

2001

10 years anniversary

**The Gabor Sztehlo Foundation for the Support of
Children and Youth**

10 years old

Robert Frenkl

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I confess I have the pleasure to write about the 10-year anniversary of the Sztehlo Foundation because it gives me the opportunity to write about the denominator. I am sure neither the organisers of this event and the trustees of the Foundation nor the participants - including the 80-person choir of the Presbyterian Church of Menlo Park (California) who made the evening of 27 May, 2001, memorable - will be offended with me.

Our church has given great many outstanding pastors to the society. Some of them became historical persons. To be a lutheran pastor has determined a high standard. He was decisive in the life of communities, influenced individual fates to the right directions. Even to-day, more than a quarter of century after the leave of Uncle Gabor, his personality and work is getting outlined more and more clearly. It raises him to the greatest men. To those who served for preaching the praises of God even for centuries. It is strange that we who knew him, loved him, remind him personally are rather temperate or bashful because of some human experiences. However, for the real posterity, his life-work will appear as a torchlight. His personality and activity filled, with uneffected modesty, minding to God, the gap that puts the world to trouble even nowadays; teaches the unprejudiced implicit helpful love, assistance to persecutees, saving children, the most defenceless people, undertaking even life-danger. He followed Christ when had given shelter to children, entrusted by Bishop Sandor Raffay, organising 32 homes for saving 1540 children and a few adults. After the war, who remained orphans, continued to live under his care. He established the children's home PAX where he undertook the impossible: replace the paternal home.

The Foundation was created by the former Sztehlo-children in 1991 in order to forward something out of the love perceived. During ten years, 230 youngsters were supported by 7.5 million Hungarian Forint altogether.

The annual meetings have been made outstanding for the fourth time by the music this year. The first charitable concert was held by the pianist Adam Fellegi at the City Hall in 1993, the second was recited commonly by the female choir Vox Hungarica and the Chorus Schütz in the church in Bécsi Kapu Square in May 27, 1995. Last year the 67-person Youth Orchestra of Memphis performed a highly successful concert in the church of Deák Square on 16 June, 2000. A report on this event, published in the *Evangélikus Élet* happened to reach California where Douglas Lawrence, the music director of the church of Menlo Park, erected on the

peninsula of San Francisco 128 years ago, noticed that the concert of Memphis had ended by common singing, Americans and Hungarians, of the song that used to be recited every evening in every home sustaining the hope by clinging to God: "*Oh, extend over, my Jesus, your protecting wings...*"

Douglas Lawrence got into contact with the Foundation and the Choir of Menlo Park gave an unforgettable - the word can hardly express the experience - concert in the Church of Budavár on May 27, 2001. The audience in the crowded church was fascinated by the 22 songs, the captivated talent of the soloists, the strength of the choir. Our American brethren served us with the Gospel of music demonstrating that Christianity, belonging to Christ, is flow of joy, relieved rejoice. The titles of some songs may indicate something of this great experience: *Sing a Mighty Song, Nativity Carol, African Noel, I Need Thee Every Hour, Order My Steps, He Never Failed Me Yet...*

Maybe, a tradition has been born. This concert was ended with the "Oh extend over..." again. First it was song by the choir as adapted by Douglas Lawrence (moreover a famous baritonist) followed by common singing, Americans and Hungarians, the whole audience in the church.

The event, organised by the Foundation, was preached by Pastor Imre Bence. It is a good reason on the occasion of the tenth anniversary to thank the service to the coworkers by name: the President of the Trustee is Ms. Zsuzsa Merenyi. The Members are: +Ms. Magda D. Koren, Ms. Eva Bozoky, Dr. Judit Fidy, Ms. Zsuzsanna Kiraly. Founders and advisors: Dr. Andor Andrasi, Dr. Andras Grobler, Ms. Sara Keszthelyi (executive), Ms. Klara Ondvari (economical advisor). Now we are waiting with high feeling what a surprise will have the next anniversary to us.

**Concert on the Sunday Evening Worship
for the memory of Gabor Sztehlo and for the
10-years activity of the Gábor Sztehlo Foundation
in the Lutheran church of Bécsi kapu tér**

Zsuzsa Merényi (published in: *Heti Válasz*, July 13, 2001- in reduced form)



On May 27, 2001, from 6.00 p.m. on, the Gábor Sztehlo Foundation for Youth and Children Aid celebrated its decennial by a musical devotion. On behalf of the founders, András Grbler,

one of the "Sztehlo children", addressed the audience, recalling the human figure and example of Gábor Sztehlo.

What is the meaning of the kind "Sztehlo children"? The historical miracle, which is still not very widely known, that Jews could survive the persecution of 1944 and the siege of Budapest without hurting a hair of their head; and then, until January 1950, a good deal of children, remained lonely or orphan, could live and learn in a children's town named PAX. This miracle, as András Grbler said, is linked with an exceptional man, evoking Sarastro of the Magic Flute, Gábor Sztehlo.

The name of the Lutheran pastor, Gábor Sztehlo (1909-1974), became really known as his Diary had been published (edited by Éva Bozóky in 1983) and the documentary film entitled The Saver of Children had appeared afterward. He arranged and managed 32 children's homes with the aid of the Swiss Red Cross, from October 1944 on, where more than 1500 children and some hundreds of adults were saved. In one of the first groups, he was awarded with the Yad Vashem order in 1973 and a tree keeps his memory in the Garden of Righteous in Jerusalem.

