

Slovak Province - Mission to the Gypsies

Sr. Silvia Zábavová CJ writes about the Mission to the Gypsies in the Slovak Republic. The following is an edited account:

“As well as studying theology in Bratislava I also work on the Mission to the gypsies. We have been trying for years to have a better grasp of gypsy history and culture so as to be better prepared in Slovakia to bring a Christian approach to what is known as ‘the gypsy problem.’



In April 2008 Sr Ráchel Chovancová and I took part in an international conference on the theme: ‘National Minorities – Assimilation or Integration?’ in Opole in Poland. The Slovak students there gave a presentation on the Ukrainian, Hungarian and gypsy minorities, the most numerous minorities being in Slovakia. The Polish Archbishop, Alfons Nossol, found our presentation very interesting and at the end commented: ‘if you deny your mother tongue it is as if you would deny your own mother’.

At the end of June our then postulants (now Srs Marcela Radaèovská and Viktoria Millá) worked on a week-end placement in the largest gypsy village in Slovakia, as our juniors had done in the previous year. In Zborov, another village with many gypsies, **Sr Salome Kuzmová** has been working for several years.

Professor Ladislav Bučko, of the College of Public Health and Social Work at Holy Elizabeth in Bratislava, invited the CJ Slovak sisters to work for the establishment of a Community Centre in Jarovnice where the students of the College could do their practical assignments.



What help could we offer in the gypsy village? As well as holiday mission work and family visits, prayers in the gypsies Church, rosary in families, excursions and events for the youngest, we held a special 10th anniversary memorial day in Jarovnice for the fifty gypsies who lost their lives in the floods of 1998. We organised a five-hour night of prayer for those who had died, and prayed for peace in the village. On the Sunday we had a procession to the memorial place, and a celebratory Mass.

In July we took part in the international Pastoral Conference in Košice which was organised by the Slovak Bishops’ Conference to study the issue of pastoral work among gypsies and other minorities. In August for the first time the gypsies participated in the spiritual week for youth known as ‘Xaveriada’.

This year I have been living in the gypsy village with Frau Jolana. The villagers invite me to visit them. They brought me biscuits, milk, fruit juice, and medicine when I was ill, to express their gratitude that I was among them. Even the fleas like me a lot! In this gypsy mission I receive more than I could have imagined and more than I deserve. The work is demanding and requires much patience, but God works above all where hearts are open for every service, as our foundress knew.”