

## SLOVAKIA PROVINCE

### Slovakia and Czech Republic

Official Languages: Slovakia – **Slovak**, Czech Republic – **Czech**

#### Vision Statement

*Rooted in the Word of God we witness to the love of Triune God as missionaries of different nations and cultures.*

#### Mission Statement

*Inspired by the charism of St. Arnold Janssen, relying on the protection of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary, we live our religious missionary vocation as a community of brothers and priests in the openness towards the challenges of the Holy Spirit.*

*We proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Slovakia and in Czechia, having in mind particularly people on the margins of the society.*

*We support with personnel, in spiritual and material way, the mission activities of the Church in the whole world and for this we promote also our lay collaborators.*

#### 1. Societal Setting

The SLO province covers two neighboring countries, Czechia (Czech Republic) and Slovakia. Before the peaceful division of the two in 1993, they formed one federal state for more than 70 years. In spite of their geographical clo-



seness, there are deep cultural, sociological and religious differences between them. Nowadays both countries belong to the Europe Union (EU) and so called "Schengen area" that facilitates moving within the Europe. Economically, after some stagnation, the quality of life approaches the median level of other countries in the EU.

**Slovakia:** Life expectancy in Slovakia is 76 years, with a median age of 39. Only 12.3% of the population is considered to be below the poverty line. Ethnic Slovaks constitute more than four-fifths of the entire population of nearly 4.5 million. Hungarians, concentrated in the southern border districts, form the largest minority, making up about one-tenth of the population. There are some other ethnic minorities such as Czechs,

Germans, Poles, and Russians. There is also a sizable population of Gypsies (the Roma people), but in the statistics they don't declare their belonging. Therefore it's difficult to determine accurately their share of the overall population. According to some statistics they might form 8% of the population. Because of their poor social and religious conditions, pastoral orientation is to be focused on them in particular way. It requires serious effort to help them to be integrated into the social and economic life of the majority.

**Czechia (Czech Republic):** The median age in the Czech Republic is 40.9 years, with life expectancy at 78 years. About 9.7% of the population is living below the poverty line. Moravian and Bohemian Czechs make up about 94% of the population. A 3% Slovak minority remains from the Czechoslovakian federal period. Other ethnic minorities are numerically insignificant, except perhaps for the Roma people. They may form as much as 2.5% of the country's population.

## 2. Ecclesial Setting

Almost 30 years have passed since the fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia (1989), which left its profound mark on the life of the Church. It was time of political manipulation, imposing ideological atheism, and elimination of any religious activity outside the Churches. The Catholic Church was persecuted and excluded from public life, its property was confiscated, and it was made financially dependent on the State. This situation has remained in Slovakia up to today, with the State paying the (minimal) salaries of

priests. After regaining religious freedom, a time of relative enthusiasm followed in the early 1990s with large numbers returning to religious practices. Since 2000, a slow but constant decrease can be observed both in Church attendance and in vocations. The improvement of social well-being is accompanied by a kind of indifference toward Church life. Some stronger traditional traits of religiosity are present in the countryside, while urban areas are more secularized.

**Slovakia:** Administratively, there are eight Roman Catholic dioceses and 3 Greek Catholic ones (Byzantine rite). Statistically, about 62% of the total population declare themselves Roman Catholics and 3.8% Greek Catholics. Some 40% of them practice their faith, attending the Church at least once a week. From other major confessions, there are nearly 6% of Lutherans and 13.4% without any confession. This last group seems to be growing. Mostly, the practice of their faith life remains limited to the sacramental level. Nevertheless, lay movements seem to be increasing and giving new life to the Church in Slovakia. A good number of them are involved in "pro-life" activities, defending the sanctity of life in all its dimensions, from conception until natural death, for there are constant attempts to introduce more liberal laws. Slovak Catholic Charity is active in assisting older people and helping in natural disasters, as well as abroad (e.g., help for Haiti after the earthquake in 2010). There is a promising role in education: schools, catechesis and also university pastoral work among youth. For some years, Catholic media efforts have been established in the country with the radio station

*Lumen* and television channel *TV Lux*, but printing presses don't seem to be able to compete with commercial printing.

**Czech Republic:** There are eight Roman Catholic dioceses and one Apostolic Exarchate for the Byzantine Rite. Catholics are representing 10.4% of the total population, while 88.5% declare themselves to be without confession. This data classifies the country among the most atheistic in Europe. In the parishes there is lack of priests, especially in the central and western parts of the country, and many Churches of the past seem to be condemned to slow destruction. Since 2012, an agreement on compensation for Church property seized by the former totalitarian regime has been in effect. It's spread over 30 years and will lead to absolute financial independence from the State. This poses new challenges for the Church in the Czech Republic. Most activities besides the regular pastoral work include charity, teaching and catechesis, and hospital chaplaincy. There are also some active lay movements.

The first SVDs came to Slovakia from St. Gabriel during the time of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, beginning with the "press apostolate". The first house was opened in Nitra in 1928, and it serves up to now as the provincial house. The period of communist totalitarian rule after World War II stopped the prosperous province and its life for about 40 years. After regaining religious freedom, besides returning to Nitra, a new SVD formation house was opened in Bratislava and the novitiate in Vidina, in the central part of Slovakia. In the late 1990s, the SVD pastoral presence

in the Czech Republic increased. First, it was in Moravia, in the eastern and more religious part of the country, and then later parishes in the capital Praha and Kolin were taken over.

