

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

July 2011

www.dcslovaks.org

Financing Churches in Slovakia: Debate and Dilemma

by Lubomir Martin Ondrasek

A fairly large portion of the Slovak public believes that an inordinately important concern of churches—especially the dominant Roman Catholic Church—is to pursue their economic interest and extend political influence. As a result, Slovak churches face a serious challenge: in the process of negotiations with the government concerning economic security, the decline of trust could turn into a full-blown crisis of confidence, with possibly irreversible consequences for churches.

Under the current system, the state pays the wages of the clergy, even though it does not regulate the number of clergy hired each year. Over the last decade, state expenditures for registered churches that have exercised their legal right to receive funding (13 out of 18) have more than doubled. Yet, in order not to be viewed as interfering with the church's internal affairs and thus compromising religious freedom, the state has not tried to influence policies regarding the church and its clergy.

(story continued pg. 3)

SASW Fundraiser for VSM/City U. Features Dinner with Ambassador

SASW is pleased to announce that, this fall, it will conduct a fundraiser to increase the number of scholarships it funds for Slovak students to attend VSM/City University in Bratislava and Trencin. Slovak Ambassador Peter Burian has graciously agreed to host a private dinner for eight persons at his residence in McLean, Virginia, in support of the fundraising effort. The SASW Board has decided to conduct a raffle for invitations to the dinner. There will be four grand prizes, each of which will be an invitation for two persons to the dinner. Tickets for the raffle will be \$50 each and you may purchase as many as you wish, giving you a chance to win more than one invitation. We expect to hold the raffle before the end of the year, and the actual date of the dinner will be determined by the Ambassador's schedule, but probably sometime in early 2012. The prizes will be as follows:

- **Grand Prizes (4) - Invitation for two to dinner with Ambassador and Mrs. Peter Burian**
 - **First Prize - Flag of the Slovak Republic**
 - **Second Prize - One case of Zlatý bažant beer**
 - **Third Prize – One-year family membership in SASW**

We will publicize the event through the fall, but you can already purchase tickets by sending your name, address, phone/email, the number of tickets desired at \$50 each, and a check payable to SASW for the total to:

**SASW Raffle
c/o Dr. Jerry Rich
10614 John Ayres Drive
Fairfax, VA 22032-3115**

President's Column

It is the midpoint in our year and once again time to communicate with you about our SASW events. As before, we contributed \$2,000 to City University for four \$500 scholarships! Millie Schoepe-Evans contributed two scholarships in memory of her late husband, Jim Evans. John Husovsky and Virginia Sorkin together also contributed one scholarship in Jim's memory. The fourth scholarship was from our general treasury. As usual, we look forward to receiving letters from the student recipients of these scholarships.

Our annual picnic will be on **Sunday, September 25**, at the home of Millie Schoepe-Evans in Fairfax. We are still looking for some people to help with planning and clean-up! Please help us make this a memorable occasion!

Our annual meeting, which will include the election of three board members for a three-year term, will be **Saturday, October 29**. M. Mark Stolarik from the University of Ottawa will be our guest speaker, after our business meeting and election. He will talk about the Prague Spring in 1968 and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. We are not yet sure if the Embassy will be available for our meeting; we will let you know when plans are finalized.

Our annual dues have not been raised in many years. Your board of directors therefore voted in May to raise the dues starting for the year 2012. The dues will be \$25 for a single membership and \$35 for a family membership. If you pay your dues for 2012 by our **annual meeting on October 29**, you can pay the current rates of \$15 and \$20. If you pay later than October 29, especially at the Svätý Mikuláš party, you will need to pay the price of the new dues.

We are looking for someone who is willing to work on publicity for SASW. We would like a person who has the time to announce our occasional meetings to other organizations and also to newspapers. We need to let more people know about our organization and to create opportunities for attracting new members. Please let me know if you are interested, by contacting me at <ktjr89@verizon.net>. Lastly, we are still looking for someone who would be willing to audit our financial books. The person would need to have a little financial background, but it cannot be performed by a board member. Please consider this opportunity to help us!

All are welcome to attend our board meetings at **6:30 P.M. in the food court of Ballston Common Mall in Arlington, VA**. The dates of these meetings for the remainder of the year are: **July 27, September 22, October 26, and November 9**.

Kathryn Tatko

SASW News and Notes

Speakers' Series – Our third Speaker's Series event this spring, held on April 30, was an interesting talk on "Communism's Twisted Paths into Christian Slovakia," by SASW member Dr. George Mesko. He discussed his latest book, published in Slovak, *Po stopách komunizmu a mílniky slovenskej krúťňavy* [In the footsteps of communism and milestones of the Slovak maelstrom]. A lively discussion followed the talk. Thanks to Dr. Mesko for his active participation in SASW.

Charles Kocian passes – We learned only recently that long-time SASW member, Charles Kocian, 89, of Washington, DC passed away last November. We offer condolences to his wife, Jean, and surviving relatives. An obituary is available at < <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/tnonline/obituary.aspx?n=charles-j-kocian&pid=146778031> >.

New Book by Genelin – As some of you may know, Michael Genelin has written a series of detective novels based on the fictional character Jana Matinova, a Slovak policewoman. Genelin's work has garnered favorable reviews. His fourth book in the Matinova series, *Requiem for a Gypsy: A Jana Matinova Investigation Set in Slovakia*, was published on July 12. It is widely available through bookstores and websites (Borders, Amazon etc.). These books are great beach reads!

