

# EVANGELICAL-LUTHERAN CHURCH IN HUNGARY - ELCH

## Year Started and Brief History

The roots of the church go back to the 1520s when Hungarian students studying in Wittenberg and other German university towns took the ideas of the freshly emerging Reformation to Hungary. After a period of Protestant majority, came the counter-Reformation which led to the present proportions between confessions.

ELCH is the third largest church in Hungary, after the Roman Catholic and the Reformed Church. Our church lives in a diaspora situation: Its often small-sized congregations are spread in an island-like pattern (Insula Lutherana) around the country, with a few major centres.

Lutherans in Hungary are traditionally of three origins: German, Slovakian and Hungarian. Today these differences are merely mirrored in liturgy, most of the church life happens in Hungarian.

## Church Leader

Presiding Bishop Péter Gáncs

## Membership

Membership of the church may be quantified on three different levels: according to the last census (2011), 214,965 Hungarian citizens declared they feel they belong to the Lutheran church. This shows a considerable decrease compared to the values 10 years ago: in 2001, 304,705 people chose Lutheran as their religion in the census.

The member registry of the church has shown numbers on both sides of 200,000 for more than ten years already. The number of church members paying a financial contribution is around 100,000.

## Organisational Structure

The Church consists of 3 dioceses headed by bishops: the Northern Diocese is headed by dr. Tamás Fabiny (Vice President of the LWF), the Southern Diocese by Presiding Bishop Péter Gáncs and the Western by Bishop János Szemerei. All levels of the church structure have a double leadership: clerical and lay. The approximately 300 congregations are served by male and female pastors. Between 1971–1983, women ordination was only done on congregation request (ie. after the pastor had been invited for the position). From 1983 on, women are ordained without any prerequisite.

## Main Areas of Work

Diakonia and education are strong areas of Lutheran presence in the Hungarian society. There are more than 10,000 students in our school network from kindergartens to the theological university, taught by more than 1,000 teachers. Diakonia institutions and services cover a wide area of human life providing daily care or full accommodation for elderly and disabled persons, single mothers, families in need and homeless people.

An important area combining mission with social responsibility is the Roma work of our church. Beside congregational level programmes (among them a successful social agricultural project), the church also works for the inclusion of Roma youth through the Lutheran Christian Roma College which supports the emergence of Roma intellectuals through a joint study programme for Roma and non-Roma college students.

In addition to Roma work and a strong representation of zero tolerance against exclusion and hate in the society, the Evangelical–Lutheran Church has a special emphasis for the year 2013. In preparation for the 500th anniversary of Reformation, ELCH has thematic years. This year's topic coincides with the EKD thematic year "Reformation and tolerance". school projects

## Special Challenges

The results of the 2011 census have put the questions of church membership, approaching people and mission in a wider sense in a priority position in our church. Our strategy entitled 'Visibly Lutheran' also addresses the present challenges of church and society through its five priorities: volunteering, strengthening the pastoral vocation, networking, sustainability and professionalism. The ongoing structural renewal for the church centre and leadership structures is also part of this process.

## Involvement in Networks or International Operations

The ELCH cooperates closely with the other established churches in Hungary and the Lutheran churches in the neighbouring countries. Our official partners abroad are the Lutheran Churches in Bavaria (Germany) and Finland. Other partners include Lutheran Churches in Sweden, Norway and the US (ELCA) and the Lutheran Churches in Austria and Westfalen (Germany). ELCH is a member of several international church organisations such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE/GEKE), the World Council of Churches (WCC). The most recent example of the international commitment of our church was the 14th CEC Assembly hosted in Budapest in July 2013.