

<p style="text-align:center">CHRIST - HOPE OF EUROPE Central European Catholic Day 2003/2004 Information in Brief</p>
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The Outstanding Significance of the Event

Almost 15 years after the miraculous year which for many people beyond the Iron Curtain brought about the change to freedom a new chapter in the history of Europe is begun through the enlargement of the European Union. The church in the countries of Central Europe is thankful for the end of persecution and martyrdom which were caused by the 20th century through various forms of totalitarian power. This period of persecution and separation was now and again interrupted by the knowledge of solidarity with the believers beyond the borders of the system. Even during the hardest times the contact with the believers beyond the Iron Curtain was kept alive on part of the church in Austria.

This fact was partly decisive for the church in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Austria jointly wanting to signal the reunification of Europe through the project of the Central European Catholic Day 2003 / 2004. It takes place during a decisive phase of the European process of integration, which includes not only a geographic enlargement but also a deepening of content and the struggle for a common treaty of constitution.

The church is ready to face the mood of the times and tries to judge it following the criteria of the gospel and to act after it. The church takes its share of the responsibility for Europe, which is decisively shaped by Christianity. For the first time this is done in a joint project by eight bishops' conferences, including 107 dioceses and approximately 60 million Catholics. The Central European Catholic Day is therefore regarded as a sign of necessary integration and reunification of Europe. The "catholicity" of the church unites people and nations in the believe of Jesus Christ, Lord of history. Therefore is a profession of faith is central which is expressed in the motto "Christ – Hope of Europe".

During one year pilgrimages, events and symposia in all the eight countries are important steps and landmarks on the way to the common highlight of the Central European Catholic Day, the "Pilgrimage of Nations", from May 21st – 23rd 2004 to Mariazell. Between 50.000 and 80.000 pilgrims are expected to join the celebrations. Through the presence of the presidents of the eight countries and other leading European politicians the extraordinary significance of these celebrations is underlined. Also Pope John Paul II has been invited by the eight bishops' conferences.

Antecedents

As long ago as 1983, in the course of his first pastoral visit to Austria, Pope John Paul II reminded Christians, on the occasion of the Europe Vespers on Vienna's Heldenplatz square, of their joint responsibility for Europe. The Papal Visit took place within the scope of the Austrian Catholic Day of 1983, the latest such event in Austria. During his subsequent two visits, the Holy Father again focused, amongst other subjects, on Europe and, at his latest visit in 1998 actually stressed that "Austria, at the heart of Europe, [had] a bridge function to fulfil".

Recalling the last Catholic Day of 1983, Austria's Catholic lay organisations have over the last two years embarked on some preliminary reflections on yet another Catholic Day to be held in Austria, which was to be organised 20 years after the last previous one, in 2003. This idea was primarily espoused by the Austrian Catholic Action (Katholische Aktion), the Federation of Catholic Associations in Austria (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Katholischer Verbände Österreichs) and the Austrian Council of Catholic Lay Organisations (Katholischer Laienrat Österreichs).

Reacting to this idea, the Bishops' Conference modified the proposal, in the light to the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union, in that the central theme of the envisaged Catholic Day should be that of Europe. For this reason, the Bishops' Conferences of those Central European countries in proximity to Austria which were candidates for membership in the EU should be invited to join Austria in organising a "Central European Catholic Day".

In pursuance of this goal Cardinal Schönborn in the autumn of 2001 consulted the chairmen of the Bishops' Conferences of **Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary**, who decided in Budapest on January 8, 2002, to hold a Central European Catholic Day jointly with **Austria**.

The Joint Project

This Central European Catholic Day is to take the form of a process that extends over approximately one year. Its **motto** will be "**Christ – Hope of Europe**" and shapes the aims of the joint project:

- As the tragic history of the 20th century has divided the peoples of our area, the church should overcome borders and live a sign of reconciliation. This sad heritage must be overcome and must not poison the common future.
- In a joint effort the sources of Christianity on our continent should be rediscovered – along the routes of pilgrimage and the great holy places – and use this positive heritage for the good of the common future.
- Christians should participate actively together at the building site of Europe and encourage to take socio-political responsibility.