As a profound believer while ecumenical minded and very practical pastor, he had not release the lonely children after the war. He established a real constitutional children's town under the trees of Buda Hills.

The grown-up children, formerly saved and/or educated by Gábor Sztehlo, have been the "Sztehlo children". They found each other again when the Diary appeared. Since then they meet every end of May (near to the date of death of Gábor Sztehlo, 28 May) on the Castle Hill of Buda, in the Church of Bécsikapu Square. They lay wreath onto the relief on the wall of the Lutheran church.

In 1990 the idea arised in the hearts of the Preisich couple (remembering the escape of the two daughters and themselves) that it is time to act for creating a worthy memento to Uncle Gábor by establishing a foundation for children's aid. The small team of Sztehlo children had gathered soon. Pastor Emil Koren, the former collaborator of Gábor Sztehlo, that time the priest of Budavár, took the lead of the Foundation. The administration was taught and initiated by a lawyer friend of Ms. Györgyi Bollmann, one of the Sztehlo children, and the Deed of Foundation was submitted quickly. Then Mrs. Magda Koren and mainly Mrs. Sara Keszthelyi-Sztehlo took the administration over, typed the lists of addresses. The Chairman of the board, Dr. Koren provided the postal address of the congregation of Budavár to the Foundation. The managing secretary was Dr. Bálint Füzéki, one of the founders, and the members were the other founders. The volunteer bookkeeper has been Mrs. Klára Ondvári. Everybody works for the Foundation free, with love. The main goal of the Foundation is to help the youth just leaving the homes of the state care, facing to the difficulties of starting the individual life. During the decade, 230 young persons were supported on the requests of the homes giving 7.3 MHUF altogether (at an indexed value of USD 42,000) including occasional helps to the homes as well. It can be considered quite moderate but annually 20 to 25 young and some tight situations of the homes have been lightened.

The celebration of the decennial was turned into a real magic by the 80-member choir of the Presbyterian Church of Menlo Park, California, visiting Hungary organised by the Kuoni Travel Agency. Maestro Douglas Lawrence, the conductor and artistic director of the ensemble has got an inkling to the message of Gábor Sztehlo and to the magnificence of the

anniversary. The unforgettable experience of the music was piled on the generous donation based on the Words of the day celebrated by Pastor Imre Bence. The concert of one hour and a half recited a wide choice of religious vocal music from classical to contemporary authors demonstrating the extended repertoire of the choir. The highly talented and educated while amateur ensemble and its members, singing solos or duettes, among them an extremely inspired singer of spirituals, fascinated the audience. Tears gathered in eyes during the concluding piece of the concert: Doug Lawrence treated the everyday evening song of the Sztehlo children they used to sing during the hiding period in the war. They recited it first in English and then, together with the audience, in Hungarian: *"Oh, extend over, my Jesus, Your protecting wings ... childs and adults all ask You to guard and save us"*. The song was still sounding when Aunt Éva, Ms. Éva Stiasny, the leading nurse of the children's home of Bogár street in 1944/45, supporting by her stick, went out to the Maestro and embraced him emotionally thanking the most loved sing and the whole concert. Donations of the choir and the audience provide further help to the indigents. Thanks to all. *The musical devotion and the following modest lovely treat made every participant feel the cross-border human charity and love.*



From Menlo Park to Budavár

Concert of the Californian Choir at the Meeting of "Sztehlo Children"

Éva Bozóky (*published in: **Heti Válasz**, July 13, 2001- in reduced form*)

"We believe - that's why we are singing" said Maestro Douglas Lawrence, the conductor of the choir, when realised the ecstatic enthusiasm of the congregation of Budavár listening to the concert of the Californian choir on 27th May, 2001.

On that Sunday, several festive occasions were associated: confirmation in the morning, the meeting in the afternoon continuing with the memorable recital by the 80-member choir of the Presbyterian Church of Menlo Park in the evening.

It is well-known in our Church, even by the younger generation, from several issues of the Diary of Gábor Sztehlo, our past priest, that he saved about 2000 children and some 200 grown-ups during the persecution in 1944. The dwellers of the 30 illegal children's homes were supplied with the aid of the Swiss Red Cross then, on various international donations, he maintained a children's town, named Pax, for those who remained lonely or made orphan by the war, until the forced nationalisation in 1950.

These former "children", in their sixties to-day, were gathered by the first appearance of the Diary and the documentary film therefrom in 1984. Since then they have met every May even from the farthest corners of the world if possible.

The meeting of this year was made memorable by the Choir of California. It presented us such a musical experience which was confession and testimony besides the infinite delight. The well-knit ensemble with fascinating sound intensity recited mainly American compositions but they sang Beethoven and even a Hungarian evening song. The spirituals and the hot-tempered still ethereal liturgical people's songs of the American South were most touching for us. It is difficult to rank the soloists; though all of them were fascinating, the most captivating vocalist was an Afro-American singer. In fact, she may be compared to Ella Fitzgerald!

Beyond the esthetical and musical experience, this choir has really lifted the whole audience out of the gravitation of the earth to the vicinity of omnipotent God.

The choir devoted the offertory of the evening to the Sztehlo Gábor Foundation established just 10 years ago by the "Sztehlo children" as a celebration of the anniversary of the aid to the starting years of youth that leaves the state care. During this decade, 230 young persons could feel the radiating love of Gábor Sztehlo and, on this occasion, his remote benediction through the music.

*For this once, the board of trustees to the Foundation expresses its thanks to the ever
helpfulness of the congregation Budavár*