

**COMMEMORATIVE STATEMENT
OF THE SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN HUNGARY
UPON THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION AND FREEDOM FIGHT OF
1956**

The Reformed Church of Hungary is grateful to God the Holy Trinity for the Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1956 in Hungary, as well as for the courageous, self-sacrificing and exemplary lives of those who participated in it. Our church, standing in front of our Faithful Lord, proclaims once again on the 60th anniversary of the freedom fight: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations...” (Psalms 90:1), and remembers with reverence the heroes of the revolution and also the victims of the ensuing retribution, as well as their loved ones.

In 1956, our nation started a revolution against the Stalinist dictatorship, the Soviet occupation, and a false ideology that demanded exclusivity. This revolution was a testimony about our nation’s love of freedom, about the faith in the fact that truth can prevail as well as about the power of joining forces. We showed a great example of heroism and sacrifice to the nations of Communist dictatorships and the free world, and we also proved that we can stand up for true principles in a firm and courageous way. The efforts of the revolutionaries elevate them to the ranks of Hungarian freedom fighters: including the leaders named in history books and the unnamed heroes; the thousands of victims of the retribution and those suffering the consequences for several decades afterwards. Despite having been crushed, this revolution has become a permanent part of our national identity; and it is a binding example for us, the subsequent generations.

The Communist dictatorship that took control in 1948 considered churches its enemies to be destroyed, and did everything in its power to achieve that goal by confiscating their property, eliminating their social base, ensuring the ideological re-education of the masses, employing deceitful propaganda and secret service techniques; by constantly harassing, dividing, threatening and blackmailing believers and ministers; and in the meantime attempted to degrade churches to be mere tools for its ruthless propaganda. This era was synonymous with unceasing suppression, ordeal and persecution for the Reformed Church in Hungary as well. Many were banished, imprisoned, interned or killed; many were broken or forced to remain silent. Meanwhile, our church communities were helpless to see certain leaders accept the enforced cooperation with the state despite their conscience, and others give up their whole existence to become subservient ideologists of this oppressive political system. Still, the desire for freedom and the rejection of the dictatorship could not be erased from people’s souls. It is only by the grace of God that the church’s communities – despite their limited opportunities, their fragmentation and sufferings – were able to remain sources of consolation and hope to many. “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory, for the sake of Your mercy, and for the sake of Your truth.” (Psalms 115:1)

The Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1956 was welcomed enthusiastically by the Hungarian Reformed community as well, as they saw not only an opportunity for eliminating tyranny and regaining national independence, but also the hope that the church could be freed. Our pastors and church members got involved in local revolutionary committees, often intervening to thwart aggression that would have tainted the purity of the revolution. Our church members in the capital contributed to the fight through becoming the voice of the masses, as well as through providing for the fighters and tending the wounded. During the period of the revolution, our church communities also expressed their wish for the renewal of the whole nation as well as that of the church.

The revolution could not have been crushed without the treason of Communist leaders and the military intervention of the Soviet Union. During the period of the vicious retribution, when thousands had to pay with their lives for making a brave stand, tens of thousands were imprisoned, and hundreds of thousands were forced to leave their motherland, our church also lost several of its faithful members and pastors. From then on, the dictatorship – wary of another revolution – employed less violent methods for suppression, but with the same ultimate goal. And yet, 1956 became a cornerstone of the faith in the prevalence of freedom and of spiritual resistance. In the end, it was this faith that resulted in the fall of Communism in 1990.

That is why it is important to express our gratitude and commemorate the courageous participants of the revolution and the sacrifice they made for the future, for us, the subsequent generations – with the certainty that “...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). We remember the heroes and their brave supporters with gratitude in our hearts. We pay our respects to the direct and indirect victims of the retribution, including our persecuted pastors, elders, theology students, and congregation members who were imprisoned, prevented from practising their profession, ostracised together with their families, and kept in fear for decades. We revere our fellow Reformed Hungarians living in Transylvania, Slovakia, Serbia and the Ukraine – pastors as well as church members – who shared the spirit of 1956, enduring suffering for their religious convictions and for being Hungarian. We remember with gratitude those who refused to turn their back on our church despite being persecuted; who were able to preserve the spirit and true values of 1956, passing onto their children a love of humanity, truth and freedom. It is with special veneration that we commemorate those who were betrayed in our church communities by others secretly or openly collaborating with the oppressive political system; who were denied any form of help, who were dragged into legal proceedings with false accusations, and were punished or humiliated with the “judgement” of the church – which goes directly against the Gospel truth: “...Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) We are also thankful for the love of our partner churches, who never ceased to pray for us and continued supporting the oppressed and the persecuted even in the darkest of times.

The past and the freedom gained constitute a certain obligation. To this day, the heritage of 1956 encourages us to stand by the Gospel truth, as well as freedom and our national treasures; it also opens up a hopeful future for us. May the memorial year provide us with opportunities to express our gratitude, to appreciate our past and to experience reconciliation, so that now, nearly thirty years after we have regained our freedom, the anniversary may become our common national celebration. We hope that the memory of 1956 will be able to unite our nation in a deeper way, enabling us to join forces in preserving and passing on our national treasures. We invite our congregations, as well as our educational and diaconal institutions to create ways to commemorate this anniversary in a worthy manner. Let us preserve the memory of the heroes and the victims. We should show our support for local commemorations, events and informational programmes related to the anniversary of the revolution and freedom fight, as well as the creation of memorial places and plaques. Also, we should encourage surviving victims to tell their personal stories, and we should find ways for such stories to reach the younger generations within our congregations.

Let us express our gratitude to God the Holy Trinity for His preserving grace. Let us be thankful for the heroes and the victims, whose struggle was not in vain. And let us praise Him for the fact that their heritage and the efforts of everyone who has been willing to carry on the values of 1956 can exist in a free and independent Hungary today.

Budapest, 14 October 2016