

## NURSING EDUCATION IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY IN THE TERRITORY OF TODAY'S SLOVAKIA

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### Abstract

*The objective of the study is to outline the general situation in society and the provision of healthcare in Czechoslovakia after 1918. After the establishment of the new republic, there were several problems that needed to be solved and they included the education of medical personnel. The contribution thus focuses on the process of the foundation of nursing schools, their existence and the problems they faced.*

*With the exception of the social-nursing school in Martin, they were church schools run by religious orders. They were the nursing school of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Bratislava and three schools founded and run by the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, located in Košice, Nitra and Trenčín. In the 1920s, the state was responsible for the foundation of a social-healthcare school in Slovakia, in Turčiansky Sv. Martin. The first, properly organised nursing school was founded in Slovakia by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross. It opened as early as 1931 and the first course was to start for the 1931/1932 school year. The second church order which dedicated its efforts to the training of nurses was the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. They established a nursing school in Košice in 1932. Unfortunately, only three years later, in 1938, it was dissolved when, as a result of the Vienna Award, the southern regions of Slovakia were annexed by Hungary. Following the war, the order managed to establish two nursing schools, the school in Nitra, went into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1946 and the other, in Trenčín, on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1947. In 1950 the repressive Communist Government terminated the activities of the schools through Operation "N" – Nuns, run by the State Security Service.*

**Keywords:** nursing education, first Czechoslovak Republic, nursing school, health care, qualitative research

### INTRODUCTION

The newly created Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) was made up of territories which had previously been part of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, but were diametrically different. This greatly affected the social situation in the country and was reflected in a number of spheres within society, including healthcare. During the times of the first CSR, healthcare and public health were not a priority for the political parties. On the whole, the amount of money spent on healthcare was very low. In the state budget of the first CSR, the Ministry of Public Healthcare and Physical Education (MVZaTV) received the second lowest amount of money, which was reflected in the lack of preventative medicine, insurance, and last but not least, in the education of medical personnel.

### OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

This study deals with the nursing schools which were founded and operated in Slovakia in the first half of the 20th century. Its objective is to outline the overall social and legal situation in the country and clarify the process of the foundation of the nursing schools, their operation and the issues they had to deal with. With the exception of the social-nursing school in Martin, they were church schools run by religious orders. They were the nursing school of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Bratislava and three schools of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul located in Košice,

Nitra and Trenčín. Following nationalisation in 1950, the nursing, nursing-social and later medical schools continued the traditions of their forerunners; the medical schools are still in operation to this day. This text is a result of qualitative heuristic research of the Archive of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross (AKMS) in Trnava, the Archive of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (ADKL) in Nitra, the State Archive in Bratislava and the Nation's Memory Institute in Bratislava. The materials studied have been supplemented with information from specialist publications of the period and compared to the existing secondary literature. We assume that the published results of the research will be expanded by further study of materials in repositories in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.

## **RESULT**

### **The Situation after the Establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic**

After the establishment of the CSR, it was necessary, above all, to develop beyond the concept of public healthcare that existed in the former Austria-Hungary, which merely focused on acute care and employed repression if regulations were not followed. Very soon after the establishment of the republic – as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918 – the Ministry of Public Healthcare and Physical Education (MVZaTV) was established through the adoption of Act No. 2/1918, a Collection of Acts and Decrees. The elimination of the high number of infectious diseases, a decrease in infant mortality and the overall improvement of the general state of health of the population were established as the primary tasks in healthcare. An article of Act No. 11/1918, a Collection of Acts and Decrees, confirmed the validity of the existing laws and legal regulations of the former monarchy, which lead to their adoption for the regulation of healthcare. Ergo, within the single country, healthcare was governed by different laws: in the Czech lands, it was the Austrian Act No. 68 of 1870 and in Slovakia, the Hungarian legal article No. 14 of 1876, which underwent amendment when required [1].

