

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF KOŠICE (SLOVAKIA)

INTRODUCTION

According to the census in 2001 in towns and villages in the territory of the archdiocese of Košice there were 1,108,504 inhabitants. Of these 671,287 inhabitants were professed in the Catholic Church (which constitutes approximately 61% of the total), 177,946 inhabitants in the Greek Catholic Church (16%), 45,674 in the Lutheran Church (4%), 42,953 in the Reformed Christian Church (4%), 40,772 in the Orthodox Church (4%), 8064 in the Jehovah's Witnesses (1%), 788 in the Evangelical Methodist Church, 274 in the Baptist Union, 978 in the Church of the Brethren, 708 in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 1247 in the Apostolic Church, 545 in the Jewish communities, 379 in the Old Catholic Church, 430 in the Christian Communities, 216 in the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, 1024 in other churches and religions. 25,923 inhabitants either did not complete a survey or could not be contacted (2%), and 81,760 reported "no religion" (7%).

Some vicariates are largely occupied by a Catholic population (Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics total) as the vicariate of Lipany (74% +23%), of Sabinov (85% +7%), some parishes of the Košice - Juh vicariate (80% +4%), the vicariates of Humenné and Snina (56% +22%) and of Prešov-Solivar (73% +8%). The Archdiocese of Košice contains 213 Roman Catholic parishes. There are 58 parishes that are totally Roman Catholic, and another 30 parishes are only Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic.

In the diocese there are also villages and towns in which the Catholic faith is in the minority or not there at all – for example, some villages of the vicariate of Kapušany, of Michalovce and Trebišov. A detailed review was published by the author in his monograph entitled *The Ecumenical Relations in the Ecclesiastical Province of Košice*.¹

The specific situation for the development of ecumenical dialogue occurs in cities where we find activity of a greater number of registered churches and unregistered religious societies. We can name, for example, the cities of Košice and Prešov, but we can apply this recognition to some smaller towns in the region of the archdiocese. Therefore, the most ecumenical activities take place in urban parishes. In some cases, promoters of ecumenical meetings are not the church but the administration of the village or town.

1 Cf. Macák, D. *Ekumenické vzťahy v Košickej cirkevnej provincii*. Prešov : Kušnír, 2007.

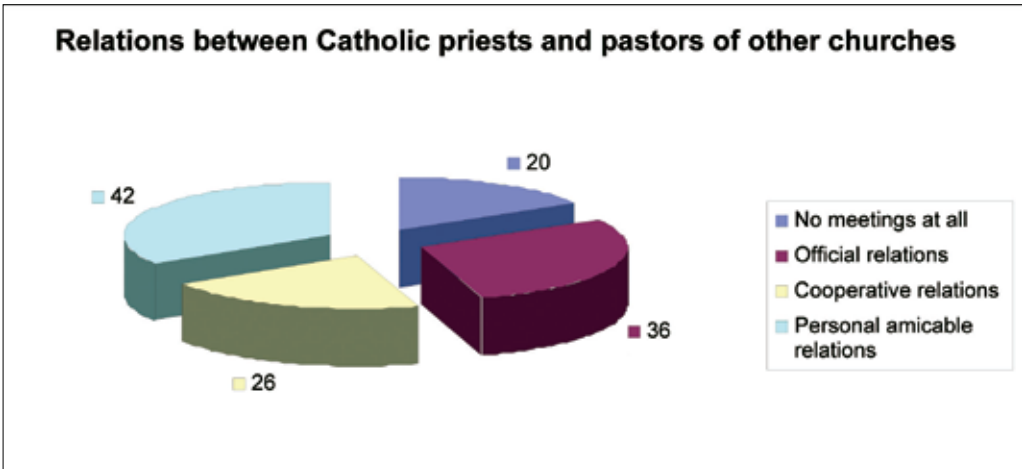
Based on these facts, a survey of ecumenical activities was conducted in the parishes of the Archdiocese of Košice. We bring the data from this survey to the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for the implementation of ecumenism. This document stresses the need to pay attention to specific local circumstances that determine the different nature of the ecumenical task (see D 34). It is a choice and determination of appropriate ecumenical engagement which must reflect the specific responsibilities and requirements that are suitable to each place where ecumenical dialogue takes place (see D 31). The survey focused on three areas of dialogue between Christian churches: spiritual, theological and practical ecumenism.

