



## 50 Years Ago: First Holy Ground in East Europe

### Slovak movement commemorates establishment

**Bratislava, 21.11.2021.** Sunday early morning our members gathered at the Holy Ground in the famous Horský Park not far from the city centre. Exactly 50 years ago the ground was established with the assistance of our German sister Brunhilde during her second visit to Bratislava. Since Emi Steberl was not able to enter Slovakia, Paul Werner sent Brunhilde D'Alberti in her place. When the Holy Ground was established on November 21, 1971 our movement was not yet persecuted. Members had selected a chestnut tree because its crown divided into two strong branches reminding them of Adam and Eve respectively Cain and Abel. The members prepared themselves doing a 3-day fast. Many had to walk a long distance since there was no public transport, so they got up at 3 o'clock; some had not been able to sleep at all due to excitement. Frosty weather and snow made the historic walk unpleasant. But their hearts were burning with anticipation!

When persecution started in 1973 the Holy Ground became the site of secret meetings - mostly in the dark of night, around midnight or early morning. Margita Vrabelova, the church leader lived in a house nearby and came daily for tearful prayers. In the course of interrogation, the secret police learned about some "mysterious tree". They invited Juraj Lajda, who was incarcerated to help them identify the tree. Juraj walked with them the Horský Park up and down pretending to search for the exact location; he led the police men to several trees - but not to ours. He feared that they might do some harm.

This autumn our elder sister Anna Simonyiova made every effort to make a meaningful anniversary happen. Thanks to her persuasion the circle of supporters grew. Since in 1971 the ceremony was attended by 16 members, we aspired to achieve a larger number. Happily, counted 22 members arrived at Horský Park; we used flash lamps not to stumble and fall in the forest. Fortunately, the weather was better than in 1941. We started with a unison prayer; afterwards

elder members recalled some episodes of their secret meetings – we heard many interesting stories. We concluded with the CIG anthem. The celebration continued in the famous Carlton Hotel where members have had a hearty breakfast in 1971. Surely the choice of dishes is much larger today, and the service far better. A festive Sunday Service was held in the Peace Embassy and transmitted by Zoom nationwide.

Brunhilde D'Alberti and Gertrud Koch were informed beforehand about the event and expressed much joy about that. Mrs. Koch had spent many years in Bratislava and visited the Holy Ground frequently. When the Bratislava community had no church centre, we held our Sunday service at the Holy Ground. WFWP meets there frequently for the monthly "Prayer for Peace". Once the chestnut tree seemed to be dying, it recovered again - perhaps thanks our prayers and loving touches. Several big trees in the surrounding have fallen but our chestnut braves all storms. Sometimes unattended dogs come and encircle our praying members respectfully keep some distance. Perhaps the animals sense the sanctity of the site?                    - by Barbara Grabner-