Soon after the establishment of the CSR, the Office of the Minister for the Administration of Slovakia began to operate in Slovakia. Its primary role was consolidation. The healthcare system in Slovakia was managed by the Department for Healthcare at the Office of the Minister for the Administration of Slovakia. In March 1921, the various departments were cancelled and their activities were taken over by agencies. The decentralised authorities began operations on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1928 and the agency within the MVZaTV was transformed into the Provincial Healthcare Office [2]. The plans of the MVZaTV, which were focused on the creation of a unified law for healthcare that would govern healthcare issues on a mass scale, were not implemented in the interwar period. The existing legal dualism had an unfavourable impact on the overall activity of public healthcare.

After the establishment of the CSR, it was also necessary to address the question of medical personnel, both the education of physicians and nursing staff. The education of physicians in Slovakia was resolved almost immediately after the establishment of the republic. An act to establish a university, the Czechoslovak State University, was adopted by the National Assembly on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1919. On the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1919, the university was renamed Comenius University. The Faculty of Medicine officially came into being on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1919 and provided teaching services from the 1919/1920 academic year. The first course was completed at the end of the 1923/1924 academic year. Experienced specialists, especially professors of the Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Prague, officially appointed by the National Assembly, became professors at the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University [3].

The birth of the CSR likewise influenced the education of nursing staff. The need for thorough and specialised training for nurses surfaced as one of the primary tasks required to improve the state of health of the population. Legally, it was governed by the “imperial law” of 1914, under which, following the creation of the new state, nursing schools were founded. According to Kleinschnitz [4], the regulation both enabled the establishment of nursing schools, and influenced the development, existence and consolidation of nursing education for several decades. Thanks to the creation of nursing schools and through the systematic education of future certified nurses, the quality of healthcare improved.

Foreign contacts were of crucial importance in the development of the nursing education system in the interwar period [5]. After the First World War, as the role of the USA in the world grew, American nurses began the global implementation of the lessons they had learnt over the course of the worldwide military conflict. It not only focused on the redress of material damage and material shortages, but also on the spread of healthcare information related to hygiene, which gradually helped change opinions on the position and role of nurses. In Central Europe, the American Red Cross were particularly active in this process. In the CSR, it was Alice Masaryková, the head of the Czechoslovak Red Cross (CSRC) and the daughter of the first President of the CSR, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who made a great contribution that drove the intense co-operation in this area. Her importance for the development of the Czechoslovak nursing education system was crucial. She participated in both the development and mass education of voluntary nurses and other auxiliary healthcare employees, who came under the auspices of the CSRC. After the end of the First World War and the establishment of the CSR, the Czechoslovak Red Cross began to look into the training of nursing personnel [6]. It organised short-term courses for both voluntary nurses and Samaritans. Within the CSRC, the members of voluntary fire brigades joined forces with physicians and created the Samaritans [7].

An important platform for nurses to make contact with nurses in foreign countries was provided by a number of international conferences for the Headteachers of Nursing Schools, Red Cross conferences, the International Convention for Nurses and other specialised meetings.

Until 1938, the Ministry of Public Healthcare and Physical Education had not established a nursing department to ensure an adequate management concept. Nevertheless, as many as nine schools were founded during this period, of which six were church schools and three were lay schools. The impetus for the foundation of these schools came from both government circles and directly from the Vatican – from the head of the Catholic church, after his appeal three schools were founded in Czechoslovakia from 1935 to 1936 (in Hradec Králové, Brno and Košice).

### **Social-Healthcare School in Turčiansky Svätý Martin (today Martin)**

In the 1920s, the state put the first social-healthcare school in Slovakia, in Turčiansky Sv. Martin, into operation. It was especially focused on spreading information throughout rural areas. The institute was founded with financial support of Slovaks in the United States of America and the head of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, Dr. Alice Masaryková [8]. The constitution of the school was also supported by other charitable organisations and societies, especially the Slovak women's organisation Živena [9]. Initially, this social school was intended to be built in Bratislava. To justify the construction of the school outside Bratislava, Alice Masaryková stated that the institute was expected to educate specialists who would be able to carry out social work among the rural Slovak population and Bratislava was far from the social environment of the Slovak countryside. The construction of the school began in 1922 and the Institute of Milan Rastislav Štefánik in 1926 [10]. From 1933, the teaching here was also focused on the education of nurses.

