

PROPOSAL REGARDING THE LEGAL STATUS OF THE BUDAPEST REFORMED SCOTTISH MISSION CONGREGATION

Historical introduction

Throughout the history of Hungary, the congregation, known for many years as "the Scottish Mission", has been keeping and upholding a close relationship with Hungarians and also with the Hungarian Reformed Church almost since its foundation.

For the first Scottish missionaries, who arrived to Hungary in 1841 the focus of their service was mission among Jews. In addition to this, they were providing spiritual leadership for the Scottish workers building the Chain Bridge. In 1848-1849 the Scottish Mission supported the Hungarians' War of Independence, too, and therefore the Habsburg rulers did not allow the Scottish missionaries to continue their service in Hungary. Only after 11 years, in 1858, could they return and continue the mission. By the end of the 19th century, the mission in Hungary among the – mostly- German-speaking Jews had been strengthened and expanded.

The work of the Mission has interacted with the life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in many areas and the Mission still has a great impact on it. The Scottish Mission established a school and planted a congregation with the aim of carrying out more efficient diaconal work. This congregation we know today as the German-speaking Congregation of the Reformed Church in Hungary. After the recognition of the lack of health care for foreigners in Hungary, they founded a hospital named "Bethesda", and started the Sunday School work, which soon became a movement of its own. Furthermore, the Mission maintained an intensive Christian colportage in Hungary. In 1865 the Bursary Programme of the Church of Scotland was opened for the seminary students in Debrecen and Budapest. Thanks to this relationship, which is still strong, the Hungarian students coming home from Edinburgh started serving at the Mission's second institution and congregation, located on Vörösmarty street. In this way the continuation of the mission was assured even after the Second World War, when the Scottish ministers were sent away from Hungary. The 150th anniversary of this Bursary Programme was celebrated by the Hungarian and the Scottish Churches in 2015.

In addition to the Scottish Ministers, who worked towards the Hungarian Revival, the Scottish matron of the Mission's Jewish-Hungarian School for girls, Jane Haining, deserves mention. She refused to return home, even at the urging of her sending church, because she didn't want to leave behind the beloved Jewish school girls in her care. At last the Germans arrested her with the accusation of spying for the British and deported her to Auschwitz, where her life ended. A part of the Danube riverside road is named after her.

Till today, the Hungarian- Scottish cooperation is intensive in the life of the congregation.

In 1990, at the time of registration of churches, the Scottish Mission did not even consider applying to become an independent church, although it was attached legally to the Church of Scotland. During its 175-year-long history, the congregation has always belonged to the current Hungarian Reformed Church Community. That is why it has been enrolled on the official list of RCH congregations as the "Budapest

Reformed Scottish Mission”, and it was also registered at Metropolitan Court. At the same time the congregation is still member of the International Presbytery of the Church of Scotland.

Due to the Agreement between the two churches in 2006, RCH expresses its formal relationship to the congregation through appointing and co-financing a part-time associate pastor.

Today the Scottish Mission serves as an international congregation preserving its reformed identity, and has become a spiritual home not just for Hungarians but for international students living in Hungary, businessmen, diplomats and refugees forced to leave their homes.

The vibrant partnership with the Church of Scotland, embodied so well by the Scottish Mission, was affirmed last year when the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Rt Rev. John Chalmers, and the Presidium of the Reformed Church in Hungary’s Synod Presiding Bishop István Szabó, elected in 2015, and Lay President Pál Huszár signed a partner church agreement.

The memorandum specifies the main fields of the cooperation between the two churches:

‘Cooperation among experts of different areas of Church life has been developed in recent decades, and common ministry addressing our contemporary situations continues to be important. This includes such fields as church review and reform, social reconciliation, commitment for ethnic minorities and for Reformed churches in Central & Eastern Europe and the Carpathian Basin (especially the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, Ukraine), cooperation between Youth Assemblies, resourcing missionary congregations, Roma ministry, work with refugees, priority areas and eco-congregations. Cooperation in international ecumenical organisations in Europe, like WCRC Europe, CPCE, and CEC brings us together in sharing fellowship based on deep spiritual truths and our shared beliefs.’

The memorandum also highlights the 175th anniversary of the Scottish Mission, which we are celebrating this year.

PROPOSAL

Rev. Aaron Clark Stevens, senior minister of Budapest Reformed Scottish Mission Congregation, supervised by our partner-church, the Church of Scotland (CofS) and integrated into its International Presbytery, formerly approached the RCH Presidium, in the light of the 175th anniversary of the congregation, with the appeal for reconsideration of its legal status.

On behalf of the Presidium, the RCH Ecumenical Office started a discussion with the minister of the CofS congregation and the CofS leadership about possible ways of the incorporation.

By the right of the Presidium's endorsement, we are suggesting the following legal solution, based on the example of the Synod Resolution Nr. ZS.-238/2012.11.16 on the foundation of the Budapest Korean-speaking Congregation:

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

1. Based on the modified second clause of the Paragraph 13. (1) of the II. Act of 1994 on the Constitution and Governance of the Church, the Synod acknowledges the Budapest Reformed Scottish Mission Congregation (in English: St Columba's Church), supervised by the Church of Scotland (CofS) and integrated into its International Presbytery, as the congregation of the Reformed Church in Hungary.
2. Legal status of the Congregation: Mission congregation with autonomous legal status
The Budapest Reformed Scottish Mission congregation disposes, within the Reformed Church in Hungary, as "internal" legal entity, an autonomous legal status and tax number, is entitled to open a bank account, and disposes all rights which are given to the congregations within RCH, having the same legal status.
3. Organisational characteristics of the Budapest Reformed Scottish Mission Congregation:
 - Is recognized as a mission congregation of the RCH through the Synod resolution
 - Is embedded into the structure of presbyteries and districts
 - Acknowledges the confessions and teachings of the church
 - Acknowledges the constitutional order of the church
 - It is a special ministry which does not have territorial character
 - Its language is English
 - Elects its consistory out of its members – according to its own rules
4. The Minister of the Budapest Reformed Scottish Mission Congregation:
 - Assignment and revocation occurs according to the rules of procedure of the CofS in prearrangement with the Presiding Bishop of RCH
 - Salary is covered from the Church of Scotland
 - is under the jurisdiction of CofS
 - Registered by the competent presbytery of RCH
 - Not automatically member of the Pension Institute of RCH, but he/she can apply for membership.
 - Corresponding member of the Presbytery.
 - The Presiding Bishop of the Synod may assign an Assistant Pastor for supporting the work of the congregation
 - The salary of the assistant pastor is jointly covered by the Church of Scotland and the RCH according to a separated agreement