

PASTORAL PRACTICE OF THE ACADEMIC PARISH OF PRAGUE

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Abstract: This paper examines pastoral practice of the Academic Parish of Prague in compliance with its specific character – service to people from academia. Data analysis from qualitative interviews and document-based research identified two major areas of ministry – pastoral care (ad intra) and public engagement (ad extra) – and positioned the community somewhat between a parish ministry and chaplaincy. Specifically, empirical research suggested that people opt for this parish because it acknowledges their social, spiritual and intellectual needs seriously and relevantly, and addresses its members with respect. Theologically, it maintains there is a compatibility between the parish offer and expectations of people, and argues that the parish interpreted and handled its specific mission – addressing urban and educated people – relevantly and authentically.

Keywords: Parish ministry, chaplaincy, specific pastoral care, Academic Parish of Prague, Tomáš Halík, qualitative research, choice, acknowledgment

1. Introduction

I just know that it attracts people who are, of course, somehow tuned in, and that's different than if you are locally destined to meet people somewhere; it's not the location, it's the spirit (Blanka, 42).

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Many people today claim to be spiritual rather than religious, and not looking for a religious community to affiliate with.² Due to various psychological, sociological, personal, historical and political reasons, their search for faith does not often bring them to a particular religion or religious community. For the church, whose mission is to serve people, this is a major pastoral challenge – how to address and attract people in a pluralistic society relevantly and reasonably.

In the opening quote, Blanka, a long-term parishioner, speaks about “a spirit” of the Academic Parish of Prague that makes it different from other places she has visited. In this paper, therefore, we shall examine this spirit – which pastoral approaches and methods are specific and pertinent for this particular church community.

The Academic Parish of Prague [Akademická farnost Praha], which was renewed after the fall of communism, is one of the few congregations in the Czech Republic that still attracts high numbers of newcomers – it signals a certain interest in a relevant faith community among believers and non-believers. Moreover, this Catholic parish with a clear ecumenical and interfaith stance has become a social phenomenon with its access to the public and cultural spheres over the past three decades. Today, it is one of the most-frequented parishes with a high rate of adult baptism, which makes it an increasingly important case of specific pastoral practice. So far, however, there has been no reliable qualitative analysis of this phenomenon, either sociological or theological.³ This explorative paper, which is based on a recent empirical research, therefore examines various ministries of the parish and reviews them theologically, in order to identify its specific mission within Czech church (ad intra) and society alike (ad extra).⁴

² B. J. ZINNBAUER, et al., “Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, 4, 1997, 549–564.

³ P. Fassatiová examined the Academic Parish quantitatively in her master’s thesis “Městská posttradiční religiozita” [Urban Post-traditional Religiosity: Catholic Faith of Academic Parish Visitors’ in Post-optimistic Perspective] in 2008.

⁴ H.-J. Sander cit. N. METTE, *Einführung in die katholische Praktische Theologie*, Darmstadt, 2005.

1.1. Method

This study, which was carried between 2016 and 2019, employed methods of social science and practical theology to examine the subject interdisciplinary.⁵ First, empirical research took place in the fall 2016, when eleven qualitative interviews with parish members of various gender, age and affiliation with the faith community were conducted; all personal names and possible identification markers were anonymized throughout the process. The qualitative interviews were later coded and analyzed with regards to grounded theory methodology.⁶ Second, a document-based research was carried out to complement the data from the interviews; published materials and online presentations of the Academic Parish were also reviewed. Both empirical steps eventually allowed for a third procedure, theological analysis of this pastoral case study. Eventually, a classical method of practical theology, *see-judge-act*, was adopted for a pastoral theological examination of the phenomenon.⁷

2. Research results

This part outlines result from empirical research in detail. First, an exploratory observation of the Academic Parish of Prague and its characteristics is provided. This document-based research presents a brief study of the main activities,

⁵ This study was a part of my dissertation research of which I take full responsibility. My personal engagement in the Academic Parish of Prague made me aware of potential advantages and conflicts throughout the process. I therefore decided to explain my contexts, methods and research steps clearly to ensure all data for a possible validation.

⁶ The method was originally developed by B. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, later adaptations and approaches followed. In this research, positions of A. L. Strauss and J. Corbin, as well as K. Charmaz were mainly applied: J. CORBIN, A. STRAUSS, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Thousand Oaks, 2008; K. CHARMAZ, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, Thousand Oaks, 2006.

⁷ On grounded theory methodology in theology S. KLEIN, *Erkenntnis und Methode in der Praktischen Theologie*, Stuttgart, 2005, 239. On methodology in practical theology N. METTE, *Einführung in die katholische Praktische Theologie*, on empirical methods O. FUCHS, "Relationship Between Practical Theology and Empirical Research", *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 2, 2001, 5–19.

themes and challenges, which were systematized into two main categories. Under “pastoral work” I positioned a typical pastoral ministry, such as sacraments, catechesis and groups, and under “public engagement,” I positioned political and art-related activities. Having described some specific activities that seem to differentiate the parish from other congregations in the region, I drew especially on themes of education, liturgy, spiritual exercises, art, and political involvement. Second, research results from qualitative interviews are communicated to illustrate expectations of people participating in parish life.

In practical theology, empirical research serves as the first step of observing reality – reading the signs of the times. Its attempt to delineate both context and variables strives for an as accurate as possible description of studied phenomenon – i.e., a particular church community – to provide reliable material for further theological analysis. Identification of spiritual demands of people on the one hand, and actual pastoral practices of the church on the other hand, thus constitutes valuable material for understanding their mutual relation and, possibly, for outlining new pastoral models and approaches.⁸

2.1. Document-based research: Parish as a platform

The primary role of Christian parishes and congregations is to serve its members in deepening their spiritual life by providing sacramental and societal support, and, thus, enabling Christians to evangelize – to be a salt of the earth (Matthew 5,13). Historically, Catholic parishes operated on a territorial basis and thus provided benefit for a local community of Christians and non-Christians within their reach. With the massive urbanization of the 20th century and globalization of the 21st century, this concept has been challenged in many ways, and numerous alternative communities rise, such as special pastoral care, personal parishes and chaplaincies:

As a general rule, a parish is to be territorial, that is, one which includes all the Christian faithful of a certain territory. When it is expedient, however, personal parishes are to be established, determined by reason of

⁸ GS 4.

the rite, language or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory, or even for some other reason.⁹

The Academic Parish of Prague was given its legal status within the church law as a personal parish serving university students and staff: the official pastoral care to students was restored at St. Salvátor Church in February 1990 with Tomáš Halík as the church rector; it continued as such until 2004, when the personal parish was established there for the same purpose and with the same pastor.¹⁰ There have thus been almost three decades of continuous pastoral work under the same parish priest. This may seem unusual in pastoral circumstances, but it is not that unusual for a parish serving academia: Halík's position within the community is perhaps to be compared to that of a university professor rather than to a parish priest. For its discursive and independent atmosphere, the parish is sometimes referred to as a "platform" by some parishioners, indicating its open mentality rather than a portfolio of its activities.¹¹

Tomáš Halík, who had worked as a psychologist for 20 years and whose ordination into the priesthood in 1978 had been known only to a small group of people during communism, started working in the Academic Parish of Prague without before having experienced typical parish life. His conversion to Catholicism, as well as religious education and work, consisted of home-based training and pastoral care within the "underground church."¹² Starting at the St. Salvátor Church thus was a very open beginning, without specific instructions and as-

⁹ CIC, c. 518, this single sentence in Cannon Law is actually the only juridical mention of a large area of specific pastoral care.

¹⁰ Akademická farnost Praha, "Historie farnosti", <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/historie-farnosti#porevolucni> [3.7.2019]. The APP abbreviation is used for official online presentations of the Academic Parish of Prague in further footnotes. Primary sources are listed in the footnotes in full, other references follow also in the bibliography.

¹¹ Researcher, Personal archive: Memos, journals, and personal communication between 2007 and 2019.

