.

And it is called, you can see up here, this isn't, this is some church folks mixed in with us, but you can see it's called the ICX Jazz Movement.

You might say, what is that? That's kind of a head scratcher. Well, hopefully by the end of this, you'll kind of know what's up with that. So we went to Poland and it's an absolute blessing of an experience for me.

And we'll tell you a little bit more about it during this talk. So big thanks to Jerry for helping with this, get this up here. So we're set for the next one there.

[1 : 08] There we go. Okay. So a couple quick facts about Poland. I had never been before, but it is a country of about 37 million.

So rather sizable population. And of course we all know that it's had a really tragic history. So it is mostly Catholic, 33 million by most statistics, somewhere around there.

It's fallen off in the past years. And there's Orthodox believers there too. And 87,000 Protestants.

And I was looking at the breakdown of that. And some of those are cults that we would say, ah, probably not Christians, but other Protestant denominations.

Poland, Poland, it's pretty interesting, has been really hospitable to Ukrainian refugees. And if you know anything over there, it's a mess.

[2 : 11] It is really a big political mess. So we did see and meet Ukrainian refugees while we were there and heard some really sad stories. But the church is really active and living there in that area.

The border is very tight between these countries, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. We met Belarusian believers while we were there.

And if you know anything about that country, it's basically a Russian, it's under Russian rule. It has a puppet government that is very allied with Russia.

So that's the situation there. So you wonder, what are we doing there? Well, a little bit of backstory is that my former boss, he was very supportive of me having a Bible study at MTSU.

And he kind of jokingly called my office the upper room. And he was great. But one of the things that happened through him, I learned of another trumpet player and musician named Tom Richeson.

[3 : 27] Tom Richeson is a really, just really a sweet believer and a really serious musician.

And I got to know him a little bit. Well, I got this call last year saying, Jamie, I have some things where I can't go on the Poland mission.

Would you be interested in doing this this year? And I said, and you know, I prayed about it. And after a while, the Lord led me to apply for it and ask for some references.

And I was accepted. So what the ministry is, it's called proclaim ministries. And their approach to evangelism is kind of different.

The basic philosophy is that when people are, well, first of all, there are all sorts of ways of communicating the gospel. I think the real cool thing is that each one of us has gifts and we are able to serve and love people in Jesus name in totally different ways.

[4 : 38] So the way proclaim does it, they say that what we are to do is proclaim and reach people for Jesus Christ by using our gifts and talents in the arts.

So this was a great opportunity to be with people who do what I do. Of course, we're all musicians and some support staff, but we all love Jesus and want to spread the word and the gospel through art.

Sometimes when people are, they encounter the gospel. If, if you encounter the gospel and just, you know, by word, it's great and it's powerful, but sometimes people, when they, uh, hear a song that's composed of something theological or spiritual, then, oh, then it's cool and it's artistic. So it's based around spreading, uh, God's truth. And you can go look, look up this, uh, ministry, proclaim international. Uh, the website is, is right there.

It's pretty outstanding. Some of the things they do, they do bluegrass performances. They're going to Edinburgh, Scotland with a bluegrass band, I believe in, uh, uh, August.

[5 : 59] So all sorts of different things. Okay. What is the ICX, uh, jazz? Well, I kind of call this a, it's a front organization and ICX stands for international cultural exchange.

And what they do is this group goes to places like they've been to China. They've been to Egypt. Uh, they have a ministry in South Africa that they're developing right now, but some of the places that they go are very sensitive about how you can get in and take the gospel in.

So this way, it looks like, uh, okay, here are a bunch of jazz musicians. They're coming. But when we get there, we use culture and music history and, um, the message all are interwoven.

So that's what ICX jazz is. Okay. What is, what was the music like? Well, first of all, the end of this, I put my web address so you can go, uh, of the group is available on YouTube.

So really cool because that was the one church. It was a church of African refugees that lived in Warsaw that we played for. And they all spoke English.

