

MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

HOME AND OVERSEAS

FEBRUARY 2019

World Day of Prayer Service on Friday 1st March 2019

(written by the Christian women of Slovenia)

Theme: 'Come – Everything is Ready!'

A new country with a long history

Who knows where Slovenia is? In recent years more people have visited the country as tourists and so it is possible that some of you may have been there and can share some knowledge with others in your circle. But modern Slovenia in the heart of Europe only became independent in 1991.

For 600 years from the 13th century to the First World War, the Slovene territories were part of the huge Austro-Hungarian Empire. They were attacked by the Turks, invaded by the French, ruled by the Austrians and then, at the end of the First World War, a united kingdom of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia was created and later named Yugoslavia. After World War Two, three more federal states were added to make up the new socialist state of Yugoslavia under Tito. Following his death in 1980 there was increasing economic and ethnic tensions until Slovenia finally declared its independence from Yugoslavia.

Slovenia is bordered by Italy, Austria, Croatia and Hungary, with a very short coastline on the Adriatic Sea. It is one of the smallest countries in Europe (roughly the size of Wales), with a population of just under two million people (about twice the population of Birmingham) and almost a quarter of these live in the capital of Ljubljana.



A beautiful country

Slovenia is the third most forested country in Europe. In fact, over 60% of the country is covered with deciduous and coniferous trees - and still a million trees are planted every year! The forests, lakes, rivers and sea are rich in wildlife and flora, with a vast network of more than 10,000 underground caves in the Karst region of central Slovenia, some of which are a great tourist attraction.

Since its independence in 1991, Slovenia continues to be the wealthiest and most politically open of all the former Yugoslav countries with low unemployment. It is successful in its car production, its pharmaceutical industry and manufacturing of electronic equipment and wood products. Farming is still important, particularly dairy farming on small family farms, though subsidised and in decline.

The Slovenians are also proud of their native bees and there are more than 90,000 bee keepers. Last year the UN recognised the importance of bees and the threats against them by declaring 20th May 2018 as 'World Bee Day'.

Women, Children and Social Care

Women have the same access to education as men, which is reflected in the workplace. Yet on average women still earn 7% less than men, except in the construction and transport industries – where some women have higher paid jobs than men!

There are many issues which are familiar to us: As in the UK, childcare is usually shared with the grandparents when both parents are working, with women still bearing the greater

burden of domestic tasks. Education is free and compulsory from the age of six to fifteen. The oldest university is the University of Ljubljana which was founded in 1919.

Slovenia has a welfare system which provides access to health services, social assistance and education for those in need. Most people pay for supplementary insurance because not everything is totally free. Women have the right to take maternity leave from a month before the birth until the child's first birthday and during this time they are entitled to a maternity payment equal to their wage/salary. Mothers of four or more children may stay home until the youngest is ten and their social insurance contributions are paid by the state during this time.

More modern concerns

Unemployment and homelessness were virtually unknown under the socialist regime but today as in many other countries, together with drug and alcohol abuse, have now become devastating problems.

The country has an ethnic mix mainly made up of a majority of Slovenes, but also of Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, Macedonians and Montenegrins, with a small number of Roma who have their own language and customs. On the whole there is a willingness to get along well together and Slovenia is the first and only country in the EU to pass a law specifically for the Roma community defining their rights.

During the communist years, any religious conviction was persecuted with imprisonment and restricted access to jobs. Since independence, the religious groups and churches have re-emerged with the majority being Roman Catholic(60%), Orthodox and Islam (mainly from Macedonia and Serbia) and some Lutheran. Amongst all these groups certain cultural prejudices remain.

Come – Everything is Ready! (Read Luke 14)

This is the theme from Slovenia, with the invitation grounded in the parable of the great Feast that Jesus told, which we all know so well. In our service we will hear the stories of those who are coming to the table, reflecting the political and economic situation of Slovenia.

The invitation is given, C O M E:
Children,
Older folk,
Middle-aged,
Everyone.
No matter where you have been
Or what you have done,
The Lord invites YOU, he says COME.

May the welcoming God enable us to set the table and fill the communities with hope.

Wendy Hopcroft for

WDP