¹² More on the phenomenon of the official/unofficial/exile church in communist Czechoslovakia in S. BALÍK, J. HANUŠ, *Katolická církev v Československu 1945-1989*, Brno, 2007, 239. Another perspective on church in totalitarian state has recently been introduced by K. Skalický, who differentiates "collaborating church" (*kolaborující církev*), church of passive resistance (*církev pasivní resistance*), church co-existing (*církev koexistující*), underground church (*církev v podzemí*), and church contesting (*církev vyjadřující ne-*

signment from the bishop and the diocese. Apart from the underground church activities, there was no example for inspiration or people to consult with. Halík and his colleagues therefore started looking for their own ways for pastoral care, often intuitively responding to needs of parish visitors, as well as the society around them.¹³

Analyzing the situation after three decades of active life, we can see these starting conditions eventually provided freedom and enabled creativity that may not have been possible in given borders of standard or well-established parish life. Tomáš Halík and his people therefore focused on a role they understood was specific for them: creating a platform, rather than a parish, where people, both believers and non-believers, could meet to receive spiritual support, support their social life, and cultivate their intellectual capacity. Similarly, the Second Vatican Council encouraged Christians in being active and creative in understanding the world around them:

The Church can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.¹⁴

The expression “respond to” seems very different from other translations using “answer to” the perennial questions, which indicate a somewhat directive approach. On this account, Paul M. Zulehner observes, for instance, that “churches often reply to questions that nobody is asking, and, on the other hand, they are silent on questions which are important for people.”¹⁵ Similarly argues Charles Taylor while observing that church leadership “pushes worked-out answers” without addressing seekers relevantly,¹⁶ and that without meeting saints and

spokojenost); in K. SKALICKÝ, *Církev v Evropě, Evropa v církvi: Teologický vhled do dějin Evropy prismaticem svobody a revoluce*, Svitavy, 2018, 270-276.

¹³ T. HALÍK, “20 let akademické pastorace v kostele Nejsvětějšího Salvátora” [20 Years of Academic Pastoral Care at St Salvator Church], *Salvatore*, 72, 2010, 1-3.

¹⁴ GS 4.

¹⁵ P. M. ZULEHNER, *Ein Obdach der Seele*, Düsseldorf, 1995, 7.

¹⁶ C. Taylor cit. G. F. McLEAN, “Introduction: Disjunctions in the 21st Century”, in C. TAYLOR, J. CASANOVA, G. F. McLEAN (eds.), *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Washington, 2012, 5.

mystics, the churches with pat and ready-made answers are not likely to appear plausible to people today.”¹⁷ It has also become a theme for Pope Francis, who asserts that “instead of overwhelming young people with a body of rules that make Christianity seem reductive and moralistic, we are called to invest in their fearlessness and to train them to take up their responsibilities.”¹⁸

This theme also seems essential for the Academic Parish. Perhaps due to Tomáš Halík’s long-time experience as a psychologist, confessor and philosopher, he often appears as a convinced doubter – aptly outlining questions or ways of thought, but rarely answering them. Even when he is actually in a position to answer a question to a catechumen, for example, he is likely to open another space rather than provide concrete and restrictive answers; as if balancing on the edge of faith and non-faith was simply his pastoral style. It might be argued here that the shape of the parish was determined mainly by the distinctive, strong personality of Tomáš Halík, and it probably would not be far from the truth, as sociology and psychology assign the founders with an unmistakable influence on shaping the character of their work, be it an institution, movement or school of thought.¹⁹ Examining the Academic Parish of Prague without reflecting Tomáš Halík and his theological and pastoral approach, therefore, would not only be impossible but even misleading.

Although my main research deals with people and their expectations of the parish, it is also necessary to see the other part – what tools does the parish use to attract and address people, whether parishioners or newcomers? It is assumed that offered forms of parish activities are based on formal and informal feedback from people, such as observation, private talks and confessions that cannot be recorded. In the following paragraphs, therefore, I will outline a description of the Academic Parish of Prague that is based on public sources: the parish’s website and newsletter presentation, public media, sermon recordings accessible to the public, etc.

Today, the parish provides typical religious services, such as sacraments and Christian formation; however, it seems also to attract people with its rich cultural and academic program. Ultimately, this community has become not only

¹⁷ C. TAYLOR, “The Church Speaks – to Whom?”, in C. TAYLOR, J. CASANOVA, G. F. MCLEAN (eds.), *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Washington, 2012, 19.

¹⁸ FRANCIS, *Christus vivit: Post-Synodal Exhortation to Young People and to the Entire People of God*, 2019, 233.

¹⁹ HALÍK, “20 let akademické pastorace”.

the leading pastoral project within the local church but also a kind of societal phenomenon with its overlap in the public space and cultural sphere; and it is especially interest from outside of the church that raises many questions about the pastoral approach of the parish.

In the following text, I will therefore identify key activities that the parish has been providing and observe areas where the parish reaches society, both Christian and non-Christian. For schematizing the studied area, I propose major parish activities being structured as pastoral care or public engagement; see the diagram “Activities of the Academic Parish of Prague”:

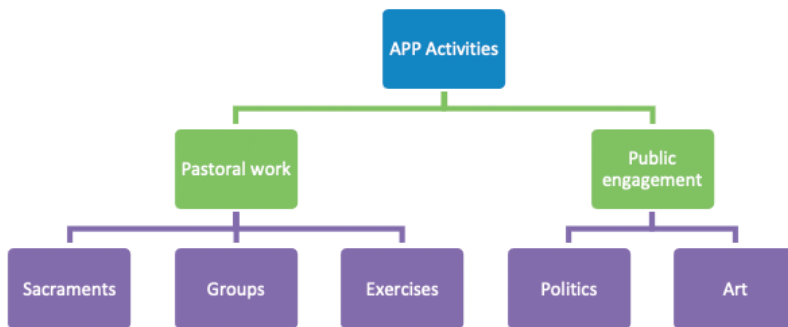


Diagram “Activities of the Academic Parish of Prague” (3.7.2019/a)

2.1.1. Pastoral work

Immediate pastoral work is exercised in three major areas in the Academic Parish of Prague: sacramental service and related accompanying activities, groups of particular interest, and spiritual exercises.

Sacramental service

Sacramental service has been provided by the parish priest, Tomáš Halík, and several chaplains. Soon after the parish was established, priests – or rather temporary chaplains – with diverse spiritual backgrounds were assigned there; namely Aleš Opatrný (Charismatic Renewal), Jan Jandourek, Milan Badal (Dominican), Ladislav Štefek and Zdeněk Králík (Schoenstatt movement), Vincente Montiel Romer (Claretian), Andrea Barbero and Stefano Pasquero (Communio

et Liberazione), Pavel Petrašovský, Marek Vácha, and recently three Jesuits Petr Havlíček, Jan Regner and Petr Vacík; most stayed for a limited period of time.²⁰

As of January 2017, alongside Tomáš Halík were Marek Vácha and Petr Vacík; another Jesuit, Jan Regner, was abroad on a study leave. As most priests carry out other duties elsewhere, their work for the Academic Parish is only a part-time job. Halík works also as a professor of philosophy and religion at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague; Vácha chairs the university's Department of Ethics and Humanity Studies at the Faculty of Medicine during the week while on weekends he commutes to a small parish in South Moravia; and Vacík is in charge of a retreat house in Kolín, east of Prague, where most weekend activities and programs take place. His work at the Academic Parish is therefore carried out mainly on weekdays and Sunday nights, when the "high mass" takes place at 8pm. There are two masses on Sunday, at 2pm and 8pm.²¹ There is another mass during the week, on Tuesday at 6pm, just preceding the catechesis course, a main educational platform for catechumens and confirmands.²²

Sacrament of reconciliation is offered every Tuesday and Thursday night, with several priests being available at the church usually between 8pm and 11pm. Parishioners are offered either a sacrament of reconciliation or a private spiritual talk.²³ Recently, Irena Göbelová, a Carmelite nun, joined the team to provide

²⁰ APP, "U nás působící kněží", <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/akademicka-farnost-praha> [3.7.2019].

²¹ Although there have been some attempts during the existence of the parish to transfer some services to Sunday morning, such a change was never accomplished and remained a sort of dissatisfaction for young families. Although it was discussed at various forums, such as the Parish Council, the opposing arguments remained the same: afternoon mass is accessible to people from regions, evening mass is accessible to students returning to Prague, Researcher, Personal archive.

²² APP, "Bohoslužby a svátosti", <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/bohoslužby-a-svatosti> [3.7.2019].