### **Nursing School of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Holy Cross in Bratislava**

The first nursing school was founded in Slovakia by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross [11]. The Sisters of the Holy Cross first settled in Slovakia in 1865, in the city of Zlaté Moravce. The province began its activities on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1927 with the society led by Sister Teodózia, the first provincial Mother Superior. From 1926 onwards she began to entertain the idea of founding a nursing school in Slovakia. The need for an educational institute for future nurses was also related to the shortage of Slovak-speaking nurses. Sister Fides Dermeková was put in charge of organising the establishment of a nursing school [12]. At that time, the Congregation asked the Ministry of Public Healthcare and Physical Education in Prague for permission to establish a nursing school. The request had to be supplemented by the statutes, the curriculum, and designation of the building in which the school was to operate, or at least a plan of the school. The model for the statutes and curriculum was provided, in German, by the nursing school that had been established by a German province of the Congregation in Chomutov. The statutes contained twelve clauses which defined the reason for the foundation of the school, the language of instruction (the official language of the state), the conditions for admission, the subjects taught, the way in which the examination committee should be appointed

and its composition, the conditions of admittance to final examinations, the skills and roles of the headmaster and teachers and the general supervision of the school, performed by the Provincial Office. Admittance to a final examination had to be approved by the Provincial Office and it was only permitted to re-take the exam once. Despite problems finding suitable teaching premises, the first school in Slovakia to offer a two-year nursing course was founded and the state promised to provide the Congregation with 500,000 crowns for the construction of the school without delay.

The nursing school was opened as early as 1931 and the first course was to start for the 1931/1932 school year. Before the beginning of the academic year it was necessary to provide evidence that several conditions had been fulfilled: the school had suitable premises, the proposed staffing proposal for the specialist headmaster and teaching staff had been met, there was a detailed plan for the practical training of the students. Since the Congregation did not have suitable premises available, it renovated a provincial house. Sister Fides Dermeková was put in charge of the school, the solemn opening ceremony was held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1931. She publicised the opening of the nursing school in the specialist periodical *Československá nemocnice* (Czechoslovak Hospital) [13].

Fifteen pupils, aged 18 to 27, began the course of study in the first year – twelve sisters from the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Holy Cross and three from the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent from Rožňava. The applicants were required to be between 16 and 30, must have graduated from a municipal school, or possess an alternative equivalent education. In the evaluation of physical aptitude, emphasis was put on a suitable, correctly developed and normal physique. From a psychological point of view, the Congregation only admitted those of its members whose character was suitable for the nursing of ill people, something the Mother Superiors verified before they started a course of study. In the case of lay applicants, the school's management requested information from the headmasters of the schools where they graduated. Instruction began on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1931. The first lessons were lectures on anatomy and hygiene. Based on a request from the Congregation, the subjects were taught by professors, associate professors and assistants from the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Bratislava.

In the first school year, the pupils were educated in theoretical subjects, with the exception of nursing techniques. In the second year the emphasis was on practical skills and training took place within the departments of the State Hospital in Bratislava. These practical sessions took place from 7 am to 12 pm in the mornings, and from 3 pm to 6:30 pm in the afternoons. The pupils were required to provide a night service in each department twice a week, from 7 pm to 7 am. Having finished the first year, they were entitled to ten days' holiday. The school took care of their physical education through walks and trips to the countryside. The first-year of lectures was completed on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1932. After the end of the school year, the sisters helped in the hospital, while the lay pupils were allowed home for a short period of leave. In early August 1932, the pupils were assigned practical training at the hospital's clinics. Gradually, the school developed its own classrooms, laboratories, study halls, a room that contained aids to help improve nursing techniques, and specialist libraries. The first final examinations took place in June 1933. This was an exceptional and historical event, they were the first final examinations at the first nursing school to have ever been held in Slovakia.