[7 : 30] So we didn't have to have any translator, which was really nice. Um, and it was really interesting because John, one of the leaders in the ministry had lived in France as, as a missionary for years.

So he was speaking French and English. It was kind of wild. Um, so the music was all geared towards three different kinds of things.

It was original music composed by some of the band members with titles. You can see the titles, I mean, the search forgiveness. I like this one. Uh, this was one that Greg Tardy, the saxophonist wrote called the omnipresent cardiologist.

Okay. Okay. And that was a way to introduce the tune. Who do you think the omnipresent, who can really see the depths of the human heart? Um, God can, right?

Uh, so that was a way to work in the story of this. Uh, another tune called cure was Greg's composition that focused on telling the story and the, uh, the mood and the attitude of the story of, uh, how Moses held up the bronze serpent in the wilderness so that, uh, those who were bitten by the snakes, uh, could look on it and be healed.

[8 : 51] And the story of how that perfectly foretells, uh, Jesus Christ being lifted up on the cross for our sins. So, uh, kind of real creative approach to how you can get across the gospel.

Um, of course we had some, uh, gospel favorites in there too. I believe we do, uh, we do most of these on the video that's online. Uh, will the circle be unbroken?

I mean, that was kind of our closer and it's, it's not maybe how you would hear it played in bell buckle, but you might kind of enjoy hearing how you would jazz up something like that.

Um, also take my hand, precious Lord. I'll talk about that in a bit. Um, um, another one, an original song by Mark, the guitarist was centered around a poem that his grandmother had written called Love Can't Be Told.

And it was based on, um, John 15, 13 is that? Right? Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for another.

[9 : 57] So the, the attitude of that song was based on that scripture. So, so yeah, some of these tunes, of course, like I was saying, have a story.

Um, if any of you know, how many of you know the tune, take my hand, precious Lord. I mean, that's, that's a gospel favorite. It's really, some people think that's what really started, um, uh, the black gospel movement in the forties and the thirties and forties.

And Thomas Dorsey was, he was a ragtime and jazz pianist, but the Lord kept calling him to be in church music and to write songs.

Um, well, he was away playing piano for a gospel choir performance in St. Louis, and he got a phone call and his wife and unborn child both died in the year.

And childbirth while he was gone. So he came home to Chicago and he was just devastated and he couldn't do anything for a long time. And finally a friend said to him, you have to take, you have to go to the Lord to take this burden off you to help heal.

[11 : 23] And so what he did was take my hand, precious Lord came right out of that experience. So we got to tell about what the lyrics were for this tune and how, uh, beauty and life can still come out of death.

And that's how, uh, music and the Christian message, uh, kind of join. So, um, um, I'll talk a little bit about the people.

They're kind of interesting because really, uh, I'm very thankful. I just praise God that I got to be with some really, really good, strong believers who are great musicians.

And they have kind of a wide background. Uh, Wally was our pianist and he's, uh, he was in church planting in Minneapolis and he was a worship leader for years, but he has a, a background in jazz piano.

Um, um, so he now works at a college teaching worship arts, both the theological side of it and, um, and also the musical side of it.

[12 : 34] And John, our leader kind of joked to the audience that he has more degrees than a thermometer. So, um, um, Greg Tardy, he teaches over, he's one of my colleagues over at that, uh, orange school that I will not mention.

Um, but he is a great musician has played with a bunch of different, uh, jazz legends. And he wrote a lot of music, uh, for us for this trip.

Um, Mark Bowling, he's my roommate. He's my roommate in the hotel. So I got to know Mark really, really well. And he has a great story.

I got not only to, to know his music and, and his playing and get to play with him, but, um, I learned about his testimony, which is, which is really, really cool. Um, and he taught at UT for years and is retired now.

Um, John and Diana Bowers, they, they were really, really great to get to know because they have a real heart for missions.

[13 : 42] They've done this for two decades now, this ministry. So they have a lot of history with different churches around Poland and in Europe.