²³ T. Halík describes the long-time experience with this service in *Noc zpovědníka* [Night of the Confessor], where he declared his delight in such accompanying people despite long lines and late night hours.

regular spiritual counseling; other “guest” priests support the team occasionally.²⁴ There is, of course, a possibility to request this sacrament at any time.²⁵

Organization of preparations for receiving sacraments is assigned to a long-serving member of the parish team, Martin Staněk. He serves as a parish manager, organizing primarily individual preparations for the baptism of children and sacrament of marriage. He has been working for 15 years and is said to be – due to his friendly and welcoming character – a “motor” of the parish. After being baptized in the Academic Parish in 1992, he later worked as a sacristan and pastoral assistant for several years, eventually being promoted to parish referent and coordinator, a position not typical for Czech parishes, but drawing its inspiration from German-speaking countries (Pastoralreferent, Kirchenreferent).²⁶

Homily is certainly the most visible pastoral tool of the parish as was also communicated in the qualitative interviews. People reported coming to the church for the sermons – for hearing the Gospel in a way that is relevant and appealing to them. Tomáš Halík is perceived as a rhetorically and intellectually strong personality who attracts both Christians and non-Christians. Irena Hamzová Pulicarová observed that Halík speaks urgently and presents original thoughts to which his audience is attracted. Moreover, he works within a larger social context and encourages his listeners to lead active and responsible lives while using rich vocabulary, biblical references, and a self-confident non-verbal style:

Halík gives the impression of a thoughtful and original thinking scholar, open to seeing mutual inspiration between the worlds of faith and atheism. And at the same time the impression of a person who, in addition to having deep knowledge of the spiritual dimension, also lives this dimension in his life. By doing so, his homily is appealing. And there are also his links to sociology, philosophy, and psychology that he deals with as a preacher.²⁷

Tomáš Halík’s sermons are, however, usually perceived in extreme ways in the Czech church: many people see them very positively, but some regard them as rather negative; be it for Halík’s distinctive personality, thought-provoking

²⁴ *Salvatore*, 149, 2018, 2-3.

²⁵ APP, „Adorace s možností svátosti smíření nebo duchovního rozhovoru”, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/udalost/92758/2019-05-23/adorace-s-moznosti-svatosti-smireni-nebo-duch--rozhovoru> [3.7.2019].

²⁶ APP, “Martin Staněk”, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/martin-stanek> [3.7.2019].

²⁷ I. HAMZOVÁ PULICAROVÁ, “Směřování k naplněnému sdělení,” PhD Thesis, Praha, 2013.

message, use of language and rhetorical style or 15-minute-length. Theologically, nevertheless, the content is above the style, so we may ask how important it is for people to see the speaker as credible and authentic. Halík obviously aims at an educated and knowledgeable audience in his sermons; interestingly, he sometime uses rather general and non-religious vocabulary to approach non-Catholics in the audience; other times he perhaps employs demanding intellectual connotations that are not accessible to some Catholics. As if he preferred “reflective seekers” rather than “passive dwellers” among his listeners.²⁸

The specific character of the parish, serving primarily to a community of people affiliated with institutions of higher education, emphasizes the speaker’s responsibility to address this specific congregation no matter how non-appealing it might be for others.²⁹ Providing beneficial support through homily is also about predicting expectations of different groups and searching for a certain balance in a given liturgy service.

It was observed, for instance, that some people come to the St. Salvátor Church only for the sermon; once it has ended, they leave the church. One respondent noticed this occurs more often when the social and political situation is disturbing; her interpretation suggests that many people come for support and encouragement and not necessarily for the holy mass. Moreover, accessibility is also important; the parish has kept its sermons archived online, so most people come prepared in a way: they know the preachers and their style from the media and, eventually, can come to observe in person if they wish to.³⁰

Catechesis course

The *Kurz základů víry* [Basics of Faith] course has been a flagship of pastoral activities in the parish for almost three decades; since early 1990s, it has served as a common platform for sacramental preparation of adults.³¹ Today, each term

²⁸ T. HALÍK, “Church for the Seekers”, in T. HALÍK, P. HOŠEK (eds.), *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, Washington, 2015, 127–133.

²⁹ EG 135.

³⁰ Importance of online accessibility grew in recent pandemic when church attendance was not possible. Halík’s sermon-streaming, for instance, ranged between ten thousand and twenty thousand from January 2021 to August 2021, APP, <https://www.youtube.com/user/salvatorskafarnost/videos> [4.8.2021].

³¹ M. STANĚK, “Malé dějiny pražské akademické farnosti”, in F. HORÁČEK, N. SCHMIDT (eds.), *Salvatoria: Almanach k 60. narozeninám Tomáše Halíka*, Praha, 2008, 273–297.

is scheduled for two academic years and takes place every Tuesday evening, between 7pm and 8:30pm in the largest space available, the sacristy. The lectures are usually presented by Tomáš Halík, other parish team members or guest speakers. The thematic structure covers key topics of Christian faith (the credo) and practical Christian life (the Ten Commandments, the sacramental life, etc.); and although the target audience is comprised of candidates for baptism and confirmation, all lectures are open to the public. Usually, over 100 candidates register at the beginning of the term, about 70% of them preparing in a two-year term for baptism and confirmation (“slow confirmands” are constituted from baptized but non-practicing Christians) and about 30% are preparing in a one-year term for confirmation (“fast confirmands” are constituted from practicing Christians).³²

In addition to these lectures, there are supporting programs on weekends; their importance has increased over the past ten years as candidates are now expected to attend about three weekends during their preparation period. These are not only to support the theological and perhaps “theoretical” nature of weekly lectures, but primarily to create an appropriate environment for the candidates to get to know each other, share their spiritual paths, learn about practical methods of spiritual and prayer life, etc. To a certain degree, it can be compared to a high school education principle of providing both lectures and seminars.

A slightly different approach to various focus groups was observed in the parish team, which may be attributed to the coordinators’ different spiritual experiences. Whereas in the beginning the course was – intentionally or not – designed for “converts,” i.e. people coming from outside the church, today also many young Christians apply for confirmation in the parish. From a pastoral perspective, this constitutes a challenging task: how should the program be designed to meet such a diverse audience? Is it relevant, for instance, to incorporate people without any church experience and education with those who have been practicing the Catholic faith for 20 or 30 years? It seems as a challenge for the parish team, of which some members have a convert background (Tomáš Halík, Martin Staněk, Petr Vacík, Denisa Červenková, Irena Göbelová, and recently Hana Šimková) and others a Catholic background (Jan Regner, Petr Mucha, Adéla Muchová). This disproportion was somewhat spontaneously resolved in putting emphasis on weekend programs, where people share similar experiences and ask questions

³² APP, “Kurz základů víry”, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/kurz-zakladu-viry> [3.7.2019].

relevant to their knowledge and spiritual background. While it possibly deserves more discussion and analysis, the topic was addressed in the parish team meetings rather indirectly so far.³³

Martin Staněk, the parish coordinator, has been serving as the course coordinator for the past 20 years, after graduating from the course himself in 1992.³⁴ His responsibilities include managing weekly lectures, including arranging for speakers, and organizing the weekends. Staněk is also responsible for the group of catechumens and “slow-confirmands”: the weekend meetings, the liturgical preparation, and the “Sunday school,” special meetings offered during the Sunday masses just a few weeks before the baptism, which provide the candidates with still more help with their spiritual life.³⁵

Groups

Like other Catholic parishes, the Academic Parish is home to various groups – they have come and gone throughout the decades – and they were mostly initiated by parishioners around a central theme or need. Prayer groups are diverse: a weekly meditation group, for instance, has been meeting for a decade under the guidance of Carmelite nuns; the *Krypta* prayer group uses a verbal form of prayer and songs from Taizé; the choral prayer group meets early in the morning to sing the Latin Laudes together.³⁶ Recently, a small group of Centering Prayer meditation practice has also started.³⁷

³³ In informal conversations, for instance, Tomáš Halík and Martin Staněk, preferred that the Catholics by origin coordinate “fast-confirmands” group and they themselves engage with the catechumens who are closer to their own religious experience, Researcher, Personal archive.

³⁴ P. JIRSOVÁ FASSATI, M. STANĚK, “Osm plus jedna otázka pro pastoračního asistenta Martina Staňka”, *Salvatore*, 70, 2009.

³⁵ FASSATI, STANĚK, “Osm plus jedna”, APP, “Martin Staněk”, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/martin-stanek> [3.7.2019].

³⁶ A special community, for instance, has developed around this group; both youth and young families spend Easter in a former monastery in Roudnice nad Labem to pray together: they wear informal liturgical gowns for the occasion and seem to enjoy this traditional prayer of the church. It is, in a way, similar to church choirs that provide their members with both deep spiritual experience and closer social ties, in Researcher, Personal archive.

³⁷ *Salvatore*, 156, 2019, 11.

Some other groups were recently identified, such as a long-time serving parish choir, a small Bible study group, a group called *Cesta* organizing hiking trips together, and a few groups serving young families – some meet on a regular basis, others spend a summer week together. The programs for the families, however, have always been regarded as insufficient, and many parishioners who have started their own families have called for more activities. It has, however, usually depended on the families themselves whether they could start something on their own, and there has never been much initiative from the parish management.