The process **starts** simultaneously in the eight countries, but at national level, on the weekend following Ascension Day (May 31/June 1, 2003). For the first time, on this occasion a **joint pastoral letter** was published by the participating Bishops' Conferences. The Austrian Bishops' Conference opened the Central European Catholic Day at national level with a European Vesper for Peace on June 10, 2003, in St. Stephan's Cathedral.

One year later, on the weekend after Ascension Day (May 22/23, 2004), there will be another joint event as the **conclusion** and highlight of the process: a "**Pilgrimage of Nations**" to **Mariazell**, whose motto will be "Whatever He saith unto you, do it" (*John 2,5b*). As a highlight a festival service will be celebrated probably on Saturday, May 22, 2004. In addition a programme for the youth of all the eight countries is planned for Friday and Sunday.

By way of preparation, **eight joint symposia** on pastoral and socio-political issues have been planned to be held in the course of the year.

Structural Aspects of International Activities

Responsibility for all joint events will for the most part rest with the **Leading Committee**, which will in principle be composed of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences.

An **Executive Committee** has been set up to plan and organise joint activities. As a rule, it is composed of the Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences and one further person nominated by each of the Bishops' Conferences. The preparation of individual issues and events (theological foundations, liturgy, finances, media, internet, pilgrimage committee, youth event) has been entrusted to **working groups** set up by the Executive Committee. The **Organising Committee** responsible for the preparation of the "Pilgrimage of Nations" to Mariazell is constituted on September 5, 2003.

Secretarial support is provided by a **Preparation Office**, which is headed by Dr. Paul Wuthe and has its offices in the Archiepiscopal Palace in Vienna. Up-to-date information in the German language has been available since September 2002 in the **Internet** under www.katholikentag.at, while information in the other languages can be accessed via homepages of the various national Bishops' Conferences.

Additional Activities at National and Diocesan Levels

The Central European Catholic Day provides a broad thematic and organisational framework for a multitude of activities. Important events planned by the churches for the period in question will be focusing on the issues and concerns of the Central European Catholic Day (e.g. the Three-Country Pilgrimage Friuli-Carinthia-Slovenia, the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary).

Moreover, numerous church institutions, groups and movements organize events on their own responsibility as part of the Catholic Day. Particular importance is given to those dioceses and parishes which have already formed partnerships with dioceses and parishes in the accession countries. On **May 1st 2004 a welcoming celebration of the parishes along the border** with the new EU-member states has the motto "Welcome – together in Europe" (coordinated by the Catholic Action).

Several Bishops' Conferences, including the Austrian Bishops' Conference, have already set up **National Committees** to coordinate matters at national level.

Pilgrimage of Nations to Mariazell

The Pilgrimage of Nations is the highlight of the Central European Catholic Day. Pilgrims from the whole of Central Europe are expected along with numerous high-ranking dignitaries of the Church and political leaders from Central Europe and the European Union. The programme envisages the following:

Friday, May 21, 2004:

8:00	Opening Celebration with the young in the basilica
22:30 – 6:30	Prayer vigil in the basilica

Saturday, May 22, 2004:

6:30	Laudes in the basilica
7:00 – 8:00	Procession with the Statue of Our Lady to the festive grounds
from 8:00 onwards	Preparatory programme on the festive grounds
11:00 – 13:00	Eucharist
13:00 – 13:45	Procession with the Statue of Our Lady through the festive grounds
afterwards	lunch, festival of nations on the festive grounds
15:00 – 17:00	Workshops for the young
19:00 – 21:00	Youth festival on the festive grounds

Sunday, May 23, 2004:

11:00	Eucharist for the young on the festive grounds
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Important border-crossing Pilgrimages and National Events with participants from other countries

