

HUNGARY

Population: 10 Mio

Area: 93.036 km²

Part 1: Laws concerning Homosexuality

Forbidden by law: No

Age of consent: Equal

Registered partnership/marriage: No

In 1996 Hungary amended an existing law on non-married (heterosexual) couples living together in an economic and sexual relationship (common lay-marriage) to also cover same-sex-couples. The reform became necessary by a 1995 decision of the Hungarian constitutional court which had limited the definition of marriage to two persons living together. But the rights and benefits are not automatically given – you must apply for them in each case.

Anti-discrimination law, protecting lesbians/gays (L/G) against discrimination: Yes, since January 2004

At work: Yes

On the housing market: No

In other areas: Yes in education, social sphere, health care, authorities, public services

Other groups in the society protected through such a law: Yes, the law of equal opportunities applies to all groups.

Incidents that briefly describe the situation of L/G in society:

In 2003, a widower whose partner had died after 10 years' co-habitation, applied for a widower's pension. The pension fund refused his request, but due to the petition of gay organisations, the related government edict was modified.

"Labrisz", the Lesbian Association, started an educational program offering to hold class discussions about LGBT-related issues in high-schools. It received a lot of political and media attacks, and the schools, too, are rather reluctant to invite the program.

Part 2: Situation in the Church(es)

Open L/G welcome to

Eucharist: No

Do volunteer work: No

Work as ordained ministers: No

Other employment in church(es): No

Partnership blessing possible: No

Incidents/outspoken attitudes that briefly describe the situation of L/G in the churches:

In fall 2003, a student of a Calvinist university was fired after he came out as gay. The board of the school declared that they do not support gays to become ministers. Since then, a series of protests have taken place. The boy's family and also a gay organisation took the school to court. The former case has already been closed: The family won the suit, and the court decision obliged the school to take back the student.

According to the prevailing Church views, homosexuality is a deadly sin; gays and lesbians are met with disdain and excommunication in Christian circles, sometime with condescending pity or an aggressive intent to help.

Part 3: Christian Lesbian/Gay Networks

Network name: "Öt Kenyér" ("Five Loads of Bread") Christian Community for Homosexuals

Year of foundation: 1996

Web page/contact address:

Pf. 25, HU-1461 Budapest

www.otkenyer.hu, otkenyer@otkenyer.hu,

Filled in by the "Öt Kenyér" group and Anna from Labrisz, Hungary

About "Five Loads of Bread" – Christian Community for Homosexuals

The "Five Loaves of Bread Community" was founded in 1996 by young Catholics so as to provide a spiritual background for those gay men and lesbian women who believe – despite of all – that God, through Jesus Christ, and out of pure love, has invited them to salvation. The "Five Loaves" works as an ecumenical community, and (though its members are mostly gays and lesbians) it is open for any "person of good will".

Our primary intent is to help each other living as gays and Christians, seeking solutions for emerging problems. In the long run, we'd like to dissolve false stereotypes, often created and maintained by religious circles. According to our possibilities, we take steps to overcome spiritual and physical aggression, and legal and moral discrimination against the homosexual minority, so as to ease the lives of gay and lesbian people wrestling with religion, identity and other problems. Last but not least, we try to give non-religious gays and lesbians an authentic image of Christ's good news.

Our name, the "Five Loaves of Bread", refers to the miraculous multiplication of bread. As we put it in our first charter: "God uses small means to carry out His great aims. We believe that we, though small in the eyes of society, can be strong and effective in God's hands in building the Church and making the world more righteous."

We meet weekly; out of the current 35 members of the community, on average, 15-20 people take part. On the first Sunday afternoon of each month we celebrate Holy Mass and a love-feast together, and two weeks thereafter we organise a leisure programme. Beside these, we regularly take part in collective retreats; in 2003 we celebrated the complete three holy days of Easter together, and baptised one of our members.

Next, I'd like to describe four aspects of our community life: First, I'll give you an insight into our inner life, then I'll speak a bit about our website, then about our worldly activities, and finally, about our relationship to other Christian denominations.

We begin the Thursday evening meetings with a ritual, consisting of psalms, songs and prayers. At the gatherings, conversation plays an important role: it's based on a scriptural passage, and everyone can share their thoughts and ideas. Then we have time for individual, silent prayers, and in the remaining time we talk about current events and upcoming programmes while also enjoying some food and drinks. We close the meeting by blessing those having their birthdays and the Lord's Prayer comes last. – The topics of discussion have been determined, among other things, by the Catholic Catechism, by spiritual themes and the gay

Christian issue. Recently we've been dealing with *Inside Out*, a book by Lawrence Crabb, and also the Apostles' Creed.

Financially we are self-sustaining, everyone gives a monthly contribution according to their means, but we also welcome external support so we opened our own bank account. Our community was officially registered at the court in September 2003.

The "Five Loaves of Bread Community" is, on the one hand, an "inner room" (Mt 6:6a) for its members, but it doesn't merely work as a self-supporting group: it also wishes to be "a city set on a hill" (Mt 5:14–15), virtually and physically as well.

Our website, www.otkenyer.hu, has been working since September 2000. It doesn't only serve to inform the readers about the character, organisation and current events of the community (both through texts and pictures), but we try to provide an extensive library as well, about the topics of Christianity and homosexuality, and especially about the spiritual and theological issues about their compatibility. We intend the website for gays and lesbians who have already or have not yet accepted themselves, for their relatives, for open-minded and suspicious straight people, regardless of their religious beliefs. We try to address people with hostile feelings on a separate page with a skull on it, and they can engage in conversation with us in the guest book. Those interested can contact us through email, regular mail or telephone as well.