Moreover, there are two independent organizations associated with the parish informally. *Vysokoškolské katolické hnutí Praha* [Movement of Catholic University Students in Prague] is run by their own board of students and gathers those who seek for social, cultural, and religious support. Some of their activities are performed in cooperation with the Academic Parish and regularly promoted in the parish newsletter.³⁸ *Karmel Edith Steinové* [Edith Stein Carmel] is a community that joined the parish through its Czech members: Denisa Červenková was baptized in the parish and today works at the Department of Fundamental Theology at the Catholic Theological Faculty at Charles University, and Irena Göbelová, also a graduate from the Academic Parish, works as a psychologist. Besides their own pastoral work at the convent, they are both available for spiritual service at the parish, the meditation groups and spiritual accompaniment.³⁹

Spiritual exercises

Spiritual exercises and retreats comprise a significant portion of parish pastoral work today; they were introduced through Jesuits to the parish and now create a non-separable part of pastoral service. Most take place during weekends in Kolín, in a former Capuchin monastery that served as a Jesuit center for 20 years before being assigned to the Academic Parish of Prague. Between 2011 and 2020, this center was under the supervision of Petr Vacík, a Jesuit and a member of the Academic Parish team.⁴⁰

³⁸ Vysokoškolské katolické hnutí Praha, <http://vkhpraha.cz/> [3.7.2019].

³⁹ Karmel Edith Steinové, <http://www.cestanahoru.org/> [3.7.2019]. It is a member of Carmelite Sisters of St. Teresa in Florence, <http://www.suorecarmelitanedifrenze.it/ilcarmelo/?lang=en> [6.10.2019].

⁴⁰ Kolínský klášter, <https://www.kolinskyklaster.org/> [3.7.2019]. Moreover, Vacík claims inspiration from Jesuit centers of spirituality worldwide, such as Haus Gries: Stille und Meditation, in Germany, J. MATĚJKOVÁ, “Hledání srdce: Cestou kontemplace a zenu s je-

All the programs are influenced by Jesuit spirituality and range from typical Ignatius exercises (weekend-long, week-long), through meditations of various kind (Sadhana), contemplative exercises, psychology-oriented Enneagram, to thematic retreats in Advent and Lent, Carmelite spirituality retreats, exercises with film, ecumenical-oriented programs, etc. Each session is supervised by a team member (Petr Vacík, Jan Regner, Denisa Červenková, Irena Gobelová, František Hylmar) and often accompanied by a psychologist (Michal Petr, Petr Miklas) or another expert (Jan Šedivý, Elva Frouz, Miloš Hrdý, Ivana Noble, Scarlett Vasiluková Rešlová). There are about 30 exercises offered each year in Kolín, which last from three to seven days. Most are fully booked within a few weeks after the registration period is opened and, thus, keep waiting lists for applicants.⁴¹ So, although the exercise team does not necessarily overlap with the parish team, these programs are regarded as key activities of the parish and would surely deserve closer research in a larger context of urban ministry.⁴²

2.1.2. Public engagement

Active participation in public and politics has always been a delicate theme for the church and Christians in the modern era. Since the Second Vatican Council, the church has formally avoided favoring certain political parties but rather called for general ideas of human rights and social justice.⁴³ Priests and official church institutions tend not to take political positions; and if there is a need for debate over political issues, various lay organizations get involved. The existence and character of an academic parish, however, indicates a certain interest in politics within Christian circles, clerics not excluded.

Tomáš Halík's involvement in public life has often been criticized as inadequate and inappropriate for a religious figure.⁴⁴ For instance, the parish has long

zuitou Petrem Vacíkem” [Heart search: The way of contemplation and Zen with the Jesuit Petr Vacík], *Česká televize*, 8.10.2017, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1185258379-cesty-viry/217562215500007-hledani-srdce/> [6.10.2019].

⁴¹ APP, “Salvátorská duchovní cvičení v Kolíně” [Spiritual Exercises offered by St Salvátor in Kolín], *Salvatore*, 149, 2018, 11-14.

⁴² APP, “Duchovní cvičení”, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/duchovni-cviceni> [3.7.2019].

⁴³ *Gaudium et spes* 76.

⁴⁴ M. KOČÍ, “Přínos Tomáše Halíka”, in T. HALÍK, *Žít s tajemstvím: Podněty k promýšlení víry*, Praha, 227–249.

been in contact with liberal elements of society, be they politicians, schools of thought, or civil activities; e.g., President Václav Havel, the Forum 2000 Foundation, and Christian liberal politicians such as Karel Schwarzenberg, Zuzana Roithová, Daniel Herman and Pavel Fischer. Halík, on the other hand, often took clear stands against Czech presidents Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman and their style of politics.⁴⁵ Due to Halík's articulated position, therefore, it is probable that many parishioners share political views close to those of Christian liberal thinking.

If we examine available data, namely Halík's official speeches and articles, as well as supported activities within the parish, we observe that he regularly alludes to politics and certain politicians in his sermons and intercessions, especially when some tension in society arises, such as during election campaigns or the refugee crisis in 2015.⁴⁶ People who know Halík from his writings and media appearances seem therefore attracted to his philosophy also at the church. It is not unusual, for instance, that some people come for the liturgy of the word only, leaving the church right after the homily; many of these non-Christians attend either because of their interest in spirituality or to receive comfort in politically and socially tense times. It is not without interest, however, that it is rarely particular legislation that is criticized by the parish representatives publicly but rather ethics itself. In this sense, these activities can be understood as philosophical rather than political work.⁴⁷

Czech society tends to be sensitive to truth, which is sometimes attributed to the beginning of Protestantism in Bohemia; the Catholic Priest Jan Hus confronted clerical corruption and put principal emphasis on this key Christian virtue. It was later adopted when the modern Czechoslovak state was constituted:

⁴⁵ T. HALÍK, "Výzva k neúčasti", T. HALÍK, "Desatero ke strachu z islámu. Rozum a věčnost místo hysterie a panikaření", *Lidové noviny Orientace*, 3.10.2015, 22.

⁴⁶ J. Pehe highlights Halík's role as a public intellectual, J. PEHE, "Občanský aktivista a veřejný intelektuál", in *Máš před sebou všechny mé cesty: Sborník k 60. narozeninám Tomáše Halíka*, Praha, 2008, 253-254.

⁴⁷ It should be mentioned that T. Halík even considered running for president but later rejected the idea in order to keep his profession as priest and professor, M. KOČÍ, "Halíkovo napětí mezi ano a ne prezidentské výzvě" [Halík's Tension between Yes and No to a Presidential Candidacy], *Česká pozice*, 18.8.2014, http://ceskapozice.lidovky.cz/forum/halikovo-napeti-mezi-ano-a-ne-prezidentske-vyzve.A140813_160536_pozice-forum_lube [25.7.2019].

the banner of the President has since the 1920s included the motto *Pravda vítězí* [Truth prevails], and during the critical days of 1989, for instance, Václav Havel adapted this into a famous phrase: *Pravda a láska musí zvítězit nad lží a nenávistí* [Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred]. What seemed as a positive and deeply Christian call in early democratic years, however, soon became a bizarre tool for various hate campaigns within society; some people claiming it was too moralistic, others accusing supporters of being naïve; yet others believing this was only a means of hidden corruption interests. Opponents started to use a derogatory term for Václav Havel and his followers – “*pravdoláskař*” [a truth-and-love type], which has survived to these days and is meant to signify their naivety. A list of alleged “*pravdoláskař*” citizens was even created and updated by Adam B. Bartoš, a nationalist who proclaims himself a believer of Protestant origin.⁴⁸ This weird phenomenon may seem a sort of harmless rhetorical game; however, for our research it is important that parish-related people were soon listed there (Tomáš Halík, Jan Jandourek, Martin C. Putna, Marek Vácha, Petr Mucha),⁴⁹ and thus, positioned within certain intellectual and political circles.⁵⁰

It is necessary to reject the notion that opponents to “*pravdoláskař*” deny the concept of truth and love in general, or that they deliberately promote lies and hatred, as it is sometimes jokingly suggested. It makes, however, a practical instrument in examining the political-ethical emphasis of the Academic Parish that refers directly to Václav Havel’s legacy:

In the post-totalitarian system, therefore, living within the truth has more than a mere existential dimension (returning humanity to its inherent nature), or a noetic dimension (revealing reality as it is), or a moral dimension (setting an example for others). It also has an unambiguous political dimension.⁵¹

⁴⁸ A. B. BARTOŠ, “CV: Bůh, vlast, rodina,” <https://abbartos.wordpress.com/curriculum-vitae/> [5.7.2019].

⁴⁹ A. B. BARTOŠ, “Pravdoláska 5.0,” <https://abbartos.wordpress.com/2013/05/25/pravdolaska-5-0-aktualizovany-seznam-pravdolaskaru-200-dalsich-jmen-celkem-700-pravdolaskaru/> [7.7.2019].

⁵⁰ M. Vácha recently commented this topic, J. LESCHTINA, M. VÁCHA, “Marek Orko Vácha: Miloš Zeman hází hlubinné miny do podvědomí národa”, *Aktuálně.cz*, 9.7.2019, <https://nazory.aktualne.cz/rozhovory/marek-orko-vacha-milos-zeman-hazi-hlubinne-miny-do-podvedomi/r~8f0c4e74a16511e9b7740cc47ab5f122/> [6.10.2019].