At the beginning of the nursing school of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Holy Cross in Bratislava and over the first decade of its existence, it is possible to observe the difficulties the school had to deal with. In the early years, mastering Slovak proved to be a significant problem for the students. Both the school in Bratislava and other nursing schools had to deal with the issue of non-unified textbooks. Fides Dermeková, together with the school Headmaster, associate professor Ľudovít Valach, took part in the second convention of certified nurses in Prague on the 19<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> October 1931, at which the need for the publication of unified textbooks for nursing schools was very clearly formulated. A resolution was adopted at the convention which called for the publication of unified textbooks, the establishment of more nursing schools in the CSR, the appointment of certified nurses to the posts of Superior and the application of the experience gained by the Superiors in the construction of nursing schools and medical and humanitarian institutes. The issue of textbooks was also dealt with at conferences of the representatives of nursing schools. Not only were textbooks non-existent, but given



how expensive they were and the low number of nursing schools in the CSR, their publication was problematic [14].

The nursing school operated under the laws of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945) until 1948, when it was nationalised. The school's assets passed into state ownership and the staff continued at the school until June 1950.

### **Schools of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul**

The other important church order which for many years provided charitable care in the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary and whose members worked as nurses in a number of existing hospitals was the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (Company). The "Vincentians" had worked in the Kingdom of Hungary from the mid-19th century. The establishment of the CSR in 1918 created a new situation. The nuns who came from other parts of the former Austria-Hungary left Slovakia. The Superiors General of the order, based in Paris, decided to form a new province from the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1922 onwards and appointed Father Jozef Danielik CM as its first director. At the time he was the Father Superior of the Lazarists in Piliscesaba. As the position of provincial assistant was occupied by Sister Bernardína Soldánová, who worked in the ancient city of Nitra, the first steps taken by the newly established province were to begin to organise themselves there. But the Superiors continued to search for a place suitable for the seat of the province, because the sisters performed nursing activity in hospitals in various cities in Slovakia, they led teacher-training institutes, primary schools, various sanatoria, protectories, orphanages, refuges, etc. and eventually, the foundation of nursing schools came under their auspices. Shortly afterwards the opportunity to acquire a manor house in the village of Ladce arose, they were able to buy and reconstruct it with the help of the American province.

The sisters dedicated themselves to service in hospitals – the former county hospitals, state hospitals, and, following the introduction of the provincial establishments, provincial hospitals. After 1922, in addition to the county hospitals in Nitra, Trnava and Trenčín, they provided their services in the state hospitals in Košice, Turčiansky Sv. Martin and Ružomberok, the provincial hospital in Levoča, the municipal hospitals in Kremnica and Michalovce, in Likier, at the institute for the mentally ill in Pezinok, the state sanatorium in Trenčianske Teplice, the municipal old people's home in Banská Bystrica, the poorhouses in Žilina and Kremnica, the Institute for the Blind in Báhoň and in a number of other medical institutions and sanatoria, and they also, for example provided assistance to prisoners in Ilava.

With respect to the extensive activities of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, both in the field of education, and especially through the service they provided in hospitals, it was necessary for the sisters to have a sufficient level of education to allow them to perform in their profession. After opening the provincial house in Ladce, the Superiors of the order focused on the opportunities available to provide their selfless sisters with the basics of a nursing and medical education. As early as 1925, they requested that the MVZaTV approve the provision of a nursing course directly in the seat of the province, in Ladce. The course was led by physicians from the Trenčín hospital and at the end of the course there was a state approved final examination. After passing it, the sisters received a nursing certificate. This option notwithstanding, the sisters desired a higher level of specialisation, therefore they made intensive efforts to establish a proper, two-year nursing school [15].

### **Nursing School in Košice (1932–1938)**

The first educational institution founded by the Company of Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul was the nursing school in Košice, in 1932. There are records that they began their work to found the school as early as 1928, when the provincial Mother Superior, Sister Bernardína Soldánová of Ladce, sent a letter with a request to establish a specialist nursing school in Košice.

