

## EUROPE CENTRAL PROVINCE

### Austria, Switzerland France and Croatia

Official Languages: Austria – **German**, Croatia – **Croat**, Switzerland – **German, French, Italian and Romansh**, France – **French**

#### Vision Statement

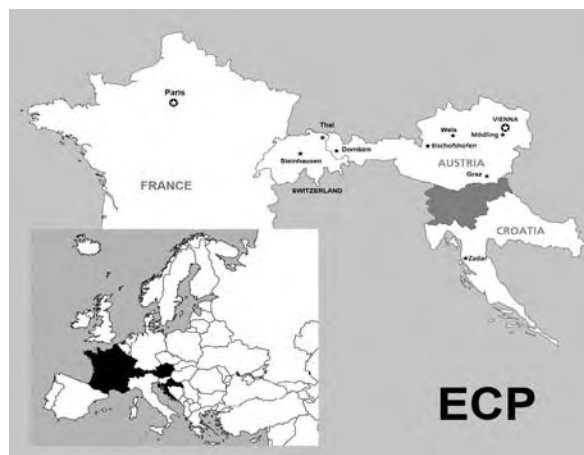
*As international communities we live and work in order to give witness to the Kingdom of God.*

#### Mission Statement

*As an open-minded and missionary community of brothers and priests from all continents, we consider it necessary that lived communion and missionary endeavors mutually shape, enrich and strengthen each other. Through dialogue, sharing and networking with other SVD communities we strive to bring our experience of the proclamation and celebration of the Good News in other parts of the Universal Church into the reality of our SVD communities and into the local Church. Our communities are spiritual spaces for us and for people who accompany us in the fourfold prophetic dialogue.*

### 1. Societal Setting

The situations of the countries are quite different due to the various historical developments. A political tendency observed in all four countries is that in recent years the number of political



parties has increased, formed by those who try to defend their own identity, mostly at the expense of what appears to be foreign. Behind this trend, there are surely the uncertainties caused by financial crises, refugee flows and international terrorism standing at the doorstep.

France was once a world power with a great influence in Africa and Asia. Nowadays it is looking at the principles of the French revolution of "freedom, equality, fraternity" in order to establish internal stability for its population, which is predominantly in cities, very mixed and international. The recent terrorist attacks strongly affected the country. The economic upturn proceeds very slowly. France, alongside Germany, is once again taking a more central position in the European Union (EU) after the departure of Great Britain from the EU.

Switzerland grew slowly over the years into a country with different languages, denominations and cultures. It does not belong to the

EU. The current path of bilateral agreements with the EU is becoming increasingly difficult. The Swiss financial center, an important part of the country, was strongly affected by the financial crisis as well as by the rather hesitant adjustment to international tax standards. The fear of being involved in the problems of great nations and thereby losing its own independence, as well as the fear of being overrun by foreigners, are on the rise.

Austria was once also a monarchy and a world power. After the catastrophe of the Second World War, it has built up a growing prosperity in its Second Republic, especially since 1955. For many citizens this affluence seems to be threatened by the present ever-more interconnected world, with its many problems. Populist responses to the fact that the gap between poor and rich is continuing to widen worldwide, hinder the implementation of a policy that places openness to the world in the forefront.

Croatia is a young state, gaining its independence only in 1991. Since 2013, it has been part of the European Union. Especially in the cities, the hope of an economic recovery prevails. The islands are affected by the increasing aging of the population. The attitudes towards minorities are rather unfavorable and in various border regions one can feel strongly the deeply rooted irreconcilability among the various nations of the former Yugoslavia, now forced to live together.

## 2. Ecclesial Setting

After experiencing many years without vocations, the province has had one young postulant since 2016. The number of vocations is generally decreasing or rather modest in all four countries. New spiritual communities and movements, as well as religious orders with a rather traditional orientation, experience a small increase of vocations.

France is characterized by a strong separation between Church and state. The Church lives on the donations of the faithful. In the urban areas, the Church is experiencing an upswing, mainly through immigration from various countries. A great challenge is dealing with numerous Muslim communities in increasingly anonymous urban districts. Many young priests either belong to the new Church movements or have an immigrant background.

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indispensable**

Due to the shortage of priests in dioceses, there are currently many structural changes in Switzerland, which lead to ever-increasing pastoral problems. On the other hand, everyone is aware of the fact that the image of a priest as "sacramental manager" is not an attractive profession. Cooperation with lay people is strongly encouraged. A fundamental change in the theology of the Church's ministries and offices is long overdue.

In the rural regions of Austria, there are still partially favorable conditions for the Church. In cities, however, the number of people who do not belong to any religion is growing. A lot of reorganization has taken place in recent years due to the sharp decline of vocations to the priesthood. This has led to a certain alienation between local priests and their faithful. According to one of local Bishops, Croatia has enough local vocations; there is therefore no need for missionaries. The Church still plays an important role in the lives of many people. Old traditions and Church languages are still important elements of their piety. Yet, a trend of dropping out of Church by the young generation can be observed in the cities.