⁵¹ V. HAVEL, *The Power of the Powerless*, Praha, 1978.

Václav Havel, a philosopher himself, promoted “living in truth” as the most important responsibility for both politicians and citizens alike. So, although he did not officially position himself within an established religion, Havel became a model for many Christians in times of persecution and later democratization; the Academic Parish of Prague therefore claims him as one of its ideological inspirations, as was summarized in a requiem ceremony by Tomáš Halík in 2011:

The Gospel says that man is asked about his faith there. Not to his religious views and beliefs, but to the faith that can be read from the deeds as written in one of the New Testament epistles. Even in the lives of many who haven't lived in church pews and don't consider themselves religious believers, faith – which God appreciates the most – is present: life in truth.⁵²

The relation between the sacral (parish) and social (politics), therefore, seems inseparable in the context of the Academic Parish. And although we have just noted that it is mainly parish priest Tomáš Halík who represents the most visible political voice, it is not solely his initiative but rather a characteristic of the parish community in general.

Politics

In public discourse, the parish representatives often take a clear stand when it comes to political situations with a problematic ethical dimension, as outlined earlier. I would like to illustrate this as regards the “Brady Case” when the Dalai Lama visited the Czech Republic in October 2016 and “living in truth” became an impulse for Tomáš Halík and the parish to get involved.

Before the Tibetan spiritual leader's visit, President Miloš Zeman allegedly threatened Daniel Herman, then Minister of Culture, that his uncle Jiří Brady – a Holocaust survivor – would not be given a state award as intended if Herman met the Dalai Lama in Prague. When Herman met the Dalai Lama despite the President's disapproval, the Presidential Office denied Jiří Brady had ever been on the laureates list. This situation proved embarrassing for the Presidential team and eventually ended up in their confusing specifications and put-offs regarding logistics, protocol, etc. Moreover, a few days later, fearful of the Chinese reaction,

⁵² T. HALÍK, “Víra Václava Havla”, APP, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanek/1440/promluva-tomase-halika-pri-rekviem-za-vaclava-havla-20-12--2011#.XR9yS-gzZPY> [5.7.2019].

top Czech politicians – the President, the Prime Minister, the Head of the Lower House of Parliament, and the Head of the Senate – issued a statement distancing themselves officially from this meeting:

As the highest Constitutional representatives of the Czech Republic, we wish to emphasize that our country in meeting its long-term policy towards the People's Republic of China is based on principles of strategic partnership between the two countries and the mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China, of which Tibet is a part. (...) The personal activities of some Czech politicians do not reflect changes in official Czech politics.⁵³

In response, some politicians and public representatives decided against attending the ceremony and rather raised a Tibetan flag as a symbol of their disapproval with the President and his public office associating with China. The Academic Parish also raised the Tibetan flag, and Tomáš Halík supported his friend Daniel Herman⁵⁴ and the boycott in a public statement four days later:

One cannot ignore the fact that Miloš Zeman has been, also judicially, convicted of lies several times. It is no longer possible to keep silent about his behavior, because silence would mean complicity in the constant turning of our country's helm away from Europe and the Western world, and the distrust of our allies, complicity in the betrayal of Václav Havel's moral and political legacy, in reducing our country's seriousness in the world damaging the moral climate of Czech society. It is not possible to pretend that nothing is happening. Against cowardice and indifference to evil in public life, civil responsibility and character strength need to be demonstrated in order to clearly show who stands for what... and what for a man and citizen actually is.⁵⁵

⁵³ Prezident ČR, "Společné prohlášení nejvyšších ústavních činitelů České republiky" [Joint Statement by the Czech Republic's Supreme Constitutional Officials], official website, 18.10.2016, <https://www.hrad.cz/cs/pro-media/tiskove-zpravy/aktualni-tiskove-zpravy/spolecne-prohlaseni-nejvyssich-ustavnich-cinitelu-ceske-republiky-12953> [11.7.2019].

⁵⁴ Daniel Herman, a former Catholic priest, is now in public service.

⁵⁵ T. HALÍK, "Výzva k neúčasti", 22.10.2016, APP, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanek/2160/vyzva-k-neucasti-na-letosnim-udelovani-statnich-vyznamenani#.XR-96yugzZPY> [5.7.2019].

Similarly, Halík recently supported political demonstrations against Prime Minister Andrej Babiš in June 2019 for alleged fraud and conflicts of interest, claiming that there are certain times in history when “civil responsibilities cease to be merely a political measure of power, but they are given a spiritual and moral dimension:”

We are not primarily here for Mr. Babiš and Mrs. Benešová [his newly appointed Minister of Justice]. We are here for ourselves. These meetings are an expression of our human dignity and civil responsibility. We are sending a clear message that we are not deaf, blind and dull, indifferent to what is happening around us, what is happening to our state and our Czech society.⁵⁶

These cases illustrate strong involvement of Tomáš Halík in public and political discourse, and the parish seems to support its representative mainly by adhering to his speeches and presentations on the parish website. It is noteworthy that politics has recently caused major confrontations between Halík and the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Dominik Duka; once close friends as anti-communist dissidents, each man acknowledges having a different political worldview today.⁵⁷

Art

Emphasis on art is another important communication channel from the Academic Parish towards society at large; by providing space to various artistic forms, such as visual art, film, performing arts, and music, the parish seems to attract people with high-quality standards. Constituting a team of volunteering experts in the “parish exhibit council,” including Norbert Schmidt, Klára Jirsová, Pavla Pečinková, Petr Tej, Petr Vacík, Petr Neubert, Hana Rysová, and Martin Staněk; moreover, it emphasizes the importance of these activities.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ T. HALÍK, “Pozdrav Tomáše Halíka účastníkům manifestací za svobodu a demokracii“, 10.6.2019, APP, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanek/2475/pozdrav-tomase-halika-ucastnikum-manifestaci-za-svobodu-a-demokracii#.XR-CsegzZPY> [5.7.2019].

⁵⁷ This conflict, as of November 2019, would be an appealing subject for further research in church studies, hierarchy, clericalism, globalization, dialog and pluralism. For its complexity, however, it is not possible to examine details here. Rather, I refer to the official website of the Archbishop of Prague and private website of Tomáš Halík for more details.

⁵⁸ APP, “Umělecké intervence a výstavy”, <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/umelecke-intervence-a-vystavy> [5.7.2019].

The annual *Popelec umělců* [Ash Wednesday of Artists], referring to a French tradition during World War I, promotes dialog between the worlds of art and faith. It takes place every year on the first day of Lent and provides a space for meditation and performances by musicians, poets, visual artists, and theater groups.⁵⁹ In 2019 it marked its 24th anniversary; it has since developed into a rather popular cultural event, sometimes broadcast on Czech public television.⁶⁰

Visual interventions, modern performances that intervene traditional religious space, and various musical performances were recently presented by Norbert Schmidt in *Přímluva za současnost: Umění v sakrálním prostoru* [A Plea for the Present: Art in Sacral Space] edition tracking the most important artistic activities between 2009 and 2016, from contemporary authors, such as Václav Cigler, Eva Brodská, Václav Sokol, Adriena Šimotová, Jindřich Zeithamml, Stanislav Kolíbal, Magdalena Bartáková, Choi Jeonghwa, and Petr Nikl.⁶¹ Some works were, for instance, installed during the liturgical period of Lent, traditional for its minimalistic decorations. The upper gallery of St. Salvátor Church is used for exhibits featuring authors, or, alternatively for the parishioners' works produced within the projects of *Fotomaraton* [Photomathon] or *Salvátorový salon* [Salvator Salon].⁶² The parish cooperates closely with *Centrum teologie a umění* [the Centre for Theology and Arts at the Catholic Theological Faculty] of Charles University in Prague. All exhibits offer free entry to general public; moreover, elementary and high schools are invited to guided tours during school days.⁶³

Since 2011, *Filmový klub: Film a spiritualita* [Film Club: Film and Spirituality] has been organized in the municipal library under the supervision of film theorists Lukáš Jirsa and Petr Vacík from the Academic Parish of Prague. The film screenings for the general public are followed by an open floor; people can

⁵⁹ APP, "Popelec umělců", <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanek/1727/popelec-umelcu#.XVwKtugzZPY> [20.8.2019]. The parish website also provides audio, visual, and textual archive material of *Popelec umělců* between 1995 and 2019.

⁶⁰ J. BRICHČÍN, "Popelec umělců 2012", *Česká televize*, 22.2.2012, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10396756282-popelec-umelcu/21256221450/> [3.10.2019].

