

Mi Újság?

What's new?

Reflections on a year of living, learning, and serving as a YAGM in Budapest, Hungary

Has it already been two months? Here is a look at how I spend my days in Budapest:

My workweek is split between Phiren Amenca—a network of Roma volunteers and volunteer organizations—where I spend Mondays and Thursdays, and the Fasori Evangélikus Gimnázium—a Lutheran middle and high school—where I spend Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

At the Fasor School I mostly assist and sometimes teach in English and Italian classes.



I work with about 20 different groups of students between 5th and 11th grade. So far, each class has been engaging in a different way, and it has been a joy to get to know everyone and share about myself as well.

At Phiren Amenca, I'm still discovering the ways I can contribute. While I work in the office, being part of the

organization also involves participating in local events, workshops, gatherings, and social events that Phiren Amenca has either organized or is a part of.



For now, I am mostly meeting great people and learning a lot about the situation of the Roma in Hungary and Europe, about Roma history, about antigypsyism, and about all of the incredible work that young Roma and non-Roma are doing to advocate for the community.

Outside of work, I spend my time with my roommates Max and Angela (from Ukraine and Romania respectively) who are also volunteers at Phiren Amenca. In addition to living and working together, we also take Hungarian lessons together twice a week. It

has been slow going because most times in Budapest it's easier to speak English, but I hope I start to learn more quickly so communication and building relationships will be easier.

I have also been exploring the Lutheran congregations around Budapest. I've attended some of the English services and the Hungarian services at the church associated with my school, once visited the service at the Buda Castle church, and even went to a church that had a potluck lunch after the service!



It's hard to say which church will become my home, but as time goes on, I think I'll find a place that feels right.



Orientation

My first three weeks in Hungary were spent in orientation with the other YAGMs. For two weeks we stayed in the town of Révfülöp on Lake Balaton, before heading to Budapest. In addition to intensive Hungarian lessons, worship, Bible study, and time for personal reflection, we were able to explore the town and surrounding area. This included hiking to a lookout tower, taking a 14-mile bike ride, visiting the beach, picking fresh fruit, and just wandering in general. It was a beautiful introduction to Hungary.

Communication

As many of you know, I love language and understanding how communication works. Here are some words and phrases I've learned so far in Hungary, and why I find them important or interesting.

So keres?

Romanes for "what's up?" This is how my roommate Max always greets me, and it is also the unofficial slogan of Phiren Amenca.

Erős vár a mi Istenünk

Hungarian for "a mighty fortress is our God". This is a common greeting amongst Lutherans, and is written on the façade of most churches.

Tök jó

Hungarian for "cool". Translates literally to "pumpkin good". Haha!

Porajmos

The Romanes word for the Holocaust. Many people don't know about or deny the Roma holocaust, and it's an ongoing struggle for recognition.

Congregation

Having a congregation that is like a family has always made attending church an enjoyable and comforting experience for me. Since starting to attend church in Hungary, I've found it harder to feel engaged in the service and the message since there is often little congregational interaction during or after the service. While I hope this change in pace will lead me to find new ways of engaging in and appreciating church service, for now I am thankful that thus far God has always managed to seat me next to at least one friendly face.

Most often this is Rachel, the YAGM country coordinator who is also located in Budapest. We often find ourselves in the same pew, and it has been a comfort to exchange bemused smiles as we attempt to read and sing the unfamiliar Hungarian hymns. Occasionally, this has been a fellow newcomer Tina, who during this week's Hungarian sermon, quietly handed me a book of English daily devotionals, so we were able to share in that message. Twice, this has been the families of fellow English teachers from the school, who helped walk me through the service.

Last week, it was my roommate Angela, who decided to go to the English language service with me. The next day, as we were walking to the elevator in our building, she turned to me and said, "the lord be with you today, Charlotte." For once, taking a moment to appreciate the significance of the words, I replied with a smile, "and also with you."