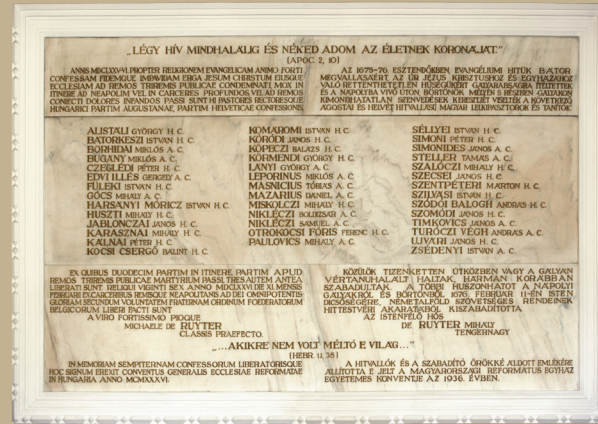


## THE PLAQUE OF THE GALLEY SLAVES

In the life of the Protestant church, the 1670s were full of tribulations. During the time of the counter-Reformation in Hungary, on 5 March 1674, over 700 protestant confessors of faith were summoned by the special court in Pozsony (Bratislava). The court accused them of high treason and violation of the Catholic Church. The court demanded them to confess their “sins” and to convert to Catholicism. Those of the summoned preachers who were not willing to negotiate, were put in small groups and imprisoned. Over 40 priests were forced to go to Naples. Thirty-two survived and were sold as galley slaves. Their fate created a great outcry in the Protestant countries of Europe. In order to set them free, a monetary collection was launched in hopes of getting the pastors released. Finally, after several attempts, the Dutch Admiral Michiel de Ruyter accomplished the mission on 11 February 1676.



In 1933, Károly Marjai, a minister in Mezőtúr proposed that a plaque should be placed inside the Assembly Hall in memory of the martyrs. The proposal was accepted by the General Convent in 1935. The plaque was unveiled on the 260<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the galley slaves' liberation. As he explained it, the hall was built by the Reformed Church in Hungary before the Trianon Treaty and back then, the Church included “all the Reformed presbyteries of the territories that belonged to the Hungarian Crown. By accepting the initiative on behalf of the whole Reformed population, the Church would express its never-ending gratitude to the galley slaves.”

The plaque was commissioned on 6 May 1936 as part of the Calvin celebration for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publishing of the “Institutio Religionis Christianae”.

The words on the plaque salute not only the galley slaves, but also Admiral Michiel de Ruyter, their liberator: “In the blessed memory of the confessors and the one who liberated them, placed by the General Convent of the Reformed Church in Hungary in the year 1936.”

ORIGINAL PICTURES FROM THE POSTCARD COLLECTION OF ANDRÁS CSENGŐ-TSCHÖNER AND THE ARCHIVES OF THE SYNOD OFFICE.



OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN HUNGARY

## THE SYNOD BUILDING

## THE HISTORY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SYNOD BUILDING

In 1897, the General Convent, the national decision-making body of the Hungarian Reformed Church, realized that a building was required to accommodate all the assemblies, offices and committees whose activities were related to the work of the Convent. It was decided that if there was not a suitable property in possession of the Reformed Church, a new building was to be built for this purpose. The Presidency of the Convent set up a committee, which was in charge of building preparation. The Convent president, Dezső Bánffy along with convent representative Ernő Dókus, oversaw the construction, which took several years to complete, and regularly informed the Convent on the progress of the building.

In 1903, the Synod made two decisions. First, the new structure was to include not only the church's assembly hall, but also the presidency conference room, central offices, and to serve as a residence for seminary students. The second decision was in relation to the construction plan. The budget for construction work was 310.000 Hungarian crowns. The ambitious nature of the project made it clear that the church required a bank loan. Each church district agreed to assist in the repayment of the loan.



Two years later, in 1905, a suitable location was selected. After examining several suggestions, the Convent chose the piece of land on the corner of Thököly Street and Szabó József Street (it was important that the building be located near the tram line). However, by the time the loan was acquired, this lot had been sold. Ultimately, the Church purchased a property on Szabó József Street, which satisfied all criteria except for its distance from the tram route. The location made up for this with its quiet environment, which as the committee put in its record, was necessary for assembly sessions.

An architectural design contest was announced by the Presidency of the Convent in 1907 - as many as 19 plans were submitted. The winning design was awarded 1000 Hungarian crowns and was titled "Mighty Fortress". The second design, "Light" was priced at 500 crowns. Another three designs were purchased for 400 crowns each. The Convent commissioned Alfréd Hajós and János Villányi to compose a final version out of the best works. According to the finalized construction plans, the Synod Building shows characteristics of historicism, which is a combination of historical styles with the implementation of current design.

The construction work started on 16 March 1908, and even though it was progressing at a good pace, due to the upholsterers' general strike in the autumn of 1908, it was completed behind schedule on 5 April 1909. The Synod Assembly Hall boasted a presidency platform encompassed by pews seating 222 people.

The first Synod session in the new hall was held on 21 April 1909, in memory of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Calvin's birth. After the opening devotion by bishop Gábor Antal, Chief Curator Dr. Dezső Bánffy, president of the preparatory committee, handed over the building with the following words:

*„(...) let us begin our assemblies here to the betterment of our universal church in a peaceful manner, with great ambition and the intention not to let the leadership be taken from the hands of our lawful autonomy and the organisations established by it. Because if that happens, we shall become weaker, and instead of the law, temporary moods will be controlling us which change from day to day, and which might result in revolutions, but will not help the gradual growth and the maintenance of a lasting organisation.”*

The building stood for several decades without renovation. As life in general and the mission tasks of the church were changing, the service apartments were gradually replaced by offices. Significant alterations were made to the building in 2003-2004 in the building. The Synod Hall was redecorated on several occasions, the last of which was in 2005. The church refurbished most of the furniture, installed modern audio-visual technology and restored the original colour of the Hall.

Several pieces of original furniture are still used in Synod offices. The Synod Hall, the council hall and most of the offices are still lit by original chandeliers and lamps. The last external renovation of the building took place in the 1980s.

Since 1966, the Budapest-Baross Square Reformed Church has held its Sunday services in the Assembly Hall.

Now, the highest legislative and executive body of the Reformed Church in Hungary, the Synod, meets within these walls. The building is home to the Synod Office, which manages all tasks related to the work of the Synod, the Synod Council and the Presidency of the Synod.



SYNOD OFFICE OF THE REFORMED  
CHURCH IN HUNGARY  
21. ABONYI UTCA, BUDAPEST-1146  
P.O. BOX: 70., PF 5., BUDAPEST-1440  
TEL: +36 1 343 7870, 460 0708  
FAX: +36 1 460 0715  
E-MAIL: OIKUMENE@REFORMATUS.HU  
WEBSITE: WWW.REFORMATUS.HU