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## **The Church's care for the pastoral care of the Roma**

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The Bible contains words of grace that come from God himself. In the words of God that create it, there is a supernatural energy that can help a person change and revive even the style of their previous life. In recent years, pastoral care has been taking place in Romani settlements in Slovakia. The pastoral care of the Romani is carried out in some parishes by priests and through the systematic work of religious orders of the Catholic Church [13].

Ružbarský [14] states that the character of the pastoral workers' approach to the Romani is the essence of a deeper acceptance of the Gospel in connection with the subsequent development of a life in faith. The most important role belongs to the priest, whom the Romani perceive as a mediator between God and man. The Romani perceive the priest as God's helper, as endowed with supernatural power. They show him great respect and honor. If he is not a Roma, he is valued more than members of the majority.

According to Opatrný [12], the term pastoral care does not have a clear and precise definition in our environment. Therefore, the term pastoral care often refers to the ordinary activity of a priest (except for technical and economic activities). Pastoral care can also be referred to in connection with the direct management of a parish. According to the author, we gain a broader perspective when we look at the tasks of the Church. In this case, we can state that the Church has its duties not only within the functioning of the parish, but above all, its mission lies in helping the surrounding world and caring for its members.

Tomčányi and Rosinský [16] understood the pastoral care of the Roma from a different perspective and stated that it is a combination of joy, concern, patience and wisdom, which are rewarded with heartfelt love. The result of pastoral care is a change in human life, successful integration into society.

In Slovakia, we are today participants in the active missionary work of various religious movements in the Roma communities. There are 18 registered churches as well as a number of unregistered church organizations actively working among the Roma. Pastoral activities are mostly motivated by the interests of specific individual priests and pastors. The real task of pastoral care is to guide the Roma on the path of seeking the Christian life and to point out what the teachings of Jesus Christ offer them. The meaning of this teaching and the blessed path is to help them to be able to “translate” the given knowledge into their lives. Pastoral care is also about instilling in the Roma a moral and collective responsibility within the entire ethnic group [7].

#### *Pastoral care of the Roma - as a prerequisite for human development*

Tomčányi and Rosinský [16, p. 46] also define pastoral activity as love for a person in all dimensions and spheres of his life from his conception to natural death. It is not just a one-time help, but a lifelong, selfless leadership and mission, the service of which is the care for every person.

Pope Francis [2] says that the mission of a Christian is wonderful. It is a mission intended for everyone, without exception. Since its inception, the Church has

tried to help the family in such a way that it touches the human heart and forms it in love in a way that achieves social change that leads it to goodness.

Pastoral care is a path that leads to positive change and human development with a permanent characteristic of living together. In general, pastoral care can be characterized as a path to positive change that leads to human development, love, purity, which arose from the transformation of character, structure or situation in time.

Lešková [8] considers social changes to be mainly transformations in the area of social structure, culture of society, changes in social behavior of people, changes in relationships between individuals, social groups, etc.

There are only a few scientific studies on the topic of pastoral activities of churches, describing their positive impact, which lead to social change among Roma. Rather, these are “life scientific studies” that individual clergy have personally experienced while personally carrying out pastoral activities. They speak of their successes as a positive change among Roma and include among their successes primarily:

- gaining the trust of parents of the Roma community,
- regular school attendance of Roma children,
- greater cleanliness in the community,
- improvement of public opinion about Roma from the perspective of majority society,
- greater silence during joint programs,
- activation of Roma in maintaining order in the community [1].

We believe that in order to achieve positive change, an adequate approach is needed so that the Roma accept our path.

Ružbarský [14] states that in order to achieve positive change among the Roma and achieve human development, one must be just in their pastoral care, one cannot forget about grace and their silent listening. All participants involved in pastoral care are therefore expected to respect the people they come into contact with, to have

knowledge of their culture, lifestyle, temperament and characteristics, to free themselves from prejudice. It is necessary to create space in their hearts not only for teaching, but above all for listening, since the essence of communicating the Christian message is mutual dialogue and personal testimony.

In our opinion, it is like walking on thin ice. Where can we find the line of correct leadership of these people? As Tkáč [15] claims, socially excluded people must not be “hostages of religious interests”, since pressure to do something with which a person does not identify hinders personal and human development. It is therefore necessary to create conditions and support missions that offer help, listen to the needs of the Roma, listen to them and are culturally and traditionally close to them, whose “work” is a person (Roma) who does not destroy, but on the contrary, improves himself and his surroundings by harmonizing Christianity with cultural diversity and the cultures of nations.

In this context, it is very necessary to highlight the idea of Beňová from the international scientific symposium, which she presented within the framework of pastoral care and acceptance of change. If a Roma person becomes aware of who he or she is for Christ, he or she will gain certainty about his or her spiritual identity, thereby changing the way he or she views himself or herself, as well as his or her environment and surroundings. Pastoral care is essential for change for the better. It is necessary to reach out to the entire generation of adolescents, young people of productive age, and also older Roma, and to shape them on the biblical principles of the Christian community, leading them on the right path of accepting Christian obligations to themselves, their community, and society [6].

#### *The Church's pastoral care for the Roma in Slovakia*

Pastoral care is a set of activities through which the Church carries out its mission and can also consist of helping to find or strengthen faith. It consists in acting and ensuring spiritual care for believers and non-believers in specific living conditions, or for a certain social group of a certain group of people (e.g. youth, the sick, the elderly, Roma, the unemployed, families).

