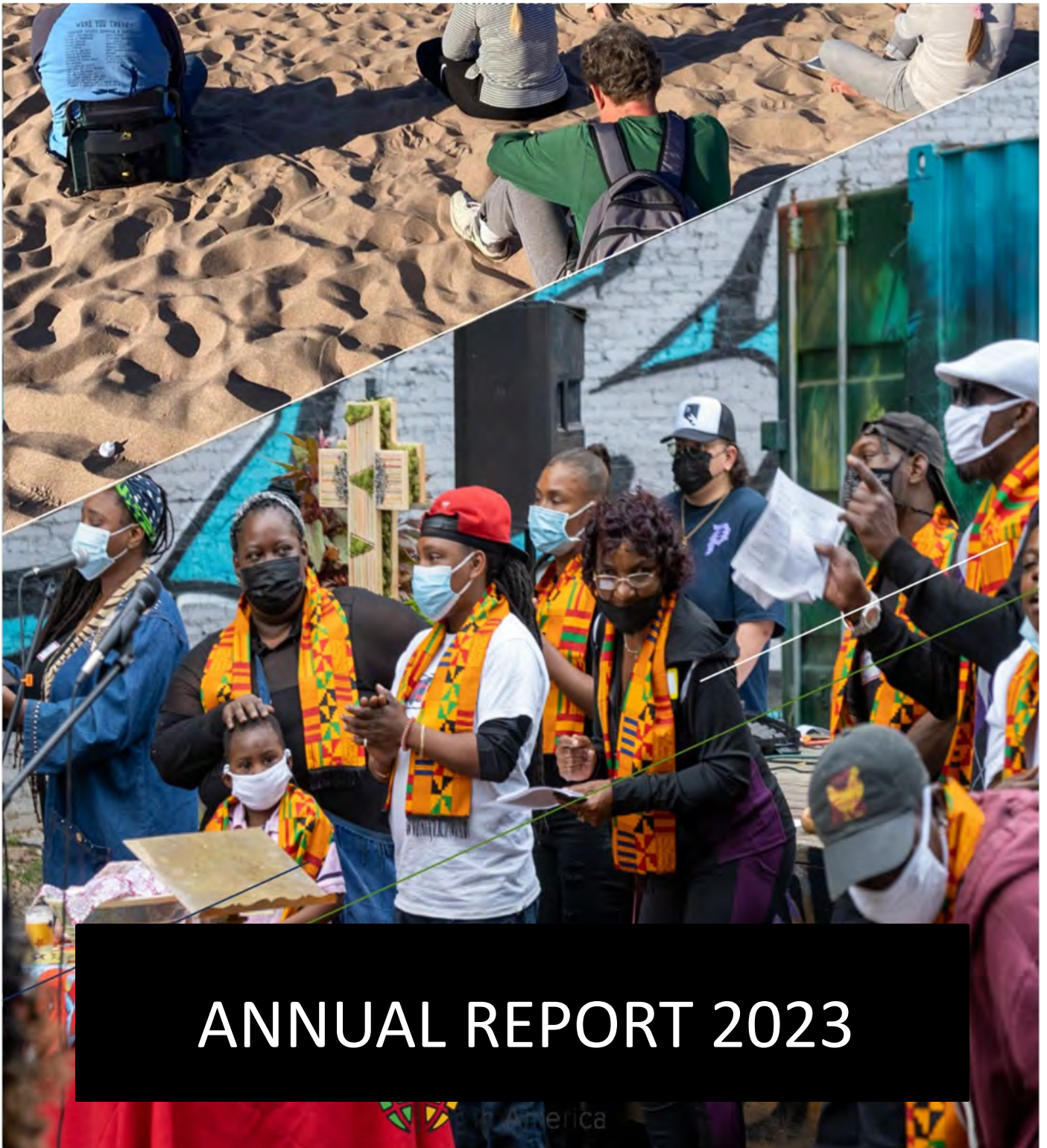


# BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL CHURCH



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

**Greetings, Brothers and Sisters in Christ both near and far!** 2023 has been a year of significant transitions for Bratislava International Church, or lovingly known as “BIC.” Some of those transitions are “normal” for our community: the arrival and departure of ELCA Central Europe Teachers, people coming and going due to work or school, the birth of new life in our families, just to name a few. However, this year has brought some unique transitions. We said farewell to Pastor Kyle Svennungsen, his wife Anna, and their boys Oden, Espen, and Magnus as they returned to the United States to begin a new chapter in their lives. Liz Kuster completed her Horizon Internship year with us and returned to the United States to finish her seminary education and requirements to be an ordained pastor in the ELCA. While we dearly miss these important leaders, we also welcomed Pastor Aaron Fuller as the current Pastor at BIC, and his wife Kelly. Kelly serves as the ELCA’s Young Adults in Global Mission Coordinator in Central Europe (Hungary).

