

Chaplain Service at Slovak Fire and Rescue Corps (FRC)

Dear members of AMI, dear friends,

I have an honour to present you our chaplain service for the Fire and Rescue Corps in Slovakia.

I am sure that many of you, as members of your own military Ordinariates, have a good experience with a work of military chaplains. Military Ordinarate usually consists of several groups of military chaplains and is led by a military bishop.

Our Slovak military Ordinarate consists of several very specific parts. It is divided in to three separate sections – vicarages. There is of course a military vicarage that is very active in our armed forces. But we also have a separate vicarage for the Ministry of Justice, which takes care of prison officials and prisoners. The third part is the vicarage of the Ministry of Interior, which takes care of police officers, customs officers and finally also for the Fire and Rescue Corps.

Each chaplain is incorporated into the corps and undergoes a specific education and training programs of the corp. All FRC chaplains are trained as regular professional firefighters.

Our Chaplain Service at Fire and Rescue Corps was established only six years ago – in July 2010. It consists of three chaplains - Pavel Mikoláš, Marcel Senderák and me - and takes care of about 4000 firefighters and another 12 000 close family members. Slovakia is divided into eight territorial parts, so each chaplain cares for two or three Counties.

For example my area consists of Nitra, Trnava and Bratislava County – the western part of Slovakia - and is 12 600 square kilometres large. But my two brave colleagues have even larger areas than me.

Our vision and work

The primary vision for establishing of a pastoral ministry of FRC was to provide an assistance and support to members in coping with difficult life situations. For this reason every priest needs to have at least five years long experience with a fieldwork before he can become the FRC chaplain. The main requirement is placed on empathy and willingness to adapt our work to the specific environment as far as possible.

Our work includes sacramental service for Roman Catholics who work in the FRC and also for members of their families. This work carries a high added value, enabling us to successfully build trust and friendly relations with active fire fighters. Through these friendly relations we very often find a proper way to win a trust also at our non-believing colleagues.

There are three centres of our work: Bratislava, Žilina and Prešov. We have our own Chapel of st. Florian – the saint patron of firefighters in our country – that is situated in our education base in Žilina. We also serve holy masses directly on fire stations in Prešov and Košice – the eastern part of Slovakia – and we take part on services in our military cathedral in Bratislava.

Over the past six years we have managed to establish a stable system of work, which involves preparing of many official events like pilgrimages, trips or sport events. They contribute to enrich the working environment and offer also a possibility of an active recreation and mental hygiene of our colleagues. We can now proudly say that our official activities are becoming always more and more popular.

A special category of our work is a crisis intervention in difficult life situations and also a posttraumatic care. It encompasses every year hundreds of hours of personal interviews and support. Whether is it a family trauma associated with divorce, serious illness or death, the chaplain actively assists and supports any FRC member who asks for a help.

Our service won a stabile trust after we helped FRC troops to take care of injured and shocked victims during flood disasters and bulk traffic accidents. After this field cooperation we were invited by the official psychological service of the Ministry of interior to become a part of their PEER Programme. So we underwent also some psychological training programmes and became official PEERS for firefighters.

We assist to firefighters and in cooperation with them we want to be a good support for victims of disasters and unforeseen situations.

These two objectives in themselves carry claims for both practical and theoretical training of clergy in crisis intervention and routines and also it needs an adaptation of proper legislation. Coming years, therefore, will be for us a time of meeting these goals.

Charity

We have realized, that the only face of the Church that is our society willing to trust, is a face of the mercy and help. Therefore we are active also in individual charity projects. We teach people to be sensitive to personal situations of their colleagues and be willing to help them.

We helped many of them in a discreet way, but this year, we started an official charity project in Bratislava. We have established a charity organization called ProCharity that unites volunteers to help families in need. Some of our members are firefighters, some work in other fields and some are students.

What we do is that we run a little charity shop – the first one in Slovakia – and collect money for targeted assistance. During last eight months we were able to support more than twenty families and single mothers in need. After gaining some experience

we have offered our help also to families of firefighters. We are now supporting a family of one of my colleague from Bratislava that is fighting with leukaemia of their only child – only two years old little Hugo. We are supporting the family with blood donations and active psychological support.

Another project is focused on a firefighter's family from Trnava. Father of three little girls is my colleague, too. Two of the girls are in a big danger because of their specific metabolic disease and need a very special hospital care. The family is therefore lack of money – mother has to stay at home and the father's gain is very limited. They would need a car for making every week hundred kilometres long route to a children hospital in Bratislava. Therefore we have opened a collection for buying a proper used car.

All mentioned kids in need were baptised by me and their case is under my personal supervision. If you have any good advice or any contact that could possibly help us in our charity work we would be very thankful for contacting us.

All these activities are private, but they do influence the image of our spiritual service for firefighters because they are able to connect people of good will and influence the way of thinking in the whole group of FRC.

Every service does change the servant, too. And also our service for the spiritual good of our firefighters has changed our own way of thinking, feeling and understanding of our mission. After hundreds of hours spent in active service on fire stations we can proudly say that this is our home environment and we are now a part of the Slovak firefighter family.

Thanks for paying attention,

Cpt. Mgr. Luboslav Farkas