

HUNGARY PROVINCE

Hungary and Serbia

Official Language: **Hungarian**

Vision Statement

Through our international and intercultural communities, we seek to bring the cultural and religious richness of the world Church into our local Church.

Mission Statement

We Divine Word Missionaries, nurtured by the spirituality of our Society, proclaim the reign of God in Hungary. In the spirit of new evangelization we try to give mission spirituality to the Hungarian Church. For this we try to be in dialogue with different people.

1. Societal Setting

Our province includes two independent countries: Hungary and Serbia. Though there are some political, social and religious similarities, the situation in these two countries is quite different.

Hungary has 9.8 million inhabitants (2017). Minority laws exist in the country, by which any group of people may be recognized as a minority provided they have lived in Hungary for at least a hundred years and can claim to have their own language, culture and tradition. To these peoples



belong the following groups: the largest group is the Roma (Gypsies), along with Germans, Slovaks, Croats, Romanians, and Jews. Hungary entered the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999, and in 2004 it became a member of the European Union. It formally became a member of the Schengen countries in 2007. With these changes the country started a new period in its 1,000-year existence in central Europe.

Serbia has a population of over 8.7 million inhabitants. Most are of Slavic origin, with a long history of varying influences of polities, religions, and cultures. The north has a strong influence from Hungary, and the south shows the influence of Turkish culture. Since the ear-

ly 1990s ethnic hostilities led to civil wars and the successive breakup of the six republics that formed Yugoslavia: Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro.

2. Ecclesial Setting

Hungary: Approximately four million Hungarians are Catholics and another one and a half million belong to other Christian denominations, especially Calvinists and Lutherans. Altogether Christians are around 55% of the population. However, a large majority is indifferent to religion or religious values.

Although the regular attendance at Church services is around 20%, mostly women, only around 7-8% feel obligated to be faithful to the Church as an institution. It is mostly the children and the older generation who come to Church, while the majority of young adults stay away. However, one can also find lively movements where the participation in Church activities is quite high. Secularization is an accepted form of life in the country. There is an ongoing debate in Hungary about the role of Christianity in public life. The current Hungarian government is very supportive towards the Churches and Christian institutions in the country, subsidizing many education programs for children and youth, and offering help in the restoration of many sacred buildings.

The religious orders, dioceses, and Christian communities run kindergartens, schools, and

high schools plus a Catholic university. There is state-guaranteed religious education in schools and in Church buildings. Priests and religious are growing old and tired; each year more priests and religious are dying than those entering the seminaries and convents

for the Church service.

In general the number of vocations to religious life and priestly service is rather low. More than

half of the parishes are without a resident priest. Responding to this, in many places the Bishops try to merge the parishes. In 2017, 20 priests were ordained in Hungary. The role of the laity in the local Churches is growing. On the other hand there is seemingly a growth of lay movements such as Cursillo, the charismatic movement, the Neocatechumenate, Focolare, etc.

Most of the parishes are self-sufficient. This is especially true in the cities. Some poor parishes in other parts of country are supported by subsidies from their dioceses. The financial support for Churches from the Hungarian government comes every year in the form of compensation towards damages caused during the communist era. The Hungarian government allows the people to offer 1% of their taxes to the Church organizations too. Since Hungary is quite culturally homogenous, it is quite difficult to witness its interculturality in the local Churches. Usually people are quite welcoming, except that it still struggles with integration of the Roma people. There is a lot of prejudice towards Gypsy people among Hungarians.

**The mission
among the Gypsies
– "putting the
last first".**

Serbia: Catholics are a tiny minority in Serbia, around 5.4 % of the population. The majority of Serbia's inhabitants belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church. There is a significant number of Muslims in the south of the country (in the so-called province of Sandžak). The Catholic Church is well organized in four dioceses of the Latin and one of the Greek Catholic rite. Religious orders are extremely scarce in the country: Jesuits, Franciscans, Salesians, Carmelites and the SVD. Religious women are more numerous, because there is a large local religious congregation of sisters. Most of the Catholics are of the Hungarian mother tongue (70%), others are Croats, Slovaks, Germans or Roma.

The Society's History

The Society arrived in Hungary in 1916. In 1924 an SVD mission seminary for boys was opened in the small village of Budatétény, on the outskirts of Budapest. Another formation house was founded in Kőszeg in 1928. The province was established in 1929, and began a third house in 1942 at Kiskunfélegyháza. The house in Kőszeg was home to the novices, the students of the high school, and the Brother candidates. The other two houses were used as formation and animation centers for our high school students. Some seventy priests were ordained and more than twenty Brothers professed final vows before these three houses were closed.