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

Both in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the main ministry SVDs are involved in is the parish ministry. There is also relevant youth ministry in the university pastoral center in Bratislava, other school ministry, and ministry with the marginalized and migrants.

#### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	25	49.0	34.1	19.8
<b>Education</b>	1	1.9	3.8	5.6
Schools	0	-		
Universities	1	-		
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	4	7.8	5.4	4.0
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	6	11.7	8.3	15.1
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	8	15.6	10.9	14.3
JPIC	4	-		
Bible	0	-		
Communication	0	-		
Mission Animation	2	-		
Others	2	-		

## Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	0	0	4.8	7.9
Retired/Sick	5	8.8	30.8	31.8
Others	2	3.9	1.9	1.6

## Characteristic Dimensions

**Biblical Apostolate:** During the Advent and Lent seasons, we offer a biblical program of renewal for small groups in our parishes and our mission houses. Regular biblical inputs are provided for lay people who are lectors at Mass. Retreats and renewal programs are also organized based on the Bible.

**Mission Animation:** We are in the process of forming the lay association called *Misijna rodina SVD* ("SVD Mission family"). A good experience, confirmed by years of practice, is organizing the summer camps ("missionary holidays") for the youth, and camps for altar boys with a solid formation program. The mission museum in Nitra, the University pastoral center, our retreat house in Nitra, and "parish missions" at the local level are some of the venues where we raise mission awareness. These activities are also aimed at awakening interest in the religious and missionary vocation among the youth. Production and distribution of leaflets with mission themes help to create concern for mission.

**JPIC:** Two confreres from Vietnam are engaged in the care for the migrants, mainly in the Czech Republic. In Nitra we also reach out to immigrants from Syria and the Roma (Gypsy) minority. We work for their social wellbeing and integration in the Church and society. The University pastoral center and hospital chaplaincy are the platforms for our prophetic dialogue.

**Communication:** We publish our *Hlasy* magazine every month to bring news about our missionaries and to be in touch with the faithful. Through other publications, such as books, mission calendars and videos, we help disseminate the Word of God as well. Some of our priests help in Slovak Catholic *TVLUX* to moderate programs, give commentary during live broadcasts, and contribute to the program with short films and video news, especially from the life of our missions.

## Priorities among Congregational Directions

The central part of our mission work is still sacramental pastoral work, but we also do many specific apostolates. Since the last general chapter, the priorities of the Slovakia province were chosen: **Primary and New Evangelization, Family and Youth**, and recently, due to the actual situation in Europe, the priority of **Migrants** came in. In the context of our Slovakia province, working with the Roma community and with migrants are the concrete challenges of our time. Working in the hospitals, schools, in the fields of mission animation, the biblical apostolate and communication opens us to the possibilities of promoting the faith among many groups of

people outside our parishes. Growing interest in pastoral work in the Czech Republic helps us to develop our new evangelization efforts.

### Collaboration with SSpS and Others

Mission summer camps give us opportunities to collaborate with SSpS and other religious congregations. Besides the basic pastoral activities, confreres also give retreats, exercises and seminars for them according their needs.

### SVD Lay Association

The association of lay collaborators in our province's *Misijna rodina SVD* (SVD Mission family) is still at its beginnings. We have formed the first small groups of families interested in collaborating with us in different parishes. Each family is given the *Vademecum* with SVD prayers and liturgies. Each member is encouraged to pray from it. Every group has a leader and the groups are encouraged to meet once a month. Once a year, there is a possibility of a common meeting and retreat for them.

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

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Clerics	48	45	57
Brothers (final vows)	2	2	6
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	0	1
Scholastics	9	14	17
Novices	2	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>83</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	49.3	53.6	51.2
Nationalities	8	8	6

**Spirituality:** We seek to deepen our spiritual life both as individuals and communities through daily celebration of the Eucharist, reading and meditating on God's Word, Bible sharing, regular personal prayer and praying the Liturgy of the Hours. Every confrere is to take part regularly in retreats and spiritual exercises.

**Community Life:** We do our best to make our community life an authentic witness of missionary life, and we put it into practice through living in international communities. In smaller communities, we are trying to plan and work as a team as much as possible.

**Leadership:** Leaders are encouraged to carry out their roles more as animators and coordinators than simple administrators of our common life and works. Their role is to organize regular (at least quarterly) meetings of communities that include both a spiritual as well as work dimension. Leaders keep the spirit of community alive in the confreres and lead them to fraternal co-responsibility.

**Finance:** The first step towards the spirit of poverty and the witness to our neighbors is to lead a simple way of life. Already during initial formation, we put emphasis on a proper understanding of the management and handling of

finances, the importance of regular billing, and the question of fundraising for the Society. Responsible management of material goods helps us to achieve financial self-sufficiency within the province.

**Formation:** We all are well aware of the responsibility for the confreres in formation. We want to help them, within our capabilities, to be well prepared on both spiritual and professional (theological) levels. During initial formation, we help the confreres through ministry practicum work in some of our Characteristic Dimensions. We also place a renewed emphasis on ongoing formation, through encouragement to participate regularly in seminars, workshops, confe-

rences, etc. We are doing our best to be engaged in the vocation apostolate, led by a promoter. Within the context of ongoing formation, a working session of a provincial assembly was organized. Some suggestions related to administration and formation were proposed. The most relevant ones included organizing meetings of the provincial leadership with the confreres from abroad working in the province, and meetings of the provincial council with the house councils on the role of leaders in the community. A workshop is being offered on personal management, community leadership, and resolving some situations in the community.

**promoting the  
faith among  
many groups  
of people**