⁶¹ N. SCHMIDT, *Přímluva za současnost: Umění v sakrálním prostoru*, Praha, 2016.

⁶² The parish website lists major events since 2003, APP, "Archiv uměleckých intervencí" [Art Interventions' Archive], <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanky/archiv-umeleckych-intervenci#obsah> [20.8.2019].

⁶³ APP, "Umělecké intervence a výstavy", <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/umelecke-intervence-a-vystavy> [5.7.2019].

discuss with Jirsa and Vacík, or a guest from the field. While Jirsa was a member of the Ecumenical Jury of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival and now works for the Catholic television NOE, the screenings attract a wide audience. There have been 37 films with a spiritual theme presented so far, including *The Tree of Life* by Terrence Malick, *Avatar* by James Cameron, *Of Gods and Men* by Xavier Beauvois, *A Serious Man* by Joel and Ethan Coen, *Interstellar* by Christopher Nolan, *Psi Páně* by Jonáš Vacek, *Voyage of Time: Life's Journey* by Terrence Malick, and *L'Apparation* by Xavier Giannoli.⁶⁴ The film club seems to be a popular exchange platform at the edge of church and society; the screenings and debates afterwards are attended by two hundred people on average.⁶⁵

2.2. Qualitative interviews: Acknowledgement and choice

Through my research I have been looking for respondents' motives that attracted them to a certain religious community; more specifically, I was asking why people choose the Academic Parish of Prague as their spiritual inspiration, when there are many other faith communities available. I followed grounded theory methodology in order to carry out empirical research: after designating the main research area, research design framework and interview guidelines, I did purposive sampling of parish members and carried out interviews with a sample of 11 people. Respondents were between 19 and 61 years of age, there was a proportional number of male and female respondents, and they represented various religious backgrounds, such as believers from childhood, converts to Christianity some time ago, and new converts or seekers, as well as current and recent parish members. In my later process of analysis, I followed the structure of open, axial and selective coding in order to examine my interview data qualitatively.⁶⁶

Upon analysis of received data and review of existing theories, I eventually came to the concluding results that people choose the Academic Parish of Prague because it addresses their social, spiritual and intellectual needs seriously and relevantly, and treats people with respect. So, although my initial research ques-

⁶⁴ APP, "Film a spiritualita", <http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanek/1973/film-&-spiritualita#.XR-rQ-gzZPY> [5.7.2019].

⁶⁵ Researcher, Personal archive.

⁶⁶ CHARMAZ, *Constructing Grounded Theory*.

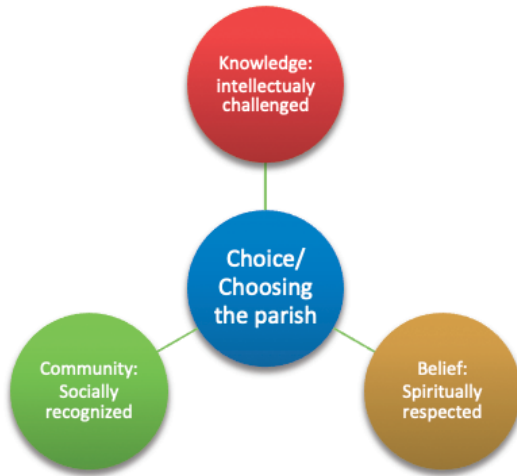


Diagram "Choosing the parish"
(Diagram 11.6.2019/a)

tion was asking for “spiritual inspiration,” my research showed that spiritual need was only one of the “inspirations,” and that people receive more of a comprehensive service from the parish than initially expected. The research results are visually outlined in the diagram “Choosing the parish” below:

It does not obviously mean that one single parish can satisfy all their needs in respective areas; it would not be possible anyway. It does seem, however, that respondents

find the parish attractive for its ability to address key areas of their lives relevantly and specifically. So, while these aspects might be addressed differently, or not addressed at all in other parishes, here people benefit especially from recognition, respect and reflection: (1) Socially, people appreciate being recognized (recognition), (2) Spiritually, people appreciate being respected (respect), (3) Intellectually, people appreciate being challenged to reflect (reflection).

These results, based on empirical qualitative research of the Academic Parish, do not claim that other faith communities in Prague cannot provide similar gratification to their members. In this context, it is necessary to understand this research as an in-depth study of a particular parish community, however specific it might be, not a comparative study of any kind. Also, it should be clear that it is not a mere institutional study; in such case, much greater attention to the organization itself – its structures, mechanisms and visions – would be needed. Its main task, to investigate the motives that are bringing people to this particular parish, was only possible through careful application of qualitative research methods, namely the interviews with current and past parish members. The data received from the interviews thus created valuable material for my further analysis.

My research showed, for instance, that people do not choose a faith community only due to its objective variables (such as high quality, professionalism, fame, or accessibility) but also for its subjective variables (personal benefit, psychologi-

cal and emotional satisfaction). It is therefore necessary to observe the motives and needs in a complex and complementary way. In the beginning, for example, I had to eliminate “spiritual gratification” from my question as I realized that people appreciated the comprehensive service the Academic Parish provides them on a social, spiritual and rational level. Unlike traditional images of a parish focusing primarily on people’s social (community) and spiritual (belief) needs, the Academic Parish seems to address also a rational (knowledge) dimension. And although some respondents emphasized just two of aspects in various combinations (social and rational, social and spiritual, rational and spiritual), in general, receiving gratification in all three areas was crucial for choosing this parish.

I also noticed that people acknowledged being truly respected and accepted; in the parish they enjoy the atmosphere of dialog and pluralism usually described as openness, and tolerance – often relational and based on their direct experience with parish representatives and interpretation of parish activities. They reported getting very specific satisfaction in different areas.

In the social area, for instance, they enjoyed social recognition through other people: while from parish representatives they received confirmation and credit for being equal partners, from their peers they received affirmation through personal attention and generational identification. They felt recognized as worthy fellow parishioners, and as such, were able to socialize within the parish better. Here, I would also include emotional and psychological satisfaction, as people reported on the community atmosphere and acceptance they experience there.

In the spiritual area, they valued a spiritual respect that was exercised through a sensitive and non-invasion approach to their inner life. They felt trust, and respect for their spiritual experience, without any pressure to take part in visible forms of parish life, such as participation at liturgy or groups that may not suit them.

In the rational area, they appreciated the intellectual challenge and stimulation that the parish provided them. They enjoyed having intellectual freedom to question their faith, as well as the openness in communication about it; some emphasized, for instance, that logical reasoning was a new and important part of their faith refection. They felt being recognized as partners despite not always having the same knowledge and experience as others.

In this regard, there were only minor differences between believers and converts, so it did not seem appropriate to differentiate between the two groups in my research. Initially, when considering a concept of “conversion” to be a central

code, I thought the topic of conversion would be elaborated more. As my research developed, I omitted “conversion” from the central focus for two reasons. First, I did not have enough evidence in my data; and second, it seemed such a large and specific theme itself that I would need to direct my further research in this direction, which I eventually did not. Rather, I stayed with a concept of choice and its motives, which seemed more universal.

In the beginning, parishioners did not necessarily look for any specific social, psychological, spiritual or intellectual affirmation – although they may later enjoy some social acceptance, spiritual approval and intellectual agreement within the parish. People rather search for a safe space where their possible questions, uncertainties and challenges are treated seriously, and thus people can eventually

grow in the respective areas freely. I identified this general approach as “acknowledgement” for two different reasons. First, it includes the values of “recognition,” “respect” and “reflection” discussed above; and second, it refers to “knowledge,” a very important part of parish life. Moreover, it addresses also psychological and emotional satisfaction with the parish, which was not elaborated separately for its ambiguous character but is rather viewed as part of “social recognition” in my model. See the diagram “Acknowledgement” below:



Diagram “Acknowledgement” (12.6.2019)

To sum up, my research started with “Why-this-choice” as a key research question, and soon I identified properties of “Community-social,” “Belief-spiritual,” and “Knowledge-rational” as partial answers in my analysis. This model was later specified with “Why-this-choice” as the main research question and “Social recognition,” “Spiritual respect,” and “Rational reflection” as respective partial answers (“Choosing the parish” Diagram 11.6.2019/a). The final analysis of research results eventually remodeled the “Why-this-choice” question into an “Acknowledgment” answer (“Acknowledgement” Diagram 12.6.2019). To con-

clude, it can be stated that people choose the Academic Parish because it acknowledges their social, spiritual and intellectual needs seriously and relevantly and, moreover, addresses people with respect. In addition to receiving necessary social recognition and spiritual respect in the parish, people are inspired to reflect freely upon issues of faith and society there – and by doing so – grow in all three areas accordingly.