SPIRITUAL ECUMENISM

Spiritual ecumenism in accordance with the II Vatican Council is “*the soul of the whole ecumenical movement*” (UR 8). It operates by the initiative of the grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. UR 8). It is a spiritual principle which functions in obedience to God the Father, by Christ’s will, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the ecumenical movement needs still greater enthusiasm in all domains of Christian life: in church diplomacy, dialogue, academics, social and pastoral charity, and pastoral cooperation.

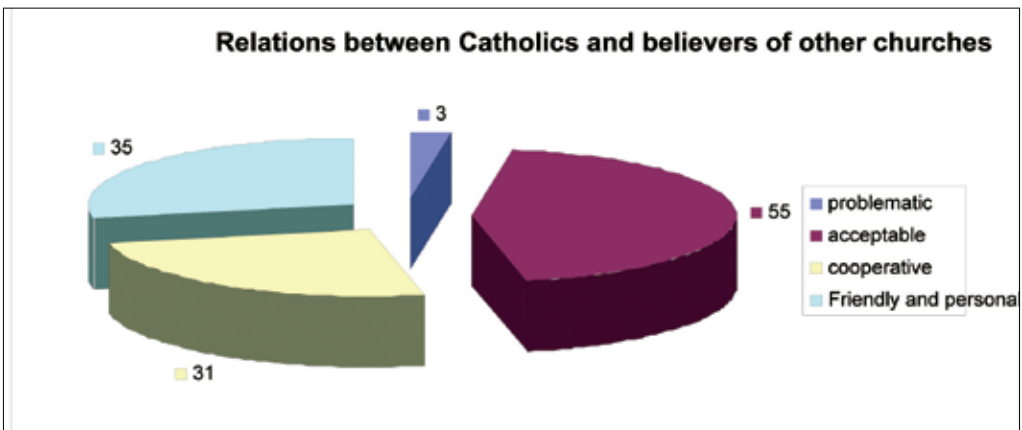
This spiritual ecumenism begins in the human heart, in its conversion. Conversion of the heart and the desire for a holy life are the soul of every ecumenical dialogue (cf. UR 8). They are essential for any credible search for unity (cf. UUS 27). The pathway to mutual forgiveness and to unity begins in the human heart and mind. This change of heart comes from prayer, and it is regulated by prayer. The President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Walter Kasper, expressed this immediately upon his arrival at the airport in the Russian capital Moscow: “I came here in the hope that we turn the page and begin a new, friendly page.... In the relationship between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches there exist many obstacles and prejudices, but with our good will and God’s help we will overcome them.” Only acknowledgement and understanding of the inner pride and egoism in the mutual disputes, condemnations, and contempt will lead to the ability to realize dialogue. The most important role of spiritual ecumenism is to foster knowledge of the problems and then commit ourselves to the hands of divine mercy. Only the conversion of the heart and cleansing of the mind can heal relations impaired on all sides in these communities.

Hence, the first question of the survey focused on the relations between the Catholic priests and pastors of other churches who operate in the area of their parishes. Very often the leaders of the particular church communities give the stimulus for ecumenical dialogue. In parishes where there are other churches also, 124 Roman Catholic priests expressed their own attitude toward pastors of other churches (88 of 213 parishes of the Archdiocese of Košice are purely Catholics).



The center of spiritual ecumenism is the love which leads to the conversion of hearts. This is the way of love from which the desire for unity is born, and in which a man focuses on God and on his brothers and on those with whom he does not have full communion. Love is what creates communion among people and among communities.

It was interesting to see how Catholic church-goers relate to the believers of other churches. This information was described by Roman Catholic priests of their parishes.



