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A People Profile: Polish Jews

Poland was once known as the center for Jewish European life. However, after the Holocaust and WWII, many Jews refused to return to Poland, and now only about 3,200 remain. Though they have a small population, the Polish Jews remain an Unengaged Unreached People Group with only .1% of the population professing Christianity.

The majority of Polish Jews live in the capitol city, Warsaw, but small pockets also live in smaller cities, such as Kraków, around the country. They Polish, but also Yiddish, a hybrid of Hebrew and German used in Jewish communities around the world. Their primary religion is Judaism, and they take pride in their religion and heritage. In fact, there are festivals, such as the Annual Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków, dedicated to highlighting and celebrating Jewish culture through concerts and workshops.

Warsaw is a large city of about 3 million people, so the Polish Jews make up a minute percentage of the population. Nonetheless, within the city, there are a number of functioning Synagogues and Jewish historical sights, so even though the population of Jews is few, their presence is felt as their history and culture is celebrated. One of Poland's most prominent cultural institutions, the Polin Museum located in the capitol, is dedicated to Jewish History, specifically the Holocaust. Many monuments, such Central Ghetto Monument, are located throughout the city to remember the Jewish Ghetto before WWII. In other cities around Poland, such as Karaków, older Jewish Synagogues can be visited and the Jewish influence penetrates the entire country.

Because they have such a small population, the Jewish community in Poland portrays a strong desire for connection and identity. The community is very vibrant and self-aware, making sure to hold on to their heritage as tightly as possible through educating their children about Jewish heritage. The emphasis on identity also applies to their religious beliefs. Their Judaism is often more for the sake of keeping their culture rather than developing their own personal beliefs. But because their values of connection to the rest of the community are so strong, converting to Christianity would be looked down upon by the rest of the Jewish community.

And this leads to part of the reason why they are unreached. Though they believe in God as the Supreme Being, they reject the Divine and Messianic qualities of Jesus. In order to accept the Gospel as true, they would have to reject much of their families' teachings, which can lead to rejection from the rest of the community.

The Polish Jews have a Bible and the Jesus film in their language, but they have no access to it. There are also no known churches or believers within their community. According to *Finishing the Task*, there are no workers currently planting churches among them. The greatest reason why they are unreached is simply because no one is directly proclaiming the Gospel to them.

But if the community is prominent and so few people, why haven't Christians managed to work with them? The main reason is because the community is so close that outside influence has trouble penetrating into it. Though they physically are not isolated from Christianity, the consequences of going against the community through conversion are taken very seriously. Because of this, it is almost impossible for Christian missionaries to evangelize among them. A second reason is simply the fact that they are a small community located in a large city. Warsaw is a largely populated city, and even though the Jews do have a prominent presence within the

city, they are easily overlooked and forgotten about when taking into consideration the other 3 million people living in the city.

So how do we reach them? The first step in reaching this community is simply finding a way to enter into it. One suggestion would be to find some Jews (either from the United States or from another country) who have converted to Christianity and send them to break into the community. Because Polish Jews are so closed to outsiders, this would be a more feasible way to make contact because they would most likely be more willing to listen to someone of their own heritage. I say this because my own family served as missionaries in Mexico, and one thing we learned through our time there is that Mexicans are more apt to pay attention to other Mexicans. Therefore, we trained what we called “national partners” to reach their own people, and that is a strategy to implement in this case with the Polish Jews as well.

Another strategy, or more like just a need, is to simply send workers into Warsaw for the purpose of getting to know the Polish Jews. Take their cooking classes, visit their synagogues, shop with their vendors, and simply live life among them and hopefully eventually the missionary, through their intentional building of relationships, will find a way to share the Gospel with them. Right now, there are no workers among the Polish Jews, so really the first step is simply sending someone, anyone, to live and work among them. By simply coexisting with them, we can make progress to advance them from a UUPG to simply a UPG.

The 3200 Polish Jews, though small in number, remain a UUPG and therefore hunger for someone to proclaim the Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ to them. At the moment, no one is preaching the hope of the Gospel to them, so step number one is to make Christians more aware of the need so that strategies can be created and implemented. One day, I know I

will witness some Polish Jews worshiping around the Throne with me, but today we have a lot of work to do to reach them.

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