They lived in France for a long time. Um, Diana, uh, they're both vocalists, but Diana, I want to talk about her because sometimes I go to that, uh, scripture that talks about us being about God using humbler things and the weaker things of the world to confuse the mighty.

Uh, Diana actually, uh, Diana actually, and, and she's okay if I talk about this because she came right up to me and she said, you know, I've had an aneurysm, didn't you?

And I said, uh, no, but, um, Diana, uh, had an aneurysm about 28 years ago and she struggles with that.

But when she goes up and talks to people after concerts, people flock around her and it's just, when I see that, when I, when I think about it, I actually get kind of emotional because, um, she has a heart for people and she draws them out.

[14 : 56] Sometimes there are people that they don't speak any English and somehow she makes a connection with them. So watch for a lot of the pictures. She'll be hugging on people and talking to people.

So she, she was, she and John both were a huge blessing to get to know on this. to it. Um, Abe is a drummer from Croatia and he went to music school in Graz, Austria, uh, but he didn't get accepted. So he said, okay, I'll go to get my theology degree. Um, so he actually became a church musician in Croatia and is a professional musician.

You can see by his smile that he's just a really great guy. So, uh, uh, Mike Choby, he's a worship leader in Chicago and, uh, he was, he is a deep thinker.

So, uh, uh, did you ever hear, and he'd bring up scripture and he'd bring up scripture and he prayed fervently. So, uh, I really liked that about Mike. And these two gentlemen, our kind of partially support staff.

[16 : 14] Pasha Shelpuk, he's from Belarus. And Greg Davis lived in Germany for years. He's originally American. He was our sound man. So you see all that gear there in those cases.

We had to take that in and out of every performance. So we prayed for people's backs a lot during this tour because it was not light stuff.

So both just great, great people. Okay, I put this up here because the whole aspect of being on a mission, I think, and I think PJ, you had this happen too when you went to Alaska.

The people that you're put with are really special. And you form this bond that you know is for a reason because God is working through it.

So I've been reading Romans 1 and studying through this. For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, so that you may be established.

[17:19] That is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. This was Paul, and he was a hero.

He's a hero of our faith. And he's saying, I want to be with you so we can all encourage each other. And that's really how it felt to do this.

Not only just the people that I was put with in the group doing the presentations, but also the people that we met in the churches. So that was a huge blessing.

So we rehearsed for a couple days, and then we went out to various cities. We did eight concerts in seven different cities in Poland.

I'll show you where those are in just a second. Our focus, whenever we'd get on the bus, John Bowers would usually lead us in a devotion, and it was focused on Colossians 1.

[18:18] And he challenged us. He said, hey, I'm really good at praying. I'm really good at praying for myself. And if we really think about that, yeah, that kind of hit home.

So we went through that chapter. Do we pray for bearing fruit? Do we pray for knowing God's will? For wisdom and understanding in his word?

For endurance and patience? Do we pray for our other team members? We prayed before each rehearsal. We prayed. We even stopped rehearsals to pray.

And, of course, performances, we prayed beforehand, and the pastors would pray. We had no idea what they were saying. But we're like, amen! So we were constantly praying together, which was so cool.

We had different people give testimonies, talk about their music. Some of them talk about their backgrounds and gave gospel messages through an interpreter.

[19:26] I'm talking kind of, am I talking faster than you, Billy Joe? No, no, I'm not talking that fast. Here's some pictures of kind of how it worked.

I like this picture because that means Jesus Christ, the same today, yesterday, and forever. So I believe that's what that, I looked it up on Google Translate.

So I really like that picture. This is kind of pictures of the group in action, and you can kind of see the different members. Different size churches.

Okay. Different places. I'll talk about this place. It's like, oh, they're church now. It's not church. We played at a music school for one of these, and the room was so small, we were just thinking there's no way we can fit in there.

