



Region 1 Director's Annual Report

7 March 2025

Dear Reverend Thomas Nasta, President Kenneth Arendt, Executive Officers, and fellow members of the Board of Directors:

It is my honor to represent the members of the First Catholic Slovak Union as the Region 1 Director. I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside the Executive Board and my fellow board members in furthering our society's mission. I extend sincere appreciation to all members in my region for their unwavering commitment, enthusiasm, and support throughout 2024.

As Region 1 Director, I have diligently performed all the duties required of me as stipulated in the bylaws of the First Catholic Slovak Union including, but not limited to, attending Board of Directors meetings as well as meetings requested by the President. I attended district and branch meetings in my region as well as spearheaded organizing events for my region. In addition, as a very active member of my branch, I attended all meetings of Branch 746 and District 4, organizing a variety of engaging fraternal events for our members.

As Region 1 Director, working collaboratively with leaders from Districts 1 and 4, we successfully organized several memorable events. Highlights include a spirited outing to a Somerset Patriots baseball game in July, a pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine in Haverstraw, New York in October, and, with the generous financial support of Branch 746, the Region 1 Summer Picnic in August—a cherished tradition that brought our members together to reconnect and enjoy quality time.

Region 1 branches and districts also participated in a diverse range of community service activities. Many of these efforts were showcased in the "Fraternalism in Action" articles, which highlighted initiatives such as encouraging members to donate canned goods to local food pantries—a longstanding tradition initiated by District 4. Other branches generously volunteered at local parishes, providing refreshments after Mass and supporting annual fundraisers with traditional Slovak nut, cheese, and poppyseed rolls. Members also participated in "The Giving Tree" initiatives at their parishes by donating clothes, toys, and other necessities to local charities. As Region 1 Director, I encouraged all branches and districts to take part in the national FCSU initiative "Sole Mates Across the Americas," which was a resounding success, resulting in the collection of hundreds of socks! I feel strongly about the importance of giving back through community service because it not only strengthens our bond as a community but also allows us to make a tangible difference in the lives of others. As FCSU members, we have a responsibility to contribute to the greater good, embodying the values of charity, solidarity, and compassion that our society was founded upon.

To inspire others, we enriched the pages of the *Jednota* newspaper with articles and photographs showcasing the vibrant activities taking place in Region 1. I have personally contributed numerous articles highlighting the active involvement of Region 1 members in various events. Most importantly, I have worked diligently to rejuvenate branches within our region, significantly increasing new membership by personally signing up nearly 30 new FCSU members in 2024 and boosting youth participation at meetings and events.

Region 1 continues to be one of the most vibrant areas of our society, characterized by a growing influx of young members who actively participate in meetings and assume leadership roles within their respective branches and districts. The heightened engagement of young adults at our events is indicative of a promising

future for our fraternal community. A plethora of engaging activities are organized by local branches, districts, Slovak-American parishes and Slovak non-profit organizations. While not exhaustive, I would like to highlight below some prominent events in 2024, thanks to the dedication and efforts of Region 1 members.

The Slovak Ball 2024: As Chair of The Slovak Ball, I extend my profound gratitude to the FCSU Board and Jednota members from Region 1 for their steadfast support of this gala event held in New Jersey. The 30th annual Slovak Ball, orchestrated by the Slovak-American Cultural Center (S-ACC) at the Royal Manor in Garfield, NJ, commemorated Slovakia's 30th anniversary of independence. The evening was enriched by captivating performances of Slovak and Rusyn folk music by the charismatic Štefan Štec, as well as a soulful performance by Ester Wiesnerová. The event attracted over 480 guests, including members of the Slovak diplomatic community, Executive Secretary Kevin Collins, and many Region 1 Jednota members.

Easter Egg Painting: Branch 746 hosted an Easter Egg Painting Workshop at Holy Family Church in Linden, NJ. Attendees embraced the Easter spirit and showcased their creativity by decorating eggs using beeswax—a technique deeply rooted in Slovak tradition. This unique event, open to both Region 1 Jednota members and the broader community, was further enriched by the participation of Branch 45 members.

Districts 4 and 16: Somerset Patriots Baseball Game: On July 28th, Districts 4 (New Jersey) and District 16 (New York) organized an exciting day at the Somerset Patriots baseball game. The vibrant atmosphere, enhanced by sunny and warm weather, saw enthusiastic participation from members of all ages, including our youngest fans from Branches 45, 290, and 746. With over 50 Jednota members in attendance, it was heartening to see both new and familiar faces coming together.

Region 1 Annual Summer Picnic: On August 6th, I organized the Region 1 Summer Picnic, hosted by Branch 746, at Al Kalla Park in Linden, NJ. This much-anticipated event brought together members from Districts 4 and 16 for a day filled with fraternal spirit, authentic Slovak cuisine and a visit from a local ice cream truck. The picnic also celebrated our youth by awarding the Jednota Branch 746 Scholarships to three outstanding students—Isabel Jabornik, Oliver Feco, and Anna Zvoc—each receiving \$1,500 in recognition of their academic excellence and community leadership. I encourage other branches to set up such scholarships.