Warhol-themed play at Studio Theater – From July 13 through August 7, the Studio Theatre, at 1501 14th St., NW, in Washington, will present the play *Pop!* based on events in the life of Andy Warhol and his circle of star hangers-on. For more information: 202-332-3300, or <www.studiotheatre.org>.

Visit Slovak villages in Serbia – Helene Cincebeaux, who regularly conducts tours to Slovakia and surrounding countries, has informed us that she has added “a small adventure trip in August to the Slovak villages in Serbia, including Kovačica, that are the home of the naïve painters (subject of an embassy art exhibit in the past), and to remote regions of Maramureș, Romania, and Carpathian Ukraine—places where time has stood still!” For more information about this tour, contact Helene directly at <helenezx@aol.com>.

Otto Von Hapsburg – Major newspapers recently reported that Dr. Otto von Hapsburg, 98, once heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, passed away on July 4. Dr. von Hapsburg was the son of Charles I, who was emperor for only two years just before the start of World War I and the subsequent dissolution of Austria-Hungary. Von Hapsburg made an interesting career for himself, which included playing a role in the events that led to the opening of the Berlin Wall and subsequent downfall of communist rule in Eastern Europe.

Financing Churches (continued from pg.1)

Changing the system of direct state financing of churches and religious societies is currently the most pertinent and widely discussed issue concerning state-church relations in Slovakia. The present system of financing of churches and religious societies is problematic and untenable in the long run, but the absence of social consensus and political will has precluded its replacement with a more appropriate model. The law that governs the financing—passed shortly after the forced nationalization of church property by the Communist Party—has been in effect since 1949, though the model of direct state support of churches stretches back to the eighteenth century. This long history indicates that any fundamental change in the financing model, which would be derived from the doctrine of strict separation of church and state, is unrealistic and, to many Slovaks, also undesirable.

In February 2011, Daniel Krajcer, the Minister of Culture of the Slovak Republic, met with representatives of the registered churches, taking the first step toward fulfilling the government’s commitment, in cooperation with the churches, to “open an all-society dialogue on the problematic issues of funding the churches.” This meeting represents an official attempt to identify and implement a mutually suitable financing model. Although there is no guarantee that this effort will prove more successful than previous attempts, both the state and the churches are better equipped to bring this task to fruition than ever before. Considering the social, religious, and political contexts surrounding the debate, it may be several years before a sufficiently broad consensus is reached and a new model of financing takes effect.

Recent discussions indicate that Slovakia will not indiscriminately copy foreign financing models, even though these models—especially the European ones—are being carefully considered. Most likely, the state will continue to subsidize religious schools, restoration and preservation of church buildings that represent national cultural heritage, wages of clergy serving in the armed forces, and various public benefit activities for the foreseeable future.

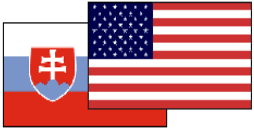
The new model will probably affect the two most controversial aspects of the current system of financing: clergy salaries and financial support for the operational costs of denominational headquarters. Undoubtedly, Slovak churches will have to rely more heavily on self-financing, but their revenue will likely continue to be indirectly supplemented by the state through a church tax or tax assignation.

Since the model of financing churches through a church tax (i.e., an additional tax imposed by the state on believers) is unpopular in Slovakia, its establishment would almost certainly lead to an outflow of members from traditional churches, as recently witnessed in Germany and Austria. Thus, the most feasible model appears to be tax assignation. In this case, every citizen would be required to designate a specific percentage of their income tax to one of the recognized churches or other previously approved cultural or charitable organizations.

Though the Slovaks’ trust of the institutional church seems to be gradually declining, they are not withdrawing their church affiliation, as has happened in some Western European countries. However, the Slovak churches must now realize that the challenge is not only economic but also ethical.

References: Michaela Moravčíková and Eleonóra Valová, *Financing Churches and Religious Organization in the 21st Century* (Institute for State-Church Relations, Bratislava, SVK, 2010).

Lubomir Martin Ondrasek, a native of Slovakia, is a Ph.D. student in Religious Ethics at the University of Chicago Divinity School. This article appeared on the website of the University of Chicago Divinity School, at <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/archive_2011/0602.shtml>.



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***2011 Membership Directory enclosed.
 Thanks for your support!***

(Please check your mailing label. If it says 'EXP: 2011' or earlier, our records indicate that your membership is not current. If you don't renew, you will not be eligible for member rates at SASW events. If you have questions, send an email to < dcslovaks@yahoo.com >, or drop a note to Tonya Harmon at the address on the form below.)

**SLOVAK-AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC
 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL/DONATION FORM**

New membership or renewal runs thru the end of 2011. **Renew for 2012 at current rates thru Oct. 29, 2011.**

Individual membership (\$15/year) \$ _____
 Family membership (\$20/year) \$ _____
 Optional tax-deductible donation:
 VSM/City U. scholarship fund \$ _____
 SASW General Fund \$ _____

Make checks payable to:
 Slovak American Society of Washington, D.C.
MAIL THIS FORM TO:
SASW—Tonya Harmon
606 Kentland Drive
Great Falls, VA 22066

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____

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____ Please do NOT include my phone number in the Annual Membership Directory
 ____ Yes! Please contact me to help out with Society events (07/11)