Jesus invites his disciples: “Pray that you may not undergo the test” (*Lk 22:40*). Prayer takes a person away from the temptation which could put the person in a sinful condition. Every sin separates people from God and from each other. Prayer for believers of different denominations is a very important opportunity to build communion. The Son of God gave us a model of prayer that unites and forms a brotherhood of all who pray. Anyone who prays the *Our Father* is praying to one God the Father and is creating a

community of brothers and sisters in faith. This prayer remains a common treasure of all Christians. It calls for mutual forgiveness and unity, for the creation of one family of God. It bears healing from all kinds of divisions. But it cannot be directed towards Christian unity without an examination of conscience, without repentance, without conversion and without boundless confidence in the power of God's mercy and love. Christians pray to be freed from evil. They ask the precious gift of peace, unity and grace to persevere together in anticipation of the second coming of Christ in glory.²

The Catholic Church encourages personal prayer for unity (cf. *UUS* 102) as well as prayer in common, which is not only effective but also an impressive way to pray for the full unity of Christians which comes from God (cf. *UR* 8). It is one of the most important and effective means to ask for the grace of unity among Christians. Every Christian prayer must be concentrated on the mystery of the Church and its unity, and thus on the restoration of personal and social life to overcome every division.

Therefore, prayer in common is undoubtedly the heart of the ecumenical journey like the communion among those who are around Christ (cf. *UUS* 22). Walter Kasper emphasizes in his book *The Spiritual Ecumenism*: "Since unity is a gift, that it is commendable if Christians pray together to embrace this gift." This community of prayer leads to a new view of the Church and Christianity.³

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (from 18TH to 25TH of January) is the most obvious time when prayer in common for Christian unity can be more visible. This week has become a widespread and consistent tradition in all Christian churches in Slovakia. At least one day during this week in all parishes of the Archdiocese of Košice, the priest celebrates the Mass for Christian Unity. In the diocese 63 parishes celebrate joint ecumenical prayer services with the participation of leaders and believers of other churches. (It should be noted that some Catholic priests mistakenly consider joint activities with the Greek Catholic believers as ecumenical; therefore, the number released is too large. A more accurate count would be about two-thirds of that number.)

Preparation of common ecumenical prayer services offers better understanding and grasp of the aspects of common prayer. Currently, organization of this type of service constitutes the place to talk about aspects of common prayer. What does the prayer of particular churches contain, and which leaders may gather for planning? The process of planning offers the opportunity to share different traditions of liturgy which were based on one tradition, but which eventually followed different paths of development. Many of those meetings pose interesting questions: Use this or another liturgical object in the upcoming religious service? Add some part or not?

Such a service is also beneficial for believers themselves who participate in a common celebration. From the riches of Christian prayer and liturgical traditions, the essen-

2 Cf. Kasper, W. *L'ecumenismo spirituale*, s. 47–49.

3 Cf. Kasper, W. *Cammino e significato del movimento ecumenico*. In: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20080117_kasper-ecumenismo_it.html (20.4.2008).

tial nature of their content and practices is selected. The insertion of any other special feature of the various churches is also a great asset.

Organization of such joint services must occur in a spirit of brotherly understanding and solidarity, mutual consent and the participation of representatives of all the Christian churches that will take part in it. The heart of the ecumenical prayer service is the Head of the Church - Jesus Christ. He is the focal point that creates the unity of the Churches. Christ constantly gives his Church the gift of unity. But the Church must always pray and work for it to maintain, strengthen and improve the unity which comes from Christ. During these meetings the ecumenical translation of the Scriptures is used. The structure of ecumenical celebrations reflects the different models present in the prayers of Christian churches.

Ecumenical activities include services during important seasons of the liturgical year - at the time of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter. In the diocese 24 parishes have joint Christmas and Easter activities. These include Christmas prayer services and various activities prepared and designed for youth and children. Christian communities want to present to them the good news and expectation of Jesus' birth in these activities. Special prominence is given to the celebration of the famous Passion procession which extends to 8 parishes. The procession has emerged as a symbolic connection between the tradition of reading the text about the suffering of Jesus Christ on Good Friday and the journey to the Holy Sepulchre on Holy Saturday. The stops take place in front of the various Christian churches.