So they let us play out in the square, which was this palace. And we got about four times the amount of people we could have fit in that room. It was just, we were praising God that that was the case.

[20:36] So different churches. I'll talk about that guy in just a second. I think I have another picture. These are some of the people involved, some of the pastors. This right up here on the bottom, that's John, our singer, next to a man who was a church planter when communism, when Poland was still communist.

He and three or four other pastors, the guy was told, was that they all sat down with a map of Warsaw, and they put pins on the map where they wanted churches to be, and they prayed for them.

And now some of the churches that are involved there in Warsaw, we got to meet them. So really a great testimony. This church up here, I think there are pictures of it here.

These are some of the pastors, some of the people we met. Now, this is after the presentations and the concerts.

This was probably the most important time because we were taught to age people, and to say, hey, what did you think about, of course, they were like, yeah, the music's great.

[21:55] Oh, well, what did you think about the presentation? You know, what do you think about Jesus Christ? And just engage them in that conversation. We got good stories of people that have come to church, and we heard of one case where one of the people at the concert last year saved in the interim from when they were there last week.

So, I mean, praise God. It's really fun to be able to hear about that sort of thing. And if you notice, Diana, I mean, she's always engaging people, and we prayed with believers in different churches, different needs.

We got to know families. It was really a sweet time after those concerts where we could be an encouragement. Let's go to the next one.

Or people were surprised at the concert. That's okay. Let it roll. Yeah. Oh, okay. So, we are so grateful for having ICX Jazz this weekend in Plock, which was an astonishing performance.

So, first of all, we are happy that more than 150 people come to the church building, which they wouldn't do otherwise.

[23 : 27] Secondly, they could hear really music, jazz music, on the highest level. Well, what is important for us that we could show to our city as a church that we can do some very interesting things.

This event was really interesting for our city. So, the government sees that church is active and can do great things.

Also, the third thing I would say is so important, that our church sees that people from the United States can come and serve with their gifts, with their talents.

And it's so, you know, encouraging for our church. So, thank you one more time for your visit.

And the last thing I say is that God arranged the dates of this coming because the ICX Jazz concert started the U.S. week in our town in which volunteers from U.S., students' volunteers, are going to teach English in high school in Plock.

[25 : 02] So, this was a great beginning of U.S. week in Plock. Thank you very much. So, yeah, isn't that... that's pretty cool. So, praise God, we ended up there with a bunch of other Americans and they were there working there all week, so we got to meet them.

And that's just a little bit of an example. Usually, the ratio was... We'd usually get kind of... They'd, like, triple or quadruple the amount of people that usually would show up for a service.

So, it was amazing. We were reaching the unchurched in a really cool way. And I think we do that here, too, through a lot of the things that we do. So, we were able to help in that.

Okay? So, pray. I want you to pray, to continue to pray for this ministry because it's a real vibrant kind of ministry.

Pray that there are some governmental and a little bit of resistance from authorities sometimes. We need to pray also... We found in one community, there's a really...

[26 : 17] One of the towns... Well, I'll talk about it in a little bit. Pray for the Jewish community and also Ukrainians and the relationship in those communities.

Pray for the coming years. So, pray for the harvest to come in. Okay. Okay.

This is just an example of the hospitality of the people at the various churches. I mean, they fed us all the time.

It was like a pierogi is a little stuffed dumpling from Poland. And I thought I kind of looked like a pierogi by the time I left.

But anyway, they were so hospitable. This church up here, I thought this was really cool. You can see their missions. They had a world map and they had pointed out where they do missions in their church.

[27 : 29] So, Kenya, Georgia, the Republic of Georgia. I can't see what some of the others are up there. This is another church.

You can see they live near an air base, which has U.S. service members. So, they pray for a church in Dearborn, Michigan, because they have a ministry to Muslims there.

Also, a church in Texas. So, it was really, really humbling. They have a three-hour-long monthly prayer meeting where they pray for their missions, among other things.