The majority of the material on our website can be found in the Reading Room, where several hundreds of articles, interviews, essays and studies can be reached on the above-mentioned three topics thematically arranged (both our own and external texts). We are linked to several gay Christian websites in English and to those of similar (European) organisations as well. The visitors can get information through taking the Test or browsing through the Questions & Answers, and on the page "A Piece of Bread" we give a taste of our favourite ideas and stories. The SOS page was meant for those facing acute danger.

If possible we update the website at least weekly, first of all, with news on gay Christian topics, new articles and our own events; we publish our current notices through banners. The pages about our community and its activities are available in English and German as well, they are also updated from time to time. We receive 250 visits daily on average. – We've been maintaining the gay Christian page of the link-collection "Startlap" since April 2002 (<http://kereszteny-meleg.lap.hu>), containing several hundreds of thematically arranged links.

Beyond its virtual existence, the community regards assuming a role in society as an important mission. Within its framework, we co-operate with other gay organisations in several fields, but we also organise quite a number of separate actions.

Since the first Hungarian gay parade and festival in 1997, we've represented ourselves separately each year: mainly with signboards and handouts. In 2003 we organised a discussion and an ecumenical service for the festival. – In 2001, we drafted an inaugural speech with the title "We have a dream" on our handout that we would find appropriate from the Holy Father at a world-wide gay meeting, with regard to the present standpoint of the Church. In 2002 we distributed our summary entitled "Homosexuality – Questions and Answers From a Christian Approach" about the acceptability of gay partnerships on biblical grounds.

The book entitled "Shall They Be Put to Death?" by Balázs Birtalan, one of the founding fathers of the community, was published in 1997, with the subtitle "The Homosexual Person and Christianity", backing up the Christian justification of gay partnerships with social, psychological, biological, theological and ethical arguments. Several periodicals mentioned the book in their articles, and, in connection with a later gay festival, the author sent a copy to every Member of Parliament. – A one-hour-long documentary was made about Balázs Bir-

talan's life, with the same title, which was presented at the gay festival and other places and in 2003 at the 34th Hungarian Film Week as well.

We spoke out against homophobic, manipulative or abusive reports and TV shows, and protested against the local mayor's action to ban gay education programmes from the significant musical and cultural youth festival, the Sziget festival. – In 2001, two members of the community spoke about their lives and the situation of gay Christians in a few minutes' introduction on a private TV station. In the show of another private station about controversial social issues the gay Christian topic emerged several times (last time in September 2003, in connection with gay marriage), where one of our members was invited as well.

We committed ourselves to issues independent of the gay Christian issue as well, e.g. we were present at the peace demonstrations against the war in Iraq, and we also marched protesting against discrimination as well as domestic violence.

Our community plays a unique role in representing lesbians and gays in Christian circles.

A Catholic periodical published a personal account and an introduction of our community in February 2001, and also an interview with Balázs Birtalan in December 2002, in which we were able to voice our standpoint in a detailed manner.

We were also present at lectures and debates organised around the Christian theme: in February 1998, Balázs Birtalan spoke at a public discussion about the need for dialogue between gays and Christians. After the lecture of a Christian society and a circle, among other audience members, we also expressed our views and made our handout available.

One of the most important elements of the gay-Christian dialogue is our exchange of letters and our attempt to get in touch with the Catholic Church (which has been mostly unsuccessful up to now). In January 2000 we sent them our public reflection, entitled "Good news to the poor", on the pastoral letter ("For Happier Families") of the Hungarian Bishops' Conference. We have not received a response since, but the Hungarian Pastoral Institute invited us to its conference in April 2001, however, later they denied the invitation. In May 2001 we turned to the Conference in another letter, asking them to clarify this matter, to appoint a contact person for gay matters and to offer a mass for homosexuals killed throughout history. Our letter was received only upon the second attempt, but they didn't react to it, so we made the issue public in July 2001. At the same time, in connection with the Sziget case, we came forward with a handout condemning the abuses of the Bishops' Conference.

In 2000, Balázs Birtalan was invited to the conference of the Catholic intellectual organization Hungarian Pax Romana, where he gave a lecture on "The Situation of Homosexuals in Church and Society", and in 2002 "Opportunities for Gays and Lesbians For the Integration Into the Church". The openness and tolerance experienced there was extraordinary. In 2003, we congratulated the new Catholic Primate of Hungary, expressing our hope that a dialogue should be established between the Catholic Church and gays and lesbians (the Primate briefly acknowledged the receipt of the letter). We also sent letters of congratulation to two newly appointed Calvinist bishops, offering our co-operation regarding the situation of gay and lesbian believers (these letters haven't been answered). In August 2003 we issued a statement in connection with the Vatican's declaration against gay marriages.

Following Jesus' command, "Pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44), we offered a public expiatory mass in October 2003 next to the Apostolic Nunciature (the Embassy of the Vatican) in Budapest, offered for both the gays and lesbians killed throughout history, and for their murderers.

*Filled in by the "Öt Kenyér" group, Hungary
Presentation of network revised by Kerstin [REDACTED]*