Common prayer also occurs in other ecumenical services. Every year 13 parishes hold a joint thanksgiving service for the harvest. The community acknowledges that all those things that a man possesses are not only the result of his work, but also the result of collaboration with the mercy of God. So, it is very important to give thanks to God for his support of human work.

Two special services were held in Košice: in September 2001 an ecumenical prayer service, which was inspired by the terrorist events of 11 September in the U.S., and whose motto was: "I have told you this so that you might have peace in me" (*Jn* 16:33); and also the prayer service which was a response to the floods in June 2010 in all of Slovakia.

A good opportunity for joint meetings is the contemplation of God's word held in 8 parishes in the archdiocese. These meetings are for children, youth and adults.

Furthermore, community ecumenical services occur on important days in the lives of other churches. Many parishes are invited to the ceremonies of other churches: the feast of the patron of the community, the anniversary of the foundation or the blessing of the liturgical space. It is worth noting that in Košice in June leaders of all Christian churches participate in the Commemoration of the Anniversary of the Beginning of the Deportations of Jews in the Jewish cemetery.

In 59 parishes of the diocese, the leaders of different churches are invited by government officials to a meeting for celebrating a particular day for the Slovakian country,

a nearby nationality, or a local region, on days significant in social and political life. It is especially interesting that the government-sponsored schools invite the leaders of churches to attend and speak on the first and last days of the school or civil year. On these occasions 14 parishes also hold a joint celebration of the *Veni Sancte* or *Te Deum* as an expression of thanks for God's mercy which the students have received.⁴

PRACTICAL ECUMENISM

The finding that prayer is "the soul of ecumenism" comes to fulfillment in the implementation and engagement in joint activities in the area of social and community life. Prayer not only leads to a change in mindset, but also invites you to a particular public-spirited attitude. Christians through faith in Jesus Christ are invited to build mutual good relations and cooperation. Joint involvement of believers and leaders of various churches in the area of social life and socialization is testimony to the world of today. It is a testimony to mutual acceptance and love for the world which is divided by sin and selfishness.

Amid all the visible and practical joint activities in which believers of Christian churches show that they are public-spirited, there is common help to the sick and needy who are found in their territory. In many towns and villages, Catholic believers go to visit and help these people, whatever their religion is. In the city of Košice the leaders of 8 churches meet with the homeless every week in the hostel of Charity of the Archdiocese to determine their needs. At the same time they offer spiritual counseling to the homeless. In all parishes of the diocese there is a collection for Charity twice each year.

Regular activity that takes place each year around Christmas time in more than 100 parishes of the Archdiocese of Košice includes the Good News. Good News involves children singing carols who collect funds donated by people in developing countries. This money is used to build new schools and hospitals, especially for children. This activity also involves non-Catholic children.

Several Catholic priests urge the faithful in their parishes to financially support the construction of other non-Catholic church buildings. These collections are made directly after worship in the churches of the East, the so-called doorstep collection. Similarly, the non-Catholic religious communities help Catholics.

There is joint support for the arts. In 12 parishes, with mutual support of all other churches present in their territory, they implement various concerts, festivals, folk festivals and art exhibitions, and activities for different social groups - such as celebration of Children's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and a day of respect for old people.

In addition, there are trips and camps for youth and young children organized by various churches in the diocese. Non-Catholics are welcome to participate.

Other joint activities include the celebration of events of community social life. In 52 parishes annually, community festivals are held to which all the leaders of various

⁴ Cf. Kasper, W. *L'ecumenismo spirituale*. Roma : Citta Nuova, 2006, s. 51–55.

churches are invited; these festivals are prepared by the village community or by one of the churches. Such events include: consecration or blessing of a new church, chapel, or other church building, a funerary chapel in a cemetery, or bells; the anniversary of the parish, community or village; blessing the coat of arms and insignia of the village; the commemoration of various events, the beginning and end of the school year, and other occasions.

In 35 parishes of the diocese, clergy are invited to visit worship services of other churches. These visits are usually reciprocal. They are the testimony of fidelity to Christ's prayer for unity, but they also invite the faithful to live with a better understanding of the call for unity.

