



The bridge was completed in 2001, linking Slovakia and Hungary.

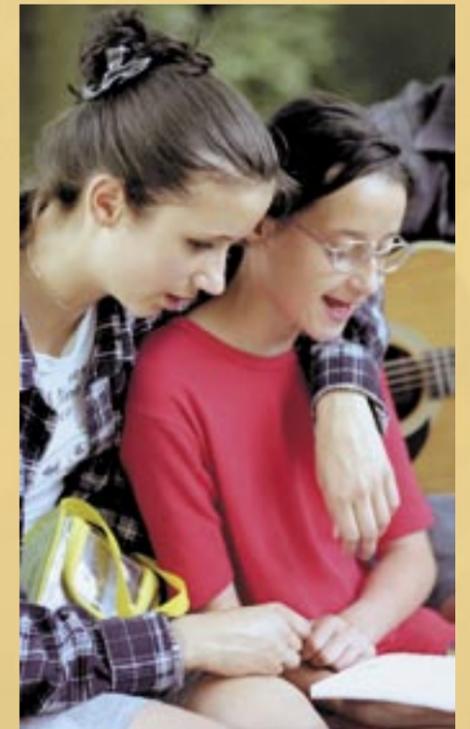
Bridging the Danube into SLOVAKIA

story and photos by Tom Price



Jani Nemeth, pastor at CC Esztergom, leads a group in worship music at the orphanage across the river in Sturovo, Slovakia.

Retreating German troops destroyed the bridge linking Hungary and Slovakia. Over half a century later, the bridge was rebuilt, allowing easy access for missionaries to share the Gospel in an orphanage as well as in the Slovakian town of Sturovo.



Older girls help the younger.

In WWII, the bridge from Esztergom to Sturovo was destroyed. Jani Nemeth, then assistant pastor from CC Esztergom, Hungary, crossed the Danube River on a ferry in order to minister in Slovakia. He spent much of his day waiting for the boat. A bridge was rebuilt in 2001, linking the two countries again.

Jani was troubled as he noticed a group of children each time he came to teach the new believers. Overlooked in this post-communist world, the youngsters peered over the stone fence that separated the orphanage from the outside world. He could not erase their sad looks from his mind. He felt the Lord give him direction to share the Gospel with these captives behind the barrier, so he approached the officials of the facility. They reluctantly agreed, after assurances that this outreach would continue to return. Christian organizations had come before but soon stopped, confusing the children.

The orphans were brought in and seated around Jani and the other missionaries. "How many of you know the meaning of Easter?" he asked the children. They looked at each other quizzically. Eggs, rabbits, toys, and money—some even knew about the tradition of spraying girls with perfume. None knew about the risen Savior.

"Jesus Christ is the Son of God," he said. "He came to this earth and performed many



Erik Racz passes out communion during the service at CC Sturovo. He grew up at the orphanage and gave his life to Christ after hearing the Gospel from missionaries from CC Esztergom, Hungary. He presently attends the CC Bible College in Hungary.



Peter Mozbauer, assistant pastor at CC Esztergom, listens at an outreach at a retirement home.

miracles, helping all the people. Those that were jealous of the good things He did crucified Him on a cross. He died so that all of our sins would be forgiven. God raised Him from the dead three days later on Easter morning."

The children sat captivated. They had never heard anything like this before. The first of many meetings, the youngsters soon came to trust the messengers as well as the message, with many giving their lives to Jesus Christ.



Kata assists husband Jani.

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Jani Nemeth



Children from the orphanage attend CC Sturovo.

Building for the Future

An outreach from CC Redlands, CA, had helped open the door into Slovakia. The country struggled economically as it shifted into a free-market society. The church has continued to grow despite many obstacles and losing several locations.

Every Saturday, CC Esztergom sends a group to the orphanage to share the Gospel. A strong relationship of trust has been established, so the team is able to enter the facility freely. Twenty youngsters attend the Saturday morning Bible study at the orphanage. Jani is now the senior pastor of CC Esztergom, but he continues to focus on ministering to the children at the orphanage as well as the church in Sturovo.

Twenty-year-old Erik Racz grew up behind the walls. The ministry's impact on him has been dramatic. He accepted Christ at the Bible study, and he has led others to Jesus. He crosses the bridge to attend all the functions at CC Esztergom. Erik recently left to attend the CC Bible College in Vajta, Hungary.

