



**Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche** Gebiet von Mittel- und Südeuropa  
**Eglise Méthodiste Unie** Région de l'Europe du Centre et du Sud  
**United Methodist Church** Area of Central and Southern Europe

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To his Excellency, Ambassador Nagy István  
Embassy of Hungary in Bern

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## A word of appreciation and thanks

Your Excellency, Mr. Ambassador,

I am deeply honoured in receiving this highest recognition from the Republic of Hungary for a foreign citizen. It is for me a recognition of the excellent ministry of the United Methodist Church in Hungary of which I have been the episcopal leader for fifteen years.

Hungary is one of the sixteen countries belonging to the episcopal area of central and southern Europe. Usually twice a year (except in this year of the Corona-pandemic), I have visited churches, met with pastors and lay-members, seen the manifold ministries and led church gatherings. I am proud that the small, but very active United Methodist Church in Hungary – at the last census – was portrayed as the church with the highest number of young people, of persons with higher education, and of members from the Roma community. I am sure that our church father, John Wesley, would have been glad of such a typical Methodist identity of a lively movement, a joining of knowledge and vital piety, and a ministry with the poor. Therefore, I receive the distinction from the Republic of Hungary in gratitude and in humility for what my sisters and brothers in Hungary are living on a daily basis.

Let me add a few remarks in three points out of my episcopal experience in very diverse countries in Europe and Northern Africa:

### **1. On the relationship of Church and State:**

The Methodists came to continental Europe at a time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when liberal governments allowed the presence of new Christian churches, for the first time. The separation of Church and State, and the recognition of religious freedom have become important and lasting values. The difficult times of churches and Christians under Communist regimes should remind us to keep a watchful eye on religious freedom and on the separation of Church and State. The latter gives a specific and complementary role to each one. The State has a particular role for upbuilding a just society for all its citizens. And I welcome that the Republic of Hungary values the positive contribution of Christian churches to peace, justice and the safeguard of Creation. It is evident for me: The Church cannot take the role of the State nor the State the role of the Church. The Church has – together with other entities in the civil society – a particular role in the realm of morality (in a large sense), because morality cannot be imposed by law. It must flow from an inner conviction, which means for Christians based on the Christian Gospel. For us Methodist Christians, our "General Rules" explain such morality under three simple headings: Do no harm; Do good by being in every kind merciful; and use the means of grace that God has given.



## **2. On Hungarian Methodists as part of the episcopal area of Central and Southern Europe:**

Since its beginning and all over the European wars with its changing of borderlines and political systems, Hungarian Methodists have been part of this same episcopal area. This continuity has created strong mutual ties. Particularly in difficult times, whether due to political oppression or economic hardship, the United Methodist Church as a minority church has highly valued the relationships beyond national borders, expressed in prayers, visits, solidarity or mutual support. The bishop has always been the visible sign of this connection in the larger Methodist movement. But we are not a hierarchical church as other episcopally constituted churches. The basic unit of the United Methodist Church is the annual conference where all pastors and an equal number of lay members gather. As such, the annual conference in Hungary is responsible for the ministry of the church in the country. This particular combination of episcopal supervision for the unity of the church, combined with a regional body in a country for the implementation of the ministry has proved fruitful.

## **3. On the relevance of Methodist ministry in Hungary:**

As I said in my opening remarks: I receive this high honour from the President of the Republic of Hungary in recognition of the ministry done by my sisters and brothers in Hungary. The United Methodist Church is a vital church in Hungary and I am proud of it. The former superintendent, Rev. Csernák István, had been appointed by my predecessor and ably led the church through a phase of renewal where a younger generation has come into leadership on all levels of the church. Thus, I have been able to appoint a younger pastor, Rev. Khaled László, as the new superintendent in 2016. Part of this renewal was also an opening up from a rather pietistic, inward turned church due to the Communist hardship towards a more typically Methodist and outward turned active engagement in the society. Examples of such new activity in the society are several newly formed congregations among Roma people or mixed with white Hungarians and Hungarian Roma, or the new initiative of taking leadership of schools.

As United Methodists, we will continue to serve the people of Hungary, of whatever background they may be, witness to the Gospel of Christ, do good in the society and build up a relationship of solidarity beyond borders of one nation.

In gratitude for the high recognition to the United Methodist Church and its ministry in Hungary,



Bishop Patrick Streiff