

The history of the Church in Croatia

Missionary work in Croatia did not really begin until Krešimir Ćosić, a Yugoslavian star basketball player was recruited by Brigham Young University, in 1969. During his junior year at the university he became a member of the Church. At the time he said, „There are many reasons not to..., there is only one reason to ... it is true“

In 1972 Ćosić was set apart as a missionary by Elder Gordan B. Hinckley. That summer Ćosić mentor's son, Elder Paul Nibley was sent across the Adriatic Sea to Zadar, Ćosić hometown, from the Italy North Mission. Together, he and his companion engaged in a variety of proselytizing activities with Ćosić. Ćosić baptized the first Croatian members of the church in the Adriatic Sea. The first couple he baptized, Mišo and Ankica Ostarčević were also the first couple from Croatia to be sealed for time and eternity. Following his Senior year at BYU, Ćosić turned down three NBA offers to return to Yugoslavia to coach, to play on the Yugoslavian Olympic Team but more importantly to share his new found faith with his fellow country men.

In 1975, Church leaders formed Yugoslavia's first Latter-day Saint congregation in Zadar. At the same time, and in anticipation of establishing a mission in Yugoslavia, the Church called Gustav Salik as mission president and stationed him in Austria near the Yugoslav border. Salik spent the next year attempting to open the mission, but could not get the necessary permission to work in the country.

In 1977, missionaries entered as students. They wore casual dress but could not proselyte. In 1978, the first sets of full-time missionaries were assigned to Zadar and Zagreb also dressed casually.

In 1979, the first Book of Mormon translated into Croatian was published for the use of missionary work in Yugoslavia.. This project was initiated five years earlier by Ćosić who was assisted by a Catholic priest. This translation is still being used in Croatia as of 2008.

In 1981 elders were removed from Yugoslavia and replaced by senior couples.

In October 1985, President Thomas S. Monson, then a member of the quorum of the twelve, dedicated the land of Yugoslavia for missionary work in the city of Zagreb with Krešimir Ćosić acting as translator. The newly acquired facility for church services in Zagreb was also dedicated at the same conference.

In 1986 one set of elders were again assigned to serve in Yugoslavia. In a six month period, they held fifteen baptisms. This activity was noticed by civil authorities and the missionaries were expelled from Yugoslavia but returned as language students. A few months later they were expelled again. Elder Russell M. Nelson, along with the Europe Area President, the Austria-Vienna Mission President and Krešimir Ćosić visited top officials in Croatia. They received assurance that there would be no future problems. From the Church's perspective, permission was granted to proselytize, if not in all of Yugoslavia, at least in Croatia.

When missionaries entered Croatia in the summer of 1987, they did so as missionaries, instead of students or tourists. That year, Rudolf Ruter the first native Croatian to serve as a full-time missionary was baptized. He later served his mission in Salt Lake City. Kresimir Ćosić was

released as Yugoslavia's first District President and Ivan Valek, one of Krešimir Ćosić former teammates baptized during the church's early years in Yugoslavia, was called to fill his shoes.

The first Relief Society in Zagreb was organized March 27, 1988. The Relief Society's first fall social had 42 people in attendance, 36 of which were investigators.

In June 1991, Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia. The threat of civil war caused Church leaders to evacuate all missionaries working in the former Yugoslavia on July 1, 1991. Only a senior missionary couple stayed in Zagreb. In the midst of war, they continued their work baptizing several new members each month.

In 1992, Ćosić was appointed the deputy ambassador to the United States from Croatia where he used his influence to help his countrymen during a time of uncertainty. In February, missionaries were again assigned to Croatia. For the first time one set of sisters was included in the assignments. While the war was far from over, fighting was only taking place on the borders of Croatia and missionaries were not in danger. During the summer, missionaries returned to Karlovac and began work in Varaždin.

Despite the civil war, Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia boasted 22 baptisms during 1991. In 1992 these same countries had 106 baptisms.

By 1992 the civil war had spread into Bosnia. The Church rendered support and humanitarian aid during this time of hardship in the Yugoslav region. Supplies for a children's hospital were sent to Sarajevo. Later, district president Ivan Valek successfully transported medications from Croatia into Bosnia. During the same period, European states sent relief supplies to help refugees in Croatia and Serbia. One sister from Macedonia served in the Yugoslav army that occupied eastern Croatia. Ivan Valek, District President, crossed the lines once a month to visit her in the barracks.

During an investigator fireside in Karlovac on July 14, 1993, a thunderous blast shattered the air. During a lull, Elder Halgren took the missionaries home to Zagreb. Karlovac missionaries were reassigned the following day.

Between 1993 and 1998, the Church provided thousands of tons of food, clothing, bedding and medical supplies to Croatia. Since 1995 the Church has participated in a project to assist Croatian farmers.

In May 1995, at age forty-six Brother Ćosić died after a two year battle with cancer. His country honored him for his accomplishments in sports, while the church recognized him as a pioneer of the gospel in the Communist realm when it was still the ideological adversary to the free world.

In 1997, Ivan Valek was released after serving 10 years as district president. Almost immediately he was called to serve as president of the Zagreb branch.

In March 2007, ground was broken in Zagreb for the first chapel to be built in Croatia. It is scheduled to be completed by year's end 2008.

In October 2007, the first native Croatian to serve a full-time mission in the Slovenia/Croatian mission assigned to Croatia was Sister Lana Sajevac from the city of Karlovac, making her the 19th Croatian to serve a full-time mission.

In the fall of 2008, hundreds have enrolled in free language courses offered by the missionaries in several cities in Croatia.

In 2008 the following Humanitarian projects in Croatia have been completed or are in progress.

- Humanitarian Aid is helping the Red Cross to clean and repair the last 3,500 wells of the 11,000 wells destroyed in the 1991-4 War between Serbia and Croatia in the Slavonia area.
- 1000 wheelchairs were donated to the Croatian Red Cross and they were distributed throughout Croatia by the Red Cross free of charge.
- New equipment was supplied to the Ophthalmology Clinic in Rijeka .
- Blankets were donated to be distributed to the elderly and needy.
- Newborn Kits were donated to be distributed to hospitals and new mothers.
- Bedding and sleepwear were donated to Children's homes in three cities.
- Supplies were furnished to rebuild— Sjaj, an association that makes available social and emotional support for the mentally handicapped.

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Congregations 6

Family History Centers 1