We also installed new and existing Council Members: Ivan Belanji, Michaela Prihracki, Megan Freudenberg, James Shepperd, and Peter Laursen (Treasurer). They are a wonderful representation of our congregation – people from all walks of life, from all places, and with various gifts for leadership and ministry.

As we look to 2024, we are hopeful. Our little congregation is still emerging from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also wonder how God is calling us to share Jesus’ message of grace, justice, and salvation in both old and new ways. It has been an especially challenging year in Slovakia and for the people who live here. Yet, we know God is faithful, and we know that God needs a church like BIC where people are welcomed without exception, because God welcomes all without exception!



Pastor Kyle, his wife Anna, and sons Oden, Espen, and Magnus and Intern Liz Kuster provided so much to our community in 2023. We wished them well as God called them onward—but not without a challenge! The van taking the Svennungsens to the airport didn’t start in the morning—so it required a bit of assistance before they were on their way!

## Highlights in 2023:

- During our youth Sunday, the young people in our community led us in faithful prayer and worship. Dalma and Sahat provided powerful messages to center our time together.
- BIC helped organize and arrange the Association of International Churches in Europe and the Middle East (AICEME) conference held in Prague. With the support of the community, Seminarian Intern Liz Kuster led worship and presided at the table while Pastor Kyle was away at the conference.
- In May, BIC hosted a women's retreat around wellness, spiritual, mental, creative and physical. Women of different backgrounds and perspectives all came to be nourished through this time spent in community.
- James Shepperd, Sarah Curpen, and Barbara Salingova completed their final evaluation of BIC's seminarian intern, Liz Kuster, and dutifully ensured that she did not leave Bratislava before trying Kofola and Langoš for the first time.
- In July, BIC said farewell to the Svennungsen's and Liz Kuster as they celebrated their last Sundays with BIC.
- Pastor Aaron Fuller began his service to BIC in August. His first Sunday leading worship included installing the ELCA CE Teachers for 2023.
- Pastor Aaron installed BIC's Council members: James Shepperd, Michaela Prihracki, Ivan Belani, Peter Laursen-Treasurer, and Megan Freudenberg.
- In October, Rev. Rachel Eskesen, ELCA Europe Desk Director, installed Pastor Aaron as pastor at BIC.
- BIC hosted a number of groups in 2023, to include ELCA YAGM volunteers serving in Hungary, A group of college students from California, and a study group of university students from Zwolle, the Netherlands.



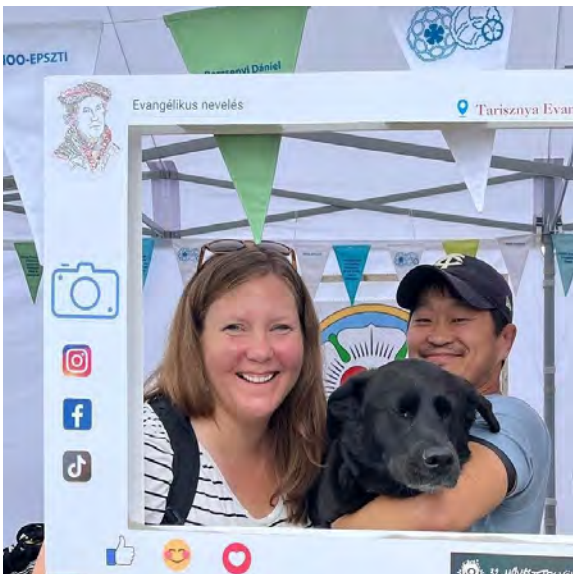
## Pastor's Note:

*Thanks be to God for God's indescribable gift! ~ 2 Corinthians 9:15*

"Indescribable gift" is the only way I can describe Bratislava International Church to others! What I hope to communicate to others is that the only way to understand just how truly special BIC is, you need to experience the congregation: in worship, enjoy a cup of coffee with a member, or jump on a virtual meeting to hear stories from past and present members!