3. Theological reflection

Although the supply-demand model may seem irrelevant in religion, a debate has been running for some time, and studies show that people in urban and pluralistic societies choose their faith community regardless of their residence and place of origin.⁶⁷ A traditional model of local parishes has been challenged especially in urban areas, where people tend to choose a community according to their specific needs: they opt for family-friendly parishes, particular spirituality oriented communities, ethnic- or language-minority parishes, and various chaplaincies. This is a major pastoral concern for the church – how to communicate its offer to people, both believers and non-believers, who see religious affiliation as somewhat optional and deliberate. In highly secular countries – the Czech Republic is known for its low level of religious affiliation – this question seems especially timely.⁶⁸

As two major forms of pastoral ministry are acknowledged in the Catholic church – parishes and chaplaincies – I have long been struggling with appropriate contextualization of the Academic Parish of Prague during my research.

⁶⁷ R. STARK, S. BAINBRIDGE, *A Theory of Religion*, New Brunswick, 1996; R. FINKE, R. STARK, “Religious Choice and Competition”, *American Sociological Review*, 1998, G. DAVIE, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging*, Oxford, 1994.

⁶⁸ D. Hamplová suggests that church-going may serve as a rather stabile indicator for religious practice. She operates with the International Social Survey Program conducted between 1993 and 2008, which indicates about 10% of the population attending church monthly in the Czech Republic, D. HAMPLOVÁ, *Náboženství v české společnosti na prahu 3. tisíciletí*, Praha, 2013, 17-19. In 2018, the Pew Research Center indicated 11% visiting monthly, specifying that 8% of adults are “highly religious” in the country, J. EVANS and C. BARONAVSKI, “How Do European Countries Differ in Religious Commitment?” Pew Research Center, 5.12.2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/> [4.10.2019].

Technically and literally, it is a typical parish community with a church building, fixed sacramental schedule, and appointed parish priest. People come here – to church property – deliberately; their initiative is expected within the community. Moreover, it is qualified as a “personal parish,” meaning that its services are primarily for students and staff of local universities, not for a general neighborhood public.

A chaplaincy, on the other hand, is characterized as a field ministry; chaplains come to people into their specific space, their particular life-situation, be it in on a street, in a hospital, school, prison, etc. People are offered the service directly or indirectly through respective institution or other means of communication. Participants are free to receive the offer or not, but their choice is usually limited by space, time and specific life-situation.⁶⁹ In this sense, the Academic Parish cannot be labeled as a chaplaincy *per se*.

Rather, its position seems somewhat in between. It takes forms of both, parish life and chaplaincy ministry, trying to identify its specifics and respond to them in an accessible manner. The German term “kategoriale Seelsorge” seems relatively apt in this context and was more or less adopted into Czech language as “kategoriální pastorec.” However, the literal English translation, “categorical pastoral ministry,” sounds rather strange, and so “chaplaincy” or “special ministry” is used instead. So, although I have decided – on the stated reasons – to position the Academic Parish within parish studies, its special role needs to be taken into consideration when discussing pastoral specifics.

3.1. Functions of the church

The general church carries out its mission through particular church communities; in dioceses, it is mostly represented by parishes and other communities.⁷⁰ In its original sense, the Latin *parochia* and Greek *paroikia* signified living alongside others; the term emphasized a community of Christians sharing the same space: *parochial* terminology has been in use since the 6th century to describe a community of Christians in a particular region.⁷¹

⁶⁹ M. SELLMANN, C. WOLANSKI, *Milieusensible Pastoral: Praxiserfahrungen als kirchlichen Organisationen*, Würzburg, 2013.

⁷⁰ EG 28-29.

⁷¹ W. J. RADEMACHER, J. S. WEBER, D. MCNEILL, *Understanding Today's Catholic Parish*, New London, 2007, 5. E. Górecki points out that administrative role of parishes was es-

Today, special ministry provides an apostolate in settings different from traditional local parishes. It usually has either a field form – chaplaincies in health institutions, prisons, the army; or a based form – personal parishes of language, profession, etc.⁷² These parishes, although different from territorial parishes in jurisdiction, yet seem to carry a form and structure of the previous models for the lack of specific theological and practical grounding. For this very reason, I keep a theological realm of parish studies in my research of the Academic Parish of Prague; yet, being aware of certain terminological and theological disproportion and ambiguity it may create from time to time, I refer to this fact in respective parts. And despite being conditioned by some specifics, still personal parishes – in the era of virtual social media – carry the positives of traditional parishes as outlined by Karl Rahner: they “gather together in one and the same place” and “localize concretization of the general Church.”⁷³ John Paul Vandenaeker observes, for instance, that Vatican II did not discuss parish systematically or in detail:

The word *paroecia* (parish) is found on 22 occasions, the word *parochus* (parish priest) is found on 19, and the word *paroecialis* (parochial) is found on another 10. However, there are a variety of other expressions which are also used to designate the parish. These include: local assembly of the faithful (*congregation localis fidelium*); assembly of the faithful (*congregation fidelium*); local community (*communitas localis*); cell of the diocese (*cellula diocesis*); ecclesiastical family (*familia ecclesiastica*); and so forth.⁷⁴

pecially developed during the Habsburg period in Central Europe, and thus, needed new impulses how to deal with modernization and urbanization of 19th century, E. GÓRECKI, *Církev se uskutečňuje ve farnosti*, Olomouc, 1996, 15.

⁷² T. O. BRUCE, *Parish and Place: Making Room for Diversity in the American Catholic Church*, New York, 2017.

⁷³ K. RAHNER, “Theology of the Parish”, in H. RAHNER (ed.), *The Parish: From Theology to Practice*, Westminster, 1958, 28-29, cit. J. P. VANDENAeker, *Small Christian Communities and the Parish*, Kansas City, 1994, 31.

⁷⁴ VANDENAeker, *Small Christian Communities*, 50. Similarly, T. van Zavrel examines that both terminology and consistency vary from text to text. In *Sacrosanctum concilium*, for instance, there is “parish,” while in *Lumen gentium*, there is “community,” T. VAN ZAVREL, “Pojetí farnosti po druhém vatikánském koncilu”, MA thesis, Praha, 2010, 9. E. Górecki outlines that different texts tried to formulate its characteristics and mission in their respective language. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, for instance, speaks of a group

Studying parishes today seems as a rather complex and interdisciplinary task – as the parish may represent sociological, theological and juridical phenomena. In order to examine my topic theologically – the goal of this section – I will therefore limit my research to theological understanding and challenges that parishes face today.

Since the Second Vatican Council, systematic study of church life has been developing in order to describe models, roles and functions of the church in modern society.⁷⁵ Markus Lehner emphasizes there are two basic models in understanding activities of the church and they are rather independent from each other as the first describes roles and the second practical functions of the church. The threefold office of Christ is based on the image of Jesus Christ as priest, prophet, and king; therefore, the church carries out his mission in teaching, sacral and pastoral service.⁷⁶ This model is accompanied by another approach; four basic functions of the church connect traditional church practices into a systematic and clear model: martyrria (witnessing faith), liturgia (celebrating faith), diakonia (serving others), and koinonia (sharing with others).⁷⁷ This theological systematization is derived from the biblical image of Jesus Christ: Jesus proclaiming the

of believers arranged under the guidance of a shepherd, who represents the bishop (SC 42); *Christus Dominus* about the designated part of the diocese in which care of souls is entrusted to a shepherd under leadership of the bishop (CD 30); and *Apostolicam actuositatem* about the visible apostolate in society (AA 10). Moreover, the parish has a chance to become a true ecclesial community if its members feel a sense of belonging to a parish community (SC 42). Her spiritual climate is to point out that she is “the family of God’s brothers revived by the spirit of unity” (LG 28) and “a family, fraternal and hospitable home (CL 26), GÓRECKI, *Církev se uskutečňuje ve farnosti*, 8.

⁷⁵ A. Dulles, for instance, introduces church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant, and community of disciples in 1974; A. DULLES, *The Models of the Church*, New York, 2002.

⁷⁶ *Lumen gentium* 10, 12, 36 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 783-786.

⁷⁷ M. LEHNER, “Das Bett des Prokrustes: Systematisierungsversuche in der Pastoraltheologie”, *Orientierung*, 4, 1994, 41. Lehner claims adaptation from K. Rahner’s list of basic functions: Gospel proclamation, cult celebration, providing sacraments, juridical life of the church, Christian life in general, and charity, as first outlined in Rahner’s *Die Grundfunktionen der Kirche*. In this text I keep terminology martyrria, liturgia, diakonia, and koinonia rather than their Greek origins or updated English translations; it is more applicable to pastoral context of this research.

Gospel (martyria), praying to God (liturgia), serving others (diakonia), and living in community (koinonia).

