

Minority within minority

How Roma Are Welcomed—or Not Welcomed—Within the
Largest Protestant Body in Slovakia, the Lutheran Church

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- Lutherans represent in Slovakia 5.3 % (among Roma 1.4 %) in 2021
- mainline Protestant denomination
- specific forms of work, different from Catholic or Pentecostal
 - female clergy
 - power of congregational board and congregational convent
 - strong historical awareness, historical heritage of a minority denomination
 - liturgical tradition (rather incomprehensible)

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9.	19.	23.	N. Szab.	Attila János Márton, és Rózsa, özvegye.	András	Gyermán József N. Szabó lakos.	1848 25
10.	1.	6.	N. Szab.	Székely János János, és...		Városi János, Béni Mária N. Szabó lakos.	48

- Baptism record of a Romani child in Slavošovce, 1848

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- 2 examples of congregations - **Slavošovce** (250 members), **Rankovce** (660 members)
- Slavošovce - young female pastor (2 years), Rankovce - couple - both pastors (over 20 years)

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- **Rankovce: parallel/separated model**
 - Confirmation classes held separately for Roma and non-Roma children
 - Regular recurring activities (Bible study, children's groups) run separately
 - Only main Sunday service and one-off events (trips, camps) are shared
 - Pastors' own words: "two nations side by side"
 - Attempts at regular joint activities fail — attendance drops on both sides
 - Children/youth cross church lines more fluidly than adults (Roma kids move between Lutheran, Adventist, Apostolic groups)
- **Slavošovce: unified/non-separated model**
 - Confirmation prep is one group (even when it ends up being all-Roma by circumstance)
 - Children's group (besiedka) is mixed by design
 - Holy Communion shared without division
 - Pastor explicitly avoids formally separating groups, even when practically most participants are Roma anyway

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- **Rankovce:** informal ecumenical overlap, especially among children — kids attend multiple denominations' events interchangeably; joint activities (Children's Day) via NGOs/third sector
- **Slavošovce:** relationship damaged by a historical conflict — a former Lutheran pastor publicly expelled Apostolic believers from the church; deep, unresolved rift; no formal cooperation despite the current pastor's openness
- Shared observation: Apostolic/Adventist services are seen as more emotionally engaging and accessible, while Lutheran liturgy is perceived (by both pastors) as a barrier — described as "intellectual," German-style, hard to follow

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- **Finances & Membership – Shared Structural Problem**
- **Rankovce:** deliberately does NOT count Roma as official members – protects them from "majority criteria" pressure (baptism, confirmation, dues) and avoids forcing contributions
- **Slavošovce:** opposite problem – baptized children ARE formally registered as members (required by church records), creating a large body of "non-paying members" that burdens official statistics and diocesan fees
- Both describe discomfort asking for church dues/burial fees from Roma families; both see it as the parish's only stable income source
- Slavošovce pastor proposes long-term education/habit-building rather than enforcement as the only viable path

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- **Distinctive/Notable Features**
- **Rankovce:**
 - Community evolved from shacks to a proper housing settlement ("new district") over 20 years
 - Church-community song book widely used and remembered by children/young adults
 - Marián, Renáta — Roma community members — repeatedly cited as key liaison/helpers
- **Slavošovce:**
 - History of cyclical decline/revival tied to presence or absence of a resident pastor (periods with no clergy caused "everything to fall apart")
 - Roma funeral customs (loud mourning, embracing coffin) noted as significant cultural adjustment for the pastor
 - High turnover of Roma tenants in rented housing near the parish
 - Insufficient education in this aspect at the Seminary in Bratislava

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- **Perceived Success / Progress**
- **Rankovce** (after 20 years): tangible structural progress — housing, education levels (from 4th grade completion to university degrees), employment (from 1 employed out of 500 to a meaningfully higher share); pastors caution against over-crediting the church alone (third sector, state programs also credited)
- **Slavošovce** (after 2 years): describes "potential" rather than results — greatest hope placed in children in religion class; pastor openly says "it could be more" and that she is still learning

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	Rankovce	Slavošovce
Children's groups	3 groups, 30-50 kids in main group	-10 children, religion class 85 pupils
Youth	-20 in main village + -15 across two other villages	Included in general youth work
Adults	Minimal – capacity absorbed by other priorities	Minimal – seen as area of future potential
Sunday service attendance (Roma)	5-7 on average	Up to 5 out of -20 total
Choir	Roma choir existed, discontinued (leader's health)	Roma songs incorporated into general choir repertoire

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Slavošovce

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Rankovce

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Communities of Apostolic
church in
Rankovce and Slavošovce

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