You can see the cities there that we hit. You can see the stars mostly along the eastern side of Poland. So, a lot of Ukrainians, refugees we met.

Ukraine is right down here below Belarus. Here's some of the churches, pictures of the churches we visited. This was in Pwosk, who you just heard the pastor at that church speak.

[28 : 38] I like that picture. That's their fence with Christian fishes on that, with the Catholic church in the distance. This was in Lublin, very close to Ukraine.

They have an actual ministry. Part of their congregation is Ukrainian. So, we had two translators, and it was like, everything took so long. But, hey, we were just patient with that.

The pastor has a special heart for the Ukrainians. And you can see the different flags there. And so, they actually house Ukrainian refugees and help them with expenses.

This was Rodson Podlaski, where we had the castle, the, by the castle. In that community, there's a lot of tension politically, because the town wants to commemorate.

This was a large Jewish community before World War II. So, there's a lot of pain and a lot of darkness surrounding that. Some people wanted a big memorial, and some people were fighting against it.

[29 : 56] And the church, I believe this church is partly, we kind of picked up Messianic Jewish vibes, which is Jewish Christians. So, pray for that community.

More pictures. We got to do master classes in music schools as a community service. This is Bialystok, which was a Baptist church.

And we actually had it in a city auditorium, which they have good relations with the government.

And this town called Elk, they have a special ministry to children and adults with special needs.

They just built a whole wing of their church for this. This is a church that they're serious about, really serious about prayer. In Warsaw, we sort of played at a mega church.

And it was an ex, kind of a soccer field that they had, an indoor soccer field that they had made into a church. And you can tell by that big screen.

[31 : 10] I mean, we gave Greg, the saxophonist, kind of a hard time about, yeah, he has such a big head. He was like, oh, shut up. I didn't know they were going to do that.

So, and this is also the pastor of the African Refugee Church there. Sweet people. If you watch the performance online, go to the end of it and hear his prayer.

It is amazing. It was so humbling. If you hear it, I believe the last thing he prayed was, Lord, when you bring these people back to their homes, we pray that everyone, that their families would be there at home.

That was pretty humbling to hear that. So, I'm going to skip this one. And there's, by the way, there's my website.

If you want to look up that concert, it's on there. You've got to scroll down on my main page and you can hear that. Got a couple things that I want to pray about here before the end.

[32 : 18] Just pray for the harvest. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.

I do want to thank, I really, we have to pray for the body of believers wherever we do missions, for their encouragement. Pray for the refugees.

Pray for the nation of Poland because they are freedom-loving people. I was really struck. You know, some of the things that go on morally in our nation, I didn't see that in Poland.

And so, I'm praying that we can be, take some of their, some of the things that they have in their culture and use them here. So, I pray that we can have an impact in our daily lives here.

I praise him for the people that he put me with. And the people that we were able to spread the gospel and talk about Christ with.

[33 : 33] I'm really, and finally, I'm really thankful to you as a church. You were very, very supportive of this mission.

So, I just thank you all that I could do this. And I hope I represented War Trace Baptist well. And I just give you thanks for your support of missions.

I just, I think we can keep doing this and be a church that supports this. So, thank you so much for your part in this.

Thank you. And I'll turn it, turn it over to Billy Joe. So. Oh, yeah. Yeah, any, do you have any questions for me? I don't know.

I talked to Tom Richardson and he said, oh, we could have two trumpets in the band. It's like, yeah, that's true. I don't know.

[34 : 32] We'll see. I'm praying about it. So, yeah. Why is there such controversy in the town that wants to build a memorial for the Jews that were there previously?

What's the? What's the? What's the? What's the? I don't know, Christy. I don't know the intricacies of it. There was a mayor that for years was very resistant to even talk about it.

And finally, they have a new young mayor. And I think we met him and he actually gave us a tour of that palace the next day.

And we talked a little bit about it. And I think he was able to see what a church could do. Okay. And what we could do for the community. And I think he is intent on changing that.

