

Mission in the Face of Pluralism, Secularization and Religious Diversity

Getting used to a pluralistic and diverse religious stage could be difficult when reality changes from one year to the next and diversity is perceived as a new phenomenon.

However, since in Transylvania religious diversity was already lived in the 16th century, the coexistence of different denominations and ethnic groups is a normality. Just as "normal" is the affiliation of the population to a Christian church. Thus, more than 80% of the population would indicate their membership within a Christian church.

"Is mission actually necessary here", one would ask, if it is only understood as a mission to bring people into contact with the message of Jesus Christ. If we understood mission as an effort to win unbaptized people for Christianity it would not be entirely true in this context. In this sense, no such mission in the form of evangelization comes into question for us as a church.

Nevertheless, we as the Evangelical Church in Romania have a mission, a mandate, and that is to be church in the world. For us this means remaining relevant to society, focusing on people and their personal faith, and being open to other denominations. That is why we as a Protestant church have often been in the vanguard of ecumenism within Romania.

By being open to "the other" and by being perceived in society as a rather tolerant and liberal church, many have become aware of us. People also become aware of us by the fact that we sometimes speak out on certain socially relevant issues. Thus, it's not always important what we say. For many, it is crucial that we say something because they want an open and transparent church that speaks and represents its own opinion. A church that regards diversity as enrichment and not as constricting or scary. Which, at the same time, is not indifferent to corruption. In recent years, people who were looking for a church with whose values they could identify, have converted to our church. That's how we became a home in faith for many.

I would like to emphasize, however, that we are not actively engaged in a mission with the goal of gaining members for our church. However, we have experienced that our way appeals to many people. For example, people in middle-aged people who have experienced a change of mentality, who are no longer directly influenced by the communist era and who want a renewal in society, in politics, but also in the churches. They are searching for a meaning in life, for a community in which they feel they belong to it and which, out of its faith, expresses itself on certain issues in society. For example, in 2017, when there were big protests in Romania against corruption and for a constitutional state, we as a church community organized evening prayer for Romania in our church. Our goal here was not to proselytize people, but we did it because we regarded it as part of our mission as a church to speak out on this socially relevant event.

We believe that when people are searching, they are looking for a conversation and so we have an opportunity to share authentically about what they might find with us. Our goal is not to indicate a quantitative annual growth, it is much more important to us to have active, mature church members in our community. That is why for many years our church has offered the opportunity for adults to attend a faith course, an adult confirmation class. Although they attend this course for several months and learn more about faith, they may ultimately decide not to be confirmed and become Protestants. However, many of them find themselves in our theology, understand our dialectics and find an easier access to God and faith in Him. Through the testimonies they give to the congregation

as confirmands, the core congregation also remembers the pillars of our faith. They, too, can experience renewal through this and thus contribute to a vibrant Christian community.

We also see our task in addressing the people in our community as a whole, a family. Starting with the work with children, we also try to reach out to the parents and teach them the values that make us a community. Not everyone who comes to us is a member of our community. Above all, we have those in mind who do not know us and only found access to us through their children. In this case as well, we would not speak of an active mission, with the goal of winning new members. However, here too we can speak of a conscious mission we carry out, namely the communication of our Protestant identity through the proclamation of the Gospel.

In all our groups we take the proclamation of the Gospel as an important mission of the church seriously. If you understand mission by this, then we pursue mission quite actively in our offerings, regardless of the age groups.