Immediately after World War II it became evident that it would become very difficult to work for world mission and for the local Church in

Hungary under the new communist government. As a result, many confreres were given foreign mission assignments and many of the younger generation went to St. Gabriel and St. Augustine. In 1950 all our properties were confiscated by the communist state, and the remaining confreres were forced to find a new way of life.

In 1970 the SVD started ministry in Novi Sad, then in Yugoslavia. In 1979 a new community was started in Zagreb, today Croatia, and in 1982 the Yugoslav district became part of the Austrian province. In 1983 a third community was established in Zadar, Croatia. Due to the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, this SVD district was divided: the two houses in Croatia remained as a district of the Austrian province; Novi Sad and Serbia were added to the Hungarian province.

In 1989 the Hungarian province became active once again when the twenty confreres who never left the country elected new superiors and reorganized the province. Having no property and no house, this was no easy task. Some confreres of Hungarian origin working in various parts of the world returned to Hungary to help rebuild the province. In 1994 the Society acquired our former mission house in Kőszeg, but it was in a very bad state of disrepair. We requested financial compensation for our properties in Kiskunfélegyháza, near Budapest. A piece of land in Budapest was returned. We built a new community house for our students there in 2000 and a retreat house for lay people in 2006. In 2014 we closed and sold our house in Novi Sad because there was no perspective for our mission. There

was only one elderly confrere and this area has become an Orthodox majority. Currently our presence in Serbia is in Zrenjanin where Bishop Ladislav Nemet, SVD is the local ordinary.

In the spirit of the Roscommon Consensus, the first non-Hungarian and non-European confreres started arriving in Hungary in 2000. In 2016 we celebrated the 100th year of our mission in Hungary.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	4	16.0	11.1	41.7
Education	0	0	0	0
Schools	0	-		
Universities	0	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	2	8.0	22.2	5.0
Administration/ Support	5	20.0	18.6	20.0
Other Apostolates	6	24.0	3.7	6.7
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	1	-		
Communication	0	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	3	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	1	4.0	11.1	0
Retired/Sick	7	28.0	29.6	26.7
Others	0	0	3.7	0

The preferential dialogue partners of the province are faith seekers, children, youth, families, minorities, and the incarcerated. We reach out to our dialogue partners through parish work, Gypsy ministry, retreats, pilgrimages, summer camps, publications, prison visits, radio talks, and facilitating sacramental life for non-Hungarian speakers.

Characteristic Dimensions

Biblical Apostolate: Through our parish work of preaching, catechesis, and Bible studies we spread the Word of God. The retreat ministries, publications, and radio talks also are grounded in the Word. A Bible camp for children began in 2008. Familiarizing the “Lectio Divina” and organizing the “Bible day” are the new initiatives taken up in the province. We are regularly uploading Bible verses and reflections on the website which is also on the Facebook.

Mission Animation: The confreres regularly give recollections, retreats, mission weekends, Bible encounters and conferences to help promote mission awareness. The mission secretariat

is growing and successfully promotes interest in worldwide mission. Ever since the Pontifical Mission Society (OPM) was reorganized in Hungary, an SVD confrere has been called on to serve as the national director. More than ten years ago the community in Budapest started summer mission camps for children and youth. First held in various parts of Hungary, and currently in Kőszeg and Köröm, the camps are meant especially for children and youth coming from poorer segments of the society or from the Roma State Institutes (25% of the places are reserved for them), many are subsidized by the province. The camps grew from 50 initially to almost 400 participants. The celebration of Mission Sunday is an occasion when we welcome people from all walks of life, different cultural and economic backgrounds.

JPIC: In 2010, we started to intentionally get involved in ministry to the Roma, a population that is still quite left out in the Hungarian church. We started out by sending our seminarians during summer, followed by sending a confrere to be an associate pastor in a parish where the inhabitants are mostly Roma people. We eventually began to administer this parish, following the departure of the parish priest who had been working among these Roma people for more than 30 years. An empowerment project is now underway, especially for the children, through afterschool programs and activities. We have a parish among the Gypsies in Köröm in the Archdiocese of Eger. The majority of the people belong to the Romani (Gypsy commu-

nity). There are 5,856 Romani people living in villages of our parish, and the Hungarian community is a minority in these villages. In 2017 a Catholic school was established in Köröm by the Archdiocese of Eger with the cooperation of our province. The spiritual care and catechesis for children is provided by our confreres.