So, although theology made various attempts to phrase it differently – Paul M. Zulehner, for instance, suggested *mystika/koinonia/diakonia* trilogy⁷⁸ and Pavel Ambros elaborated *kerygma-martyria/liturgia/diakonia* trilogy⁷⁹ – a fourfold model is recognized as rather comprehensive and illustrative in church studies today.⁸⁰ To understand and define my topic as much as possible, I decided to work with the fourfold framework to capture all possible areas affected.

Vatican II outlined that local churches (parishes, communities) actually make a diocese – the basic administrative unit of the church – real and vital; in practice, these communities exercise a mission giving the church its validity: service to God (liturgia), witness (martyria), and service to others (diakonia).⁸¹ Every structure of the church, from diocese, to parish, to religious community, is therefore invited to adopt these functions in accordance with its charisma and capacity. I would like to examine now how this call was embodied in studied example.

3.2. Parish conceptualization by Tomáš Halík

The parish priest Tomáš Halík proposed an interpretation, after 27 years of service in the parish, outlining his vision of the Academic Parish of Prague in the “Tajemství Nejsvětějšího Salvátora” [A Mystery of St. Salvátor] article in *Katolický týdeník* [Catholic Weekly] in 2017. It seems to correspond aptly with general concepts of martyria, liturgia, diakonia, and koinonia without ever mentioning the terms. While emphasizing the specific charisma of his community, Halík says that the parish needs to develop three areas of Christian existence symmetrically: religious education, spiritual life, and civil engagement. In this context, I suggest that martyria is pronounced as religious education by Halík:

⁷⁸ P. M. ZULEHNER, *Pastoraltheologie: Band 2 Gemeindepastoral, Orte christlicher Praxis*, Düsseldorf, 1995, 83-127. With “Rahnerian mysticism” (K. RAHNER, *Praxis des Glaubens*, Benzinger, 1982), Zulehner wants to emphasize personal spiritual experience rather than formal liturgical forms.

⁷⁹ P. AMBROS, *Základní služby církve v české sekulární společnosti*, Olomouc, 2013.

⁸⁰ LEHNER, “Das Bett des Prokrustes”, 41. See also K. RAHNER, “Die Grundfunktionen der Kirche” in F. X. ARNOLD, et al. (eds.), *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie*, Freiburg, 1964.

⁸¹ P. NEUNER, P. M. ZULEHNER, *Přijď království tvé: Praktické učení o církvi*, Praha, 2015, 122.

Provide a thorough religious education that enables creative dialogue with contemporary philosophy, science and culture. Through sermons, lectures and discussions it develops courage to think about one's faith.⁸²

Liturgia, in its general sense of exercising faith in God, is proposed as promoting spiritual life by Halík:

Bring young people into the depth of personal spiritual life, into the art of meditating; spiritually will accompany individuals with patience, provide space not only for the sacrament of reconciliation but also for spiritual talks and counseling.⁸³

Diakonia, service to people, is portrayed as active Christian participation in the social and political life of pluralistic society:

The third dimension is Christian civil engagement, the ability to oppose populism, arrogance and demagogy in public life. Instead of conformism and servility, we want to support courage in relating to power critically, to have a soberly critical relationship to information on social networks and to the mood of the public, not to be afraid to be a non-conformist minority, to "read signs of the times" with forethought.⁸⁴

Koinonia, community life, is not outlined as a function or mission by Halík; rather, he proposes that an informal team – clerics and laity – constitutes a primary instrument for doing all the work:

Salvátor is no longer a "one-man-show:" the mystery of its vitality lies in the teamwork of a number of dedicated collaborators and several special boards.⁸⁵

Interestingly, the communitarian function of the parish seems somewhat instrumentalized in the text; the author acknowledges the importance of the group in their common work, their effort to serve others and society; however, it seems to neglect the relational dimension of the congregation and its members. I pro-

⁸² T. HALÍK, "Tajemství Nejsvětějšího Salvátora", *Katolický týdeník*, 38, 2017, 4.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

pose a diagram (Diagram “Tomáš Halík’s concept of APP”) combining both approaches, general functions of the church and their specific application in the Academic Parish of Prague:

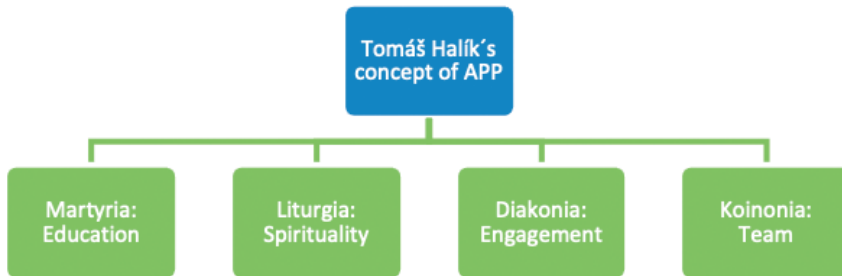


Diagram “Tomáš Halík’s concept of APP” (11.7.2019)

It seems this concept has evolved over time in the service and pastoral care of the parish. There was not a clear model to start this kind of specific pastoral work after the fall of communism, so Tomáš Halík – the first and so far the only parish priest – has naturally shaped the community according to his personal visions and emphases, regardless of how communicated they were or were not with his colleagues. If we examine the particular areas closely, therefore, we may see that some functions are stronger than others; they often take a different shape than in other parishes, and sometimes do not harmonize with other church organizations and hierarchy fully; however, we also see that the parish often demonstrates a greater understating for people and themes that are not addressed elsewhere.

It has been observed, for instance, that the parish does not aim at people from academia exclusively. Blanka, the respondent from the opening paragraph, for instance, is a forty-two-year-old woman who is neither a student, nor working at the university. The “academic” in the name of this community seems rather as a mission statement – a deliberate openness and communication with people who seek reason and reflection on their spiritual way. Most members should not be viewed as intellectuals and scholars, but rather as demanding critical thinkers in general. It has also been noticed that the congregation is attended by Christians and non-Christians alike, so perhaps a focus-group can be defined more broadly than is it usual in a parish ministry.

To conclude, the empirical research showed earlier, that people demand a holistic approach in pastoral care; they indicated satisfaction with a threefold model

when their body (community), mind (knowledge) and soul (belief) were receiving certain social, intellectual and spiritual inspiration. This demand seems rather timely in a global and pluralistic society wherein the Christian community can be seen as a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Parishes and chaplaincies are not to care for the soul only, rather they need to look after all aspects of an individual, “Sorge um den ganzen Menschen,” as Rainer Bucher argues.⁸⁶ Theological reflection identified the four functions of the church as more or less working pastoral model which is, to some degree, trying to meet people’s demand for spirituality and community. Still, it seems that tendencies to individualization (on the part of people) and to determination (on the part of the church) are noticeable and call for a further theological and psychological re-definition of Christian communities today.

4. Conclusion

So what is the spirit of the Academic Parish of Prague, which a parishioner holds as attractive in the opening quote? What is the specific character of this congregation that can be perceived as prosperous and attractive for people today?

It was observed that Tomáš Halík’s concept of a parish community with a strong emphasis on education, spirituality, and engagement seems to correspond closely with data from qualitative interviews, when people demonstrated a need for intellectual reflection, spiritual respect and social recognition. Research data indicated a strong compatibility between the parish offer (document-based research) and expectations of people (qualitative interviews), and suggested that the Academic Parish of Prague interpreted its specific mission – addressing urban, educated and critically thinking people – relevantly and authentically (theological reflection).

Moreover, the parish was identified as a spiritual pit stop for a certain period of one’s life – it has a temporary function; people come, learn, and get inspired but eventually continue on their way. It is definitely not a cradle-to-grave place where they would be destined to spend rest of their lives but quite the opposite: from the very beginning, they sense they will have to leave the community one

⁸⁶ R. BUCHER, “Die pastorale Konstitution der Kirche. Was soll Kirche eigentlich?” in R. BUCHER (ed.), *Die Provokation der Krise. Zwölf Fragen und Antworten zur Lage der Kirche*, Würzburg, 2004, 37.

day. Interestingly, this makes the situation more serious and significant in their eyes. This temporality – with its positives and negatives – seems somewhat common to specific pastoral practice in general: people are addressed in their milieu in a special period of their lives. Without a guarantee of any long-term affiliation, the power and influence of church communities decreases radically – a model that may appeal to people but worry religious organizations.

Yet further steps need to be taken to specify if and how a successful pastoral experience of one particular community can be shared and, possibly, passed on other congregations of a similar character. It should also be clearly identified what pastoral forms cannot be copied or relocated to other groups for their distinct character and personal charisma. The personality of parish leadership, clerical and lay, deserves a closer psychological and social examination – again with the perspective of transferability and eligibility of a particular case.

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