59th Anniversary of Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel: Region 1 Jednota members participated in the annual Mass organized by Branch 856 at Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel.

Slovak Heritage Festival: The 46th Slovak Heritage Festival which took place on September 29th at the Middlesex County Fair Grounds in East Brunswick, NJ, overcame gloomy weather to bring together Slovak culture enthusiasts, distinguished guests, and fraternal organization representatives. The event featured a Greek Catholic Mass, followed by dynamic performances from Slovak and Slovak-American ensembles, including Lipka Academy, Comenium Philadelphia, Limboračik, and special guests from Slovakia such as Vagonar Poprad, Monika Kandračová, Ondrej Kandrač, and Lukaš Adamec. Attendees enjoyed traditional cuisine and Slovak-made products while the FCSU had an informational booth promoting its products. Notable guests included Martina Šimkovičová, Slovakia's Minister of Culture, and FCSU representatives like Executive Secretary Kevin Collins. Congratulations to the Slovak Heritage Festival Committee, especially Vice-President Jane Holy Konzelmann (Branch 716), for organizing another successful celebration of Slovak heritage! As Region 1 Director, I was proud to continue to support this incredible event.

Slovak Pro Summit 2024: In September, Slovak PRO, a community-based non-profit organization providing professional and business opportunities, convened a high-level summit in New York City. The event brought together over 100 accomplished Slovak American professionals for two days of learning, inspiration, and networking. Under the theme "From Goals to Greatness: Celebrating Slovak Success and Giving Back," the summit aimed to create a platform for leaders to connect, exchange ideas, and collaborate, fostering new partnerships and initiatives to strengthen ties between the U.S. and Slovakia. Notably, the summit concluded with a speech and discussion with the President of Slovakia, Peter Pellegrini, focusing on engaging the Slovak

diaspora to address challenges such as brain drain and enhancing participation in Slovakia's democracy. The event also included a panel discussion on the importance of community engagement, where I was honored to be asked to share my insights on how individuals can contribute their time, expertise, or support to make a meaningful impact, drawing from my experiences as a member of FCSU and engagement in other non-profit organizations and the greater Slovak community. Among the invited participants were Region 1 members from Branches 45 and 746, including District 4 President Julie Ann Gurega Koval and Lucia Kapogiannopoulos, who serves on the Board of Slovak PRO.

Region 1 Pilgrimage to Marian Shrine: On Sunday, September 8th Region 1, in collaboration with St. John Nepomucene/St. Frances X. Cabrini Parish, organized a pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine in West Haverstraw, NY. The day commenced with a Slovak-language Holy Mass celebrated by Rev. Stefan Chanas (Branch 45) at the Outdoor Altar—a white marble structure erected during the Marian Year of 1954. Following Mass, pilgrims enjoyed a delightful lunch and concluded the day with the recitation of the rosary. Members of Branches 45, 716, and 746 participated and were integral in planning the annual pilgrimage.

Lipka Academy Christmas show: The children of Lipka Academy, the Slovak language school under the auspices of Holy Family Church, delivered a heartwarming Christmas show, embodying the true spirit of the holiday—humanity, joy, peace, and love. This annual event not only brings the community together but also saw Branch 746 making a financial donation to support Lipka Academy and Holy Family Church.

Vilija: As an enduring tradition, Branches 45 and 716, under District 16, organized the traditional Slovak Christmas dinner, "Vilija," following Slovak Sunday Mass at St. John Nepomucene Church in New York City.

St. Nicholas / Sv. Mikulas: The annual St. Nicholas party at St. John Nepomucene Church in New York City was a huge success with participation of over 130 children and their families. District 16, Branch 45, and Branch 716 played instrumental roles in organizing this cherished event.

LUX New York: Branch 45, 716, and 746 members continue to support the mission and work of LUX New York. In addition to weekly live streams of Sunday Holy Masses (in Slovak at 10:15am and English at 12:00pm) via Facebook from St. John Nepomucene Church, a special monthly mass (last Saturday of the month) is streamed live to Slovakia is also organized followed by a community lunch. To learn more about LUX New York and listen to live or archived masses and programs, visit: <http://www.luxnewyork.net>.

In closing, I commend all the branches in Region 1 for their unwavering commitment to fostering fraternalism, organizing meaningful events, supporting their parishes, actively engaging in community service, and maintaining our Slovak traditions. I am profoundly grateful for the collaboration, enthusiasm, and openness of our members, whose dedication brings our shared vision to life. As I look ahead, I remain committed to my role as Region 1 Director, with a strong focus on expanding membership, increasing youth participation, revitalizing inactive branches, and strengthening the fraternal bonds that unite our Jednota community—always guided by the enduring values and vision of our founder, Fr. Furdek.

Ďakujem vám za vašu podporu, účasť a teším sa na to, čo spoločne ešte dosiahneme!

Respectfully submitted,

Sabina Sabados

Region 1 Director