Each community has its own creed, philosophy, certain characteristics and a mission that it tries to fulfill. According to a survey of the religious affiliation of the population of the Slovak Republic, which was conducted in 2011, the population belongs to the following religious denominations in this percentage:

- Roman Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic - 62.02%,
- Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia - 5.86%,
- Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia - 3.83%,
- Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia - 1.82%,
- Orthodox Church in Slovakia - 0.91%,
- Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Slovak Republic - 0.32%,
- Other religious and church organizations listed in Appendix 4 have a representation of their believers of less than 0.19% [11].

In 2022, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic [17] published additional data for 2021, the first data on the nationality or religion of the population. It was found that up to 55.8% of the population of the Slovak Republic (3.04 million) reported a Roman Catholic religious affiliation. In terms of number, the Evangelical denomination follows with 5.3% (287 thousand) and the Greek Catholic denomination with 4% (218 thousand).

From the above overview of the percentage grouping, we can conclude that the Christian faith has the largest representation in Slovakia according to religiosity.

Among the unregistered Churches and religious societies operating among the Roma in Slovakia are:

- Devleskero Kher (God's House),
- Christian Mission Maranata,
- Christian Community Radostné srdce,
- Christian Community Romani Archa,
- The Word of Life [13, p. 29].

In the context of pastoral care in Slovakia, the Roman Catholic Church, as the most represented religion of the inhabitants of the Slovak Republic, has created the Pastoral and Evangelical Plan of the Catholic Church in Slovakia. According to the plan, the aim of pastoral care and evangelization of the parish community is to:

- improve the current parish pastoral care within the framework of the administration of the sacraments, divine services, and catechesis in the spirit of the instructions of the Church Magisterium,
- cooperate with the laity and their communities so that the parish becomes a community that evangelizes others,
- move from traditional pastoral care to missionary pastoral care,
- lead practicing believers to spiritual maturity,
- lead superficial Christians to personal faith [4].

Podolinská and Hruštič [13] state that the pastoral care of the Roma is carried out in individual parishes through the initiative of individuals and specific priests, as well as through the systematic work of religious orders and communities operating under the Catholic Church, especially the Salesians of Don Bosco.

Pastoral work with the Roma in Slovakia is very specific, directly directed at the individual, the family and the local community in which they live, while highlighting the dignity of the person. Pastoral care combines the two basic goals of its mission: evangelization and social work based on the virtue of love of neighbor, applying professional tools for work with the individual, in the community or on the street, and at the same time providing training with the aim of helping to achieve sustainable social changes in society.

In 2019, the Bishops' Conference of Slovakia developed the Strategy for Pastoral Work with the Roma in Slovakia 2020-2022, which resulted in a document on Pastoral Work with the Roma in Slovakia. In general, it consists of four main dimensions that intertwine and complement each other:

- Liturgy – celebration of the Eucharist.
- Diakonia – mercy and love of neighbor.

- Kerygma – proclamation of the Gospel.
- Koinonia – participation in the life of the parish and community life.

The organizational structure of pastoral work with the Roma is divided into institutionalized pastoral work and ordinary pastoral work in parishes. Pastoral work with the Roma takes place in about 20 pastoral works (as institutionalized pastoral work) and in about 100 parishes (in a more informal way).

Pastoral care for the Roma is supported by approximately 150 clergy, including members of religious orders, 35 pastoral assistants (mainly Roma) and over 200 volunteers. Approximately 10 non-profit organizations are active in pastoral work with the Roma. The SAVORE network has also been established, the aim of which is to improve the exchange of experiences and cooperation [5]. SAVORE is an informal Roma-Slovak platform of people (over 100 members) involved in Roma communities in various social areas and professions. SAVORE is a Roma word that means “everyone” and at the same time the letters of this word hide the values that this network wants to carry, namely cooperation, commitment, vision, expertise, development and evangelization. Based on the findings, the number of parishes, priests or theologians involved in the process of pastoral care and evangelization of the Roma is very low. However, it is positive that the individual successes of individual clergy who carry out pastoral care in their parish in the Roma community can slowly lead to positive social change among the Roma.

Opatrný [12] states that in order to achieve overall success and positive change, the Church and religious communities should expand the dimension of missionary and pastoral work in neglected Roma communities and place an emphasis on integration without suppressing the Roma identity. It is therefore important to proceed in accordance with the strategy and vision of the pastoral care of the Roma in Slovakia, with the intention of getting to know and bringing the Gospel to people in Roma settlements and, through its proclamation, leading the Roma to morality, self-help and teaching them to help each other. In the context of increasing pastoral work

in Roma communities, it is necessary to focus on the education and training of future priests in the field of Roma issues.

We identify with the general idea of Mekel [9, p. 32], who, in the context of positive change among Roma, uttered a very inspiring sentence that points to the power of faith. “What is impossible for people is possible for God. God does not make distinctions between people. He seeks those who will believe, allow themselves to be changed, learn to walk the narrow path and ultimately bear good fruit in their lives.”

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## **Bridging Cultures through Non-Native Language Learning and Teaching**

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In today's interconnected world, learning a non-native language is not just about memorizing grammar or expanding vocabulary. It is increasingly recognized as a way to connect cultures and build mutual understanding. Scholars in applied linguistics and intercultural studies argue that successful communication across languages requires intercultural communicative competence, i.e., an ability to recognize, interpret, and mediate between cultural perspectives [1; 4; 7]. The Council of Europe's updated Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (2020) underscores this by adding descriptors for mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and online interaction [3]. These updates