

Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



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A Place of Welcome

Mandak House in Budapest, Hungary, is more than just a church building. It houses a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH), but it also serves as a community center and a place of welcome. The people of Mandak House live out the Gospel through their actions.

The Jozsefvaros District, where Mandak House is located, is home to a large Roma (gypsy) population, the largest ethnic minority in Europe, which has historically been victim of systemic discrimination. Consequently, the district has a reputation of being unsafe and impoverished. Mandak House serves vulnerable populations, including Roma, throughout the district. Pastor Marta Bolba has helped build Mandak House into what it is today. Soon after her arrival in 2012, she began reaching out to other local non-profit organizations in Budapest, seeking ways they could collaborate holistically to support people in need and address social issues.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February sparked a major humanitarian and refugee crisis. Millions of people fled Ukraine for bordering countries such as Hungary. In 2015, Mandak House had faced a similar situation with an influx of Syrian refugees. This experience helped Pastor Marta mobilize quickly when the first refugees from Ukraine arrived. Mandak House has become a hub for new refugees in Budapest. Nearly 600 volunteers, working in shifts, collect, sort and distribute supplies, including food packages, clothing, hygiene kits and bedding, in the church garden. But Mandak House is more than just a distribution center; it's a place for refugees to rest and connect with others.

At the beginning of the war, many refugees were just passing through Budapest, so Mandak House provided supplies that families could take as they moved on. Now more people are staying in the city, some in shelters, some with family, some with residents who welcome them into their homes. The refugees need a different kind of support now. Volunteers at Mandak House, also home to the ELCH's Integration Services Center, help refugees enroll their children in school, find jobs, access the health care system and join the community. Different religious denominations and groups are coming together to support refugees in need. With support from Lutheran Disaster Response, Mandak House has expanded its capacity to serve refugees through psychological care, language interpretation, legal services and other assistance. It has also hired coordinators to manage the hundreds of volunteers present every day.

Working with Lutheran World Federation, ACT Alliance and Church World Service, LDR is responding to the crisis in Eastern Europe by supporting companion churches in Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. These churches are doing work similar to what happens at Mandak House—distributing supplies to refugees, welcoming them into homes and churches, and preaching the Gospel through action. Congregational and individual gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response make this work possible and touch the lives of countless people throughout Eastern Europe and throughout the world.

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