And they're probably within the next couple of years or so, they're going to have some things that will hopefully help heal that situation. Yes, Barnett.

[35 : 42] The feeling I got was maybe a little bit of both.

I mean, it isn't persecution like you'd think in some countries. But it definitely, I think it was there. I wasn't really privy to how that was working.

But, yeah, I mean, when you have 33 million Catholic people, they're very, I think maybe that's such a strong tradition there that we don't know what that's like.

You know, and I was praying for that, too, because I remember on that one where we performed in the square, I saw three nuns walk through the square.

And I thought, oh, Lord, please, maybe they can stop and listen. And, you know, they kept walking. So I don't know exactly how that's working. But I know we were told to be winsome and to realize that there would be people at these concerts that are probably of that.

[37 : 02] And we just really stressed that you don't have to do anything to earn your salvation, to earn forgiveness. But, you know, just preached the saving grace of Jesus.

Okay. Okay. If there aren't any more questions. I don't know if you're a big fan. I really can't hear his name.

What's the only internet that attracted to Russia? In Belarus. Yeah. Yeah. But yet he was coming into Poland. That's right.

Across the border. That's right. I will tell you about that. And it gets really bad. In Belarus, it's really bad. Christians are persecuted.

I met one gentleman. I left his name off of there. He was kind enough. He was a member of the Warsaw Church. And he was kind enough to take me to the Warsaw Jewish Museum, the history of Jewish people in Poland, which is fascinating.

[38 : 08] I got to see kind of what the inside of a synagogue looks like. They had it. And all this different history. He's a real history guy, and so am I.

So we were geeking out on it. He was like, we've got to get going or we're not going to get through this museum. So his story is that he was a singer in a contemporary Christian band in Europe for years and years.

And they were really popular in the Eastern Bloc countries. And after he ended his singing career, he was a dentist by trade, had a large dentist office in Belarus.

And because the persecution got so bad, his dad was a pastor. So he grew up in that Christian environment. He had a wild story about how his dad went to the grocery store and a KGB agent stuck a bunch of British pounds in his dad's pocket because they were going to frame him.

And a lady in the grocery store thought he was being robbed. So she said, please, please get him. He's robbing him.

[39 : 21] He's robbing him. So the KGB agent actually fled the scene, and his dad was left with all these British pounds. So when he went away to college, that was his dorm money or something like that.

So he has stories that will just blow your mind. But this guy had to suspend his dentist practice because they monitor your social media, your texts, your emails.

Everything is red. And he just found out while we were there that a couple people that worked in his office actually went to jail. So it is real. And we need to pray for them.

Can you tell us about that ICX woman in China? Oh, I can say a little bit about that. They also have a woman in China who came to know Jesus because she was in a huge earthquake.

And this is the tour. Well, I don't know how much I should say here. She's connected with them somehow. And she was in a huge earthquake.

[40 : 43] And she was praying, God, if you're out there, please spare me. And the entire huge apartment building fell down except for her part of the building.

And she and her family were just there. So she kind of went through life knowing she had said this to God, but she didn't know. Well, wouldn't you know that just like a week later or shortly thereafter, she was reached by missionaries and became a Christian and said, oh, this is who I was praying to. And she is on fire. And she helps host the group and set up the tour. And they have to play. I don't know how they do that, but it sounds pretty intense.

So, what does ICX stand for? International Cultural Exchange. Even though exchange starts with an E.

I don't know. Barnett, yeah. The presence.

[42 : 16] That's a good word. That's a good word.

I will. And I can mention that. Okay. If there are any more questions, I want to thank you all for being so attentive.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, brother.

I appreciate you sharing with us. I appreciate your willingness to go. And I thank you for your representation of us as a church. It's an honor to hear what the Lord's doing for you there.

We're going to take a moment. We're going to pray. But we're going to go over our prayer. We're going to pray.

[43 : 47] We're going to pray.