There is another occasion where Catholic and non-Catholic clergy may both be present. While the presence of clergy from a non-Catholic church at the celebration of a Catholic marriage is rare, according to church guidelines the non-Catholic clergy person may also speak at the ceremony.

THEOLOGICAL ECUMENISM

Theology has an irreplaceable role in ecumenical progress. Throughout history, separated churches have distanced themselves from each other in the interpretation of the truths of faith. The task of theologians is to rediscover the original meaning of the Christian truths of faith. The theological experts of individual Christian churches are invited to submit an ecumenical view of Christian doctrine.

Ecumenical education belongs implicitly to doctrinal theological knowledge. Primarily, it is education of those who work in pastoral ministry – whether ordained or not. All those who are pastoral ministers, the Catholic Church encourages to “develop all human qualities” and to “constantly examine their own speech and ability to dialogue” so that they have acquired the right ecumenical attitude (cf. D 70).

The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* calls for including a specific course in ecumenism during every program of theological studies (cf. D 79). Theological faculties, institutes and special centers for ecumenism in the diocese fulfill a role in the preparation of ecumenical dialogue and in its progress of the advancement of Christian unity (cf. D 87). The ecumenical dimension should permeate teaching in various theological disciplines (cf. D 73-78).

It is regrettable that the Theological Faculty in Košice does not leave more space for the course in ecumenism (history of ecumenical dialogue, comparison of various theological aspects of Christian churches, historical and modern understanding of unity of the Church) in the formation of future priests and ministers. The one-hour course in one semester is deemed insufficient. This happens at the expense of lectures on Liturgy and Liturgical Chants, which give more hours credit than all the courses in doctrinal theological disciplines together. On the other hand, we welcome the establishment and

funding of the Centre of Excellence for Dialogue, which is a scientific research institute of the faculty.

The *Directory* extends an invitation to:

1. *Deepen the ecumenical dimension in textbooks and research methods.* The Theological Faculty in Košice carried out a research project entitled: *The Mapping the Ecumenical Activities in Eastern Slovakia* (VEGA 1/4751/07). The director was Prof. Pavol Dráb and co-directors Prof. Jozef Jurko and Dr. Dominik Macák. Many doctrinal monographs written by Prof. Dráb, Professor of Dogmatic Theology, added a desired ecumenical dimension to this study.
2. *Offer colloquia and study days devoted to ecumenical questions.* The Ecumenical Community in Košice, together with the Centre of Excellence for Dialogue of the Theology faculty, regularly invite domestic and foreign applicants to their ecumenical symposia and other ecumenical activities. Every year the Faculty of Theology in Košice organizes two conferences with ecumenical aspects. The first conference is about social work with the title *People in Need* and the other one is about diverse theological aspects of Christian faith.
3. *Reserve a place for reporting on ecumenical activities and for deeper ecumenical studies in university magazines and newspapers.* The Faculty of Theology in Košice has a biannual theological magazine *Verba Teologica*, in which ecumenical dialogue has an implicit place.

CONCLUSION

Based on the survey carried out in the parishes of the Archdiocese of Košice, the present article presents a comprehensive picture of ecumenical activities which exist in the parishes and institutions of the Archdiocese of Košice. The development of ecumenical activity and awareness can be assessed as positive.

However, we suggest some changes that could strengthen ecumenical awareness and create better conditions for openness to the eschatological unity of Christ's church.

These include:

1. Increasing the number of hours of seminary lectures on ecumenism, 3-4 credit hours per semester, as is the practice in theological faculties around the world.
2. Joint financing of the research workplace for the Theological faculty and the Archdiocese of Košice in the *Centre of Excellence for Dialogue*, which should have the role of coordinating all ecumenical activities in the territory of the diocese, the preparation of texts for ecumenical worship in the various church seasons, and occasionally preparing and publishing electronic ecumenical journals.
3. Extension of ecumenical conferences to other cities of the Archdiocese of Košice.

ThDr. Dominik Macák, PhD.

The author teaches Ecumenism at the Theological faculty of Catholic University in Ružomberok, while he is researcher of the Centre of Excellence for Dialogue in the TF CU and secretary of the Ecumenical Community in Košice.