Communication: Our publications are the *Vilagposta* magazine (published four times a year by our mission secretary) and the Mission Calendar. Our magazine is also available on-line and on electronic devices for everyone to read. We take an active role in radio and TV programs, and are actively present in the mass media of Hungary and Serbia by writing articles. There is a good media studio and website. We actively communicate on social networks as well. We have different kinds of Facebook pages and Facebook groups where we can keep in contact with people, especially with the youth.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

Primary and New Evangelization: Through our retreat houses in Budapest and in Kőszeg, we put the spirit of new evangelization in action. We invite and we are sought by many groups. We have good contact with the Cursillo movement, which our confreres coming from mission countries brought to Hungary in the 1990s. The spreading of the Cursillo movement has proved to be a fruitful and effective way of organizing our evangelization work. More than 12,000 Hungarians have taken part in one of

their courses. We are also working with other movements and prayer groups. We keep in good contact with other groups too, and our commitment to ecumenism is seen in the Protestants who come to our houses for their programs as well. Our two houses are very convenient places for retreat groups, individual people, as well as families.

Indigenous and Ethnic Communities, Reconciliation and Peace Building; Social Justice and Poverty Eradication: We are involved in the pastoral care of ethnic minority groups (Gypsy ministry) in our parish in Köröm, in the eastern part of Hungary. We started a diocesan apostolate in 2011 with the Gypsies in this parish through the invitation of the Archbishop of Eger. Presently, two confreres are working in this village: one from Slovakia (parish priest) and one from India, who is an assistant parish priest and the JPIC coordinator. The mission among the Gypsies is a perfect example of "putting the last first".

The invitation and the challenge for the SVD here, besides other things, is giving these poor and marginalized people a sense of human dignity and identity. We are striving to live up to this goal by opening our hearts to them and by entering into their reality by being part of them. The specific goals of the JPIC ministry in the Gypsy mission in Hungary include: education and skill development; greater insertion into Gospel values; promoting their culture, tradition and practices; helping them achieve bicultural living, that is neither total assimilation nor complete division; motivating the local Hungarians to accept the Gypsies and treat them with respect; and the eradication of poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, drugs, and prostitution.

Our collaboration with the SSpS is very good. We help them in many fields to continue their mission in Hungary. They started a new mission house in south Hungary in September 2017.

Family and Youth: In 2014 we began our ministry in a parish in Vasvár, which is one of the Hungarian shrines, upon the invitation of the Bishop of Szombathely. The goal is to work with native Hungarian families and youth since the youth today present a big challenge in the family. Our work on family and youth includes summer mission camps, (in collaboration with the mission secretary), retreats in schools, and trips to different places. The province's vocation promoter takes care of this ministry.

Collaboration with SSpS and Others

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SVD Lay Partners

We have a very good collaboration with lay partners. We have had a web of SVD mission prayer groups since 2002. Currently we have around 25 such groups in our province. Prior to that, our contact with them was mostly through our newspaper. In recent years we started a group called "Men for Mission" in Budapest. They mostly help us during the yearly mission day celebration.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	1	1	0
Clerics	22	23	28
Brothers (final vows)	2	3	2
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	1	1
Scholastics	7	6	7
Total	32	34	38

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	51.1	56.0	58.0
Nationalities	8	9	8

Spirituality: Our formation house in Budapest has Bible sharing every week. The confreres in temporary vows also have a monthly recollection and the confreres in final vows have two recollections, one during Advent and one during lent. Every year on the province level we have one retreat for confreres in perpetual vows and one for confreres in temporary vows.

Community Life: As a community-building effort, family feast has become a yearly program when all confreres of the province can meet together. Ongoing formation workshops during the past few years have covered topics like skills in interpersonal communication, conflict management, and fraternal correction. Intercultural

competence workshops have increased our ability to form an intercultural community in the province.

Leadership: The workshops on various topics have shown the leadership's concern for the personal growth of each confrere. In addition, the skills and development of the confreres through these workshops empowers them with the skills needed to exercise leadership.

Finance: We try to lead a simple lifestyle, make conscientious use of our financial resources, and search for new financial possibilities. An audit of the province in 2014 was very useful for us. Many things became clear, especially concerning the relation between the rules of the Hungarian law and our internal rules.

Formation: Our formation team and program is very international. Currently we have more non-Hungarian confreres than Hungarian. We have five students and one OTP student in temporary vows and one student in perpetual vows. We are now working on a new formation plan for the students.

Personal and communal renewal is important for every SVD, therefore since 2013 we have had ongoing formation programs twice a year for every confrere in perpetual vows. Topics have included burn-out in our missionary work, skills in interpersonal communication, and others. These workshops were led by lay Christian experts in these fields. In 2016, we had a

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workshop on intercultural competence. For new missionaries arriving in Hungary, we have an inculturation program within the first two years which consists of one year of language school and one year in parish ministry or another mi-

nistry. For confreres with difficulties in learning the language, there is a possibility to take an extra half or one year of language studies. In 2015 we started regular meetings of the young confreres (“First-5s”).