

30 years of communion among Churches in Košice (Slovakia)

Ekuména: a city-wide dialogue

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The eastern Slovakian city of Košice, with its 250 thousand inhabitants, boasts several recent titles – Capital of Culture (2013), European City of Sport (2016), and European City of Reform (2018). For this and more, it is also called the “The Tolerant City.” And it was precisely in this context that, shortly after the fall of totalitarian regimes in the former Soviet bloc countries, a group of priests, together with laity from the Focolare Movement, helped foster an ecumenical initiative involving not only all the area Churches, but also the Jewish community and the municipality, called Ekuména. The author, a Roman Catholic priest, is one of its early protagonists and remains active to this day.

In 1994, in eastern Slovakia, *Ekuména*, the Ecumenical Community of Churches of Košice, was founded as a religious entity, and included nine Christian Churches: Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelical of the Confessio Augustana (Lutheran), Reformed, Orthodox, Church of the Bohemian Brethren, Apostolic, Fraternal Unity of Baptists and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church. The Catholic University Faculty of Theology is also a member, and the Jewish religious community has been an observer member since the beginning. Over time, *Ekuména* developed its own Statutes and website: <https://ekumenake.rimkat.sk>.

In 1990, the Košice municipality had established the *Commission of Churches* as a way of providing for their participation in city management, with this same Commission later welcoming *Ekuména* among its membership from the moment of its establishment. A working relationship continues to this day.

Activities

Among members, the Word of God and exchanges of Gospel-based experiences are enduring elements forming the foundation of *Ekuména* relationships. During the year, their deepest shared commitment is centered around the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and the most attended initiative by pastors and faithful is the Passion procession through the various churches of the city on Good Friday. *Ekuména* also facilitates an ecumenical *Veni Sancte Spiritus* service at the beginning of each academic year as well as collaboration for the autumn thanksgiving harvest celebration and Advent prayer services.

Ecumenical cultural, social and community events are now part of city life and reflect ongoing requests from municipal government as well. The annual Festival of Sacred Art and Košice City Days are two such examples.

In collaboration with the Faculty of Theology, *Ekuména* is also committed to theological dialogue, and organizes professional and scientific conferences at an international level. The most recent initiative, at the end of 2024, was a conference commemorating the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This collaboration with other Christian Churches has also given new impetus to theological dialogue in Slovakia. *Ekuména* members visit each other's offices and have made numerous joint trips abroad. Participation in international conferences, including the ecumenical network events of *Together for Europe* in 2004 and 2007 in Stuttgart, and later in Munich (2016), as well as the 2017 anniversary commemoration of the Reformation, all serve as strong motivating factors for the community.

***Ekuména* and the town of Košice**

As mentioned, given that the Churches are present in the region Košice, *Ekuména* facilitates municipal relations as a natural partner, contributing to spiritual programs tied to important social events and local anniversaries, and fosters relationships among its citizens. For this, it was awarded the 1998 Košice City Award. The municipality, for its part, provides a social space for *Ekuména*'s activities and financial support. City representatives also participate, together with community members, in national and international ecumenical events, such as an important Jewish-Christian pilgrimage to Israel in 2006.

Beyond the borders of Slovakia

Beginning in 2013, *Ekuména Košice* also established ecumenical contacts in Transcarpathian Ukraine, on occasion of the summer *Mariapolis* spiritual gathering in which several members of the Košice, Mukacheve and Užhorod ecumenical communities participated. Mukacheve and Užhorod are Ukrainian cities in the triangle on the border between Hungary, Ukraine and Slovakia. From this, emerged collaborative initiatives like the first joint Ukrainian-Slovak delegation that participated in a 2017 Rome congress commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This relationship remained even during these years of war in Ukraine, and the spiritual support is stronger than ever.