Dismissed from the orphanage after high school graduation, most of the teenagers are unprepared for careers or life. Some find themselves in trouble with the law. CC Esztergom is attempting to establish a home for the high school graduates, allowing for a steady transition into the working world. Bible study will accompany job preparation. They will be taught how to set up a bank account, save money, and find living quarters.

"We want this home to be a Christian environment where these young men and women can be disciplined in their walk as they begin their life away from the orphanage," stated Jani. "If God puts it on anyone's heart to come alongside us, we welcome participation from other Calvary Chapels." ☞



Slovakia is about twice the size of the state of New Hampshire.

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Jani prays with a young man that will soon leave the orphanage, uncertain of his future.

CC Nitra

Story by Sean Mercadante
Photos by Patrick Higgins

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”
Romans 10:14

“Because of the system of the church in Slovakia, I am more of an accountant or a businessman than a pastor.” The Lord used those chilling words of the Lutheran pastor in Nitra, Slovakia, to provoke a sense of urgency in Patrick Higgins for the country’s population. He had made his first trip to Hungary as a college student with CC Redlands, CA. He met his wife, Ivetka, on the mission field four years earlier while both assisted with summer outreaches. They married two years later.

Non-denominational fellowships are a foreign concept in post-communist Slovakia. It is a land of impressive church buildings and crucifixes on many street corners. Over time, the people have rejected Christ altogether, “To the people of Slovakia, Christ and the Church are simply relics of a less progressive, less modern Europe,” said Patrick.

Patrick and Ivetka have a strong desire to reach the 120,000 people of Nitra (Slovakia’s third largest city, established in the 7th century A.D.) with the Gospel. There are only 250 evangelical churches in Slovakia, a country of approximately 5.5 million people.

CC Nitra started as a Bible study of four people around the Higginses’ kitchen table. It has grown over the four years into a fellowship of several dozen. They plan to create a coffee shop/ministry center where people can ward off winter’s chill with a cup of coffee and the Gospel of Christ.

The church is sharing the Gospel with Nitra’s university students (who come from across the country) and the gypsy population. Ethnic tension between Slovaks and the Gypsy minority has crept into some churches where Gypsies are unwelcome.



Slovakians revive traditional dance.



Neal Pirollo, Emmaus Road International, teaches at CC Nitra.

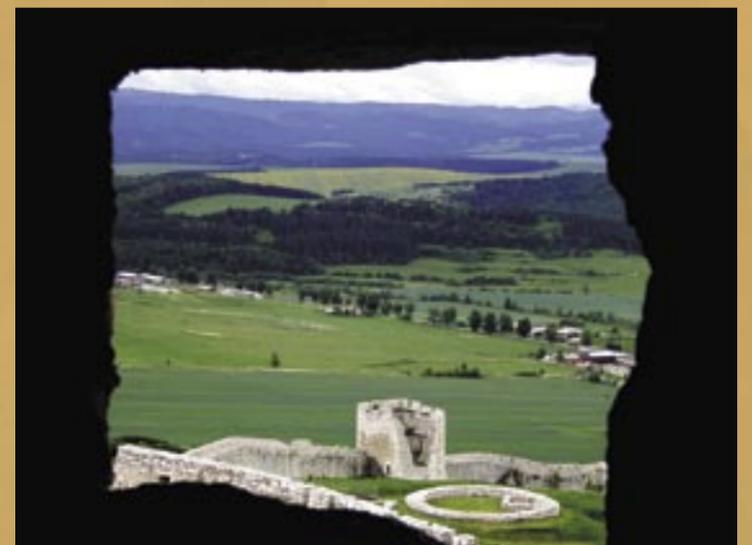


Ivetka and Patrick Higgins.

Ministry in Slovakia requires perseverance and much prayer. The budding CC ministries in Nitra and Sturovo have faced apathy and materialism, as well as accusations of cultism. In this society, religious affiliation is a cultural identification rather than a personal relationship with Christ. “As the Slovak society increasingly shuns the traditions of the past, the Church must meet the

people where they are. Our desire is to not be moved by the culture, but rather to move the culture for Christ,” said Patrick.

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Vestiges of Slovakian history dot the landscape.