



The ordination of women the limit of tolerance

The CPCE at the 2nd consultation on aid for the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia. By Joachim Kramm.

The way the nocturnal visitors to the thermal baths of the Hungarian village of Berekfürdő took seemed to anticipate the journey before them. Despite the cool April night one had to prepare for the hot influx in stages. The twelve church partners who had been brought together to Berekfürdő in Hungary by Andreas Hess (Aid

Agency of the Protestant Churches in Switzerland) from Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Hungary for a second consultation relaxed in the iodiferous water after a long journey.

The occasion was the coordination of aid for the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, Ukraine (Kárpátaljai Reformatus Egyház). The place, the “house of reconciliation”, is a successful project of the Swiss aid agency with the Hungarian church. Here the partners of Károly Czibere, the leader of the diaconal division of the Hungarian Reformed Church, were told of the offer to develop its support for the Transcarpathian Church by means of the aid agency of the Hungarian Reformed Church.

The next meeting on the way to the Ukraine took place in Debrecen, Hungary, with Gustáv Bölcskei, the president of the episcopal synod. He emphasized the close relations with the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, which as a Hungarian-speaking minority was taking part in what at the time was the most important project of the Hungarian-speaking Reformed churches in the Carpathian basin, the constitution of a joint synod. The group was given a first intimation that in the face of such a process of union, from a Hungarian perspective the ordination of women plays only a subordinate role.

After a wearisome frontier procedure the group arrived in Beregszász, Ukraine, where it visited the diaconia centre of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia. Going round the individual projects with the leader, Bela Nagy, who at the same time is also senior curator of the church, the retreat of the Ukrainian state from the frontier region was clearly visible. In a big warehouse it was now evident that the diaconia had to take on aid in catastrophes, including fire-fighting, in the region. A clothing store and a soup kitchen look after the basic needs of many people. However, a strategy for a church-diaconal infrastructure has still to be worked out. Andrews Hess wants not least the

CPCE too to take on a task in the co-ordination of diaconia in Europe which transcends the churches.

The meeting with Bishop Sándor Zán Fabián and the three superintendents in the Balazsér youth centre tested the limits to the tolerance of both sides with the question of the ordination of women. The 2005 synod had explicitly forbidden this. In reaction to vigorous reactions from Europe it was allowed again in principle in 2006. However, ordained women could not take on the leadership of a community. Six ordained women are married to serving pastors and regard their ministry as a kind of unpaid 'auxiliary pastorate'. In the Ukraine, with a predominantly Orthodox population, there is no church that admits women to the pastorate. Even the very small German Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Ukraine cannot offer any future in the pastorate to its assistant women ministers.