My wife Kelly and our pup Winnie arrived in Central Europe in May 2023, and we finally settled in Bratislava in August. So we have only been here a short while, and so I am still getting to know everyone. We have been so humbled by everyone's encouragement, hospitality, and good humor (our Slovak is terrible!). I have also appreciated the ways our Slovak Lutheran colleagues have invited and included me in their ministries.

There is a lot I am looking forward to in 2024. There are the normal blessings of being a pastor—sharing life together with such a wonderful and diverse community as BIC. I'm also excited to explore ways to partner in ministry with our Slovak neighbors and seek ways to express and celebrate our diversity as a congregation. All in the name of sharing God's indescribable gift with those in need!



## **2023 Financial Report & 2024 Goals:**

Like many churches, 2023 was a year of blessings and challenges. Our biggest challenge is our ongoing one: the reality that as an international congregation, we will always have frequent turnover in its membership. Due to our size and Slovak law, we are unable to register as a religious organization and thus receive subsidies from the Slovak government. At the same time, we are blessed. The Slovak congregation CZ ECAV Staré Mesto ("Velky Kostol") continues to graciously allow us use of the smaller sanctuary and meeting spaces for ministry rent-free. The General Bishop's Office of the ECAV continues to offer assistance to our Pastor when needed. The greatest blessing is always the generosity of our members and visitors through their offerings each Sunday! At year's end, BIC's expenses are a bit above total contributions. However, we are blessed with a strong reserve fund, and so we were able to cover the deficit. Here is the 2023 Summary:

### **Contributions:**

Regular Offerings (online or in person): 61%

Reimbursements from ELCA (pastor): 37%

Bank Interest: 1%

2% Slovak Tax Designation to NGO: <1%

**Contribution Total: 27,463 €**

### **Expenses:**

Rent on Pastor's Flat: 62%

Cantor's Compensation\*: 15%

Worship & Hospitality Costs (Guest Pastors, Coffee Hour, Education Curriculum, Worship Resource Subscription, Sacristan fees): 12%

AICME Membership & Conference Fees: 8%

Other: 3%

\* Cantor's Compensation included make up compensation for past services rendered.

**Expenses Total: 28,200 €**

**For 2024, the proposed expense budget is 27, 641 €.** This includes a number of significant expense changes:

- A 10% increase in Pastor's Flat rent in 2024 (the ELCA pays 1/2 of the rent)
- A 32.5% increase in the Cantor's compensation for 2024 (No increase since 2015)
- Pastor will not attend the AICME Conference this year (2000 € savings)

**In order to balance our expense budget, BIC has the following contribution goals:**

- Encourage a regular contribution through electronic giving.
- Seek ways for supporters of BIC to donate in a cost-efficient way.
- Promote 2% NGO Tax Contribution to BIC's NGO, Dobré Správy.

## Looking ahead to 2024:

In closing, we are looking forward to what 2024 will bring. There have been new faces showing up at BIC as the immigrant population continues to grow in Bratislava. We're also excited at initial conversations and invitations by our neighboring congregation to partner in ministry opportunities to the community and in joint worship. We're excited that we have a role to play in the learning and experience of ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission volunteers serving in Hungary during their orientations and retreats. We also are hopeful as the ELCA Central Europe Teaching Program continues to be a strong ministry in Slovakia and that we continue to provide community for the teachers who come here.

As we think about the immediate future, here are some of our goals for the coming year:

- Provide vibrant worship for all who come to BIC, and include styles that represent our diverse congregation members.
- Create opportunities to gather and grow outside of worship.
- Seek ministry opportunities with our ministry partners in the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and ECAV (Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia).
- Support ELCA Central Europe Teachers and ELCA YAGM Volunteers in Hungary.

Finally, our greatest hope is to expand our understanding of what it means to be an International Church. It is not just the present people who attend in person each week. The community of BIC is all people, past and present, close or far away, that continue to care about this little congregation and have felt the love of God in Jesus Christ in some way or another through it. As the world seems more divided and people more isolated than ever, we hope, through BIC, we can bring people together as a truly international community. We believe we can—for we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us! (Philippians 4:13)



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