### 3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

#### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	39	31.7	32.6	24.2
<b>Education</b>	0	0	1.5	1.9
Schools	0	-		
Universities	0	-		
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	0	0	3.7	4.2
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	1	0.8	8.1	21.7
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	11	9.0	9.6	22.6
JPIC	2	-		
Bible	1	-		

Communication	0	-		
Mission Animation	3	-		
Others	5	-		

#### Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012* (%)	2005* (%)
Studies/ Orientation	10	8.1	3.7	2.6
Retired/Sick	59	48.0	30.4	18.9
Others	4	3.2	10.4	4.5

*\*Combined from the former Austria and Swiss provinces.*

#### Characteristic Dimensions

**Biblical Apostolate:** We do not have any Biblical apostolate program for the local church. The Biblical dimension is important for our community life and our pastoral service. The area animator is occupied with biblical studies and accompanying confreres and groups in the biblical field.

**Mission Animation:** The two mission offices of St. Gabriel and Steinhausen, in addition to the fund raising for various SVD projects in the global south, put all their efforts into promoting mission awareness as a kind of sensitization for global solidarity.

**JPIC:** Though only a few of our confreres are directly involved in the migrant apostolate, the vast majority of our mission houses and parishes have generously provided accommodation for refugees during the recent refugee crises. Some of the confreres are active in apostolates to groups with a different language and cultural background. The youth center "Steyle Welt" was opened in cooperation with the diocesan youth in the mission house of St. Rupert in Austria.

**Communication:** All the different SVD institutions within ECP and GER are working on a new common website and platform for social media. The press apostolate of the German-speaking subzone is under the responsibility of GER and reaches out to 180,000 subscribers.

### Priorities among Congregational Directions

The Europe Central province was officially established on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2016. It has taken over the priorities of the former province of Switzerland (*Primary and New Evangelization*) and of the province of Austria (*Primary and New Evangelization - Migration - Family and Youth*). These priorities are focused on pastoral work in various parishes. The proclamation of faith in any form is of paramount importance in the countries of the Europe Central province, where the Christian faith has almost evaporated or has been strongly in decline.

The pastoral ministry in the three parishes in Rosny-sous-Bois, France, takes place in a context of an extremely multicultural and multi-religious environment. According to our chapter docu-

ments, this is exactly the place where the presence of the SVD is indispensable. In Croatia, the Bishop of Zadar assigned us primarily to the care of small and older Christian communities on different islands. The presence of our international religious community is important in order to keep a worldwide view alive in the Church of Croatia.

### Collaboration with SSps and Others

The SSps are active only in Austria. Fraternal exchange and collaboration have developed very well and are carried out in the areas like nursing, pastoral care and project support in the mission office. Establishing a joint project remains a goal of this exchange.

### SVD Lay Partners

In Switzerland, there is a circle of friends of the Steyler Missionaries with over 1,200 members. This network is very important for the province and it should be extended with the possibility of including Austria, France and Croatia.

### 4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012*	2005*
Bishops	0	0	1
Clerics	97	102	111
Brothers (final vows)	25	33	43
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	0	1
Scholastics	3	1	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>165</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012*	2005*
Average age	61.9	63.7	59.9
Nationalities	19	18	17

*\*Combined from the former Austria and Swiss provinces.*

**Spirituality:** Our international presence makes a valuable contribution to reducing people's fear of foreigners. This attempt to live together in intercultural communities is a deep and necessary spiritual contribution to the countries of the Europe Central province. Each community is looking for opportunities to share and pray together in order to strengthen each one's own spirituality and a feeling of togetherness and belonging.

**Community Life:** In the first provincial chapter of the ECP in November 2017, we tried to divide our province in such a way that all the confreres would live in a community setting that promotes and guarantees exchange and sharing.

**Leadership:** Over the next few years, a handing over of leadership responsibilities to non-native confreres will take place in all the four countries of our work. Now, we are trying to simplify the structures so that our successors can take over this task with joy.

**Finance:** The province is currently financially self-sufficient. Yet, the number of retired confreres is increasing and the number of confreres with income has decreased. What will make the situation even worse is the dwindling revenue from classical sources like the print media apostolate, renting of property, and donations. The enormous reconstruction costs of the mission house of St. Gabriel are like a "mortgage" for the future.

**Formation:** After a long time we are again facing the challenge of organizing initial formation in the province. We have a common formation program on the level of the German-speaking subzone. Yet, since candidates come only "now and then", the program has to be adapted individually. In recent years, we had in Austria many very positive experiences with OTP students. We want to continue with this program and keep the door wide open so that young confreres may get to know the concrete missionary work in our province.

A large part of the ongoing formation of our confreres working in the parishes takes place through the educational programs of dioceses, in which they participate. In addition, our confreres can take advantage of a very rich array of educational and training programs in all four countries of the province.