Bosnia/Herzegovina: Pilgrimage of the four dioceses to Kupres, July 19, 2003

Czechia: National Pilgrimage to Velehrad, July 5, 2003
Opening of the Czech National Synod at Velehrad, July 6, 2003 “Thanksgiving to Our Lady of Fatima” at Hradec Králové, October 3, 2003

Slovakia: Cyril and Method Pilgrimage to Nitra, July 5, 2003
Marian Pilgrimage to Levoca, July 6, 2003

Slovenia: Pilgrimage to Brezje, August 15, 2003
Pilgrimage together with Croatians to Marija Bistrica, August 30, 2003
Pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Maribor, September 21, 2003

Austria: Three-Country Pilgrimage to St. Georgen, Diocese of Gurk-Klagenfurt, June 21, 2003
Veneration of the Holy Name of Mary in Vienna, September 6 and 7, 2003

Poland: Pilgrimage to Cestochowa, August 26, 2003
Pilgrimage to Lagiewniki near Cracow, April 18, 2004
Pilgrimage to Gniezno, April 25, 2004

Croatia: 150th Anniversary Celebration of Zagreb Metropolitanate, May 31, 2003
Pilgrimage together with Slovenes to Marija Bistrica, August 30, 2003

Hungary: Feast of St. Stephen at Budapest, August 20, 2003

Symposia

Furthermore, throughout the year between Ascension Day 2003 and Ascension Day 2004, the **Bishops’ Conferences** plan to hold **eight joint symposia** on the following pastoral and socio-political issues (working titles):

- “Christian values in the European Union“ (Budapest, September 28 to 30, 2003), to be organised by Hungary, Slovakia, Austria

- “The Ethics of Life“ (Bratislava, October 3 to 5, 2003), to be organised by Slovakia, Hungary, Austria
- “History Calls for Shouldering Responsibility – The Example of Martyrs and Witnesses to Faith” (Sarajevo, November 7 to 8, 2003), to be organised by Bosnia/Herzegovina, Austria
- “Religious Instruction – Passing on the Faith “ (Celje, November 5 to 9, 2003), to be organised by Slovenia, Austria
- “Society and the Economy in Turmoil – How can the Church Contribute to the Project of Europe?” (Puchberg/Wels, January 28 to 30, 2004), to be organised by Austria, Slovenia, Croatia
- “Life Tomorrow – Strategies for Meeting the Challenge of Demographic Developments in Europe” (Brno, March 12 to 14, 2004), to be organised by Czechia, Croatia, Austria, Hungary
- “New Challenges in Ministering to Married Couples and Families“ (Zagreb, April 23 to 25, 2004), to be organised by Croatia, Czechia, Austria, Hungary
- “Agriculture/ Rural Areas“ (Warsaw, May 13 to 16, 2004), to be organised by Poland, Austria

In addition, numerous symposia, meetings and other events are planned jointly with partners in the Central European countries.

Liturgical and pastoral preparations

To prepare the faithful liturgically and pastorally for the Central European Catholic Day and the Pilgrimage of Nations to Mariazell, **texts for eight Sunday services** will be prepared by the individual participating countries and used in all of the eight countries on the same dates. The idea is to focus prayers and devotions on the concerns of both the Catholic Day and the churches in the participating countries. Translations of this liturgical outline will be available in all seven languages and distributed to the parishes. It will contain the following elements: Introductory rites, penitential rite (Kyrie), introductory text to the homily, intercessory prayers, closing prayer, and the Catholic Day hymn. The countries have been asked to prepare texts for divine service on the following Sundays:

Czechia: 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (June 22, 2003)
 Bosnia/Herzegovina: 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 27, 2003)
 Hungary: 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (August 24, 2003)
 Slovenia: 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (September 21, 2003)
 Austria: 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (October 26, 2003)
 Slovakia: 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (November 16, 2003)
 Poland: 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (January 18, 2004)
 Croatia: 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time (February 22, 2004)

Vienna, February 25, 2004