The decision to locate the school in Košice was related to the operation of the Vincentian sisters in the Košice hospital from as far back as 1877 and to the existence of a modern hospital in the east of Slovakia. The Vincentians requested a suitable building plot from the municipal authorities on which to build the nursing school. The approval of projects and search for the requisite finances gradually followed. In

addition to training, the newly constructed school was to provide accommodation for the sisters and a student dormitory [16].

MVZaTV announced that a physician from the Košice hospital, Dr. Adolf Měska, would become the Headmaster of the school. Sister Maria Jiroušková became its manager, she was a graduate of a nursing school in Prague and held a nursing certificate. The school lacked the necessary inventory and laboratory equipment, this was resolved by the provincial Mother Superior, Sister Bernardína Soldánová, through a request to the MVZaTV for permission to use teaching aids borrowed from the State Hospital [17]. It was possible to carry out the practical training at the hospital. The school was inspired by the statutes of the Nursing School of the Sisters of Mercy of Holy Cross in Bratislava and on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1932 it received approval from the MVZaTV to start teaching.

The two-year nursing school of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul had the right of public, which meant that in addition to nuns, they admitted lay applicants. One condition was that students had to be 18, if they were younger they needed their parents' approval [18]. The programme was taught in the national language and finally, after many administrative obstacles, permission was granted to begin teaching from the 1932/1933 school year. In particular it was physicians from the Košice hospital that taught at the school. Every year, the Vincentian Mother Superior lodged a request at the Provincial Office to provide the finances to cover the salaries of the professors and asked for a contribution towards the students' meals. The Provincial Office approved the request and the province received financial support of 15,000 crowns in 1936, and 20,000 crowns in 1937 and 1938.

The subjects taught at the nursing school in Košice were: human anatomy, the physiological activity of the individual organs, general study of the sick, nursing techniques, nursing of internal, surgical, children's, skin, infectious, mental and women's diseases, nursing after birth, instruction on the provision of service at outpatient departments, the administrative activities of hospitals, as well as civics and law as related to healthcare, social care and public nursing. After they finished the second year, the pupils sat a theoretical and practical final examination.

Paradoxically despite the exceptional effort made by the sisters in founding the school, its successful beginnings and ongoing operation they lost it three years later, in 1938, as a result of the Vienna Award. The sisters were required to leave both the school and the Košice hospital and were replaced by Hungarian nurses – Sisters of the Divine Redeemer from Spišská Nová Ves.

The Company of Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul did not want to relinquish the future possibility to continue to educate nursing staff. They attempted to transfer the school to Trenčín, which was the closest city to Ladce, or even to Turčiansky Svätý Martin. They argued that the Milan Rastislav Štefánik social school, which was based there, did not fully utilise its premises and the Vincentians could start teaching immediately. But the request was not approved by the state authorities [19].

On the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1939, the Slovak province of the SDKL lodged a request at the Provincial Office in Bratislava to found a new nursing school, which, however, they were not able to put into practice although the construction of the school in Košice had cost the Company over a million crowns and its loss was a great blow for the province.

After the end of the Second World War, the Superiors of the SDKL congregation attempted to renovate the order's house in Košice, next to the nursing school. They likewise attempted to restart training of nurses, but unfortunately under Act No. 34 of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1945 on the nationalisation of church schools, the operation of the school in Košice could no longer be managed by the Vincentian sisters. On the 18<sup>th</sup> September, the provincial Mother Superior notified the National Committee in Košice by letter that the senior physicians of the Košice hospital had requested that the Company rent out the building that formerly housed the nursing school to the state hospital and that they intended for it to continue to operate and train nurses [20]. (ACDC, archive Ošetrovateľská škola Košice 1945, n. s.). Although the school became a state school, the building was still legally owned by the order. By a decree of May 1946, the Commission of Healthcare authorised the State Hospital in Košice to secure the school for educational purposes. In June 1946, the state hospital in Košice concluded a contract with the province

to rent the school and its garden for ten years; the contract included a clause to allow early termination [21].

The destiny of the monastic communities was sealed and terminated by force by the onset of the Communist regime. The elimination of the headquarters of the province of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Ladce took place during the night of 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> January 1951. The sisters were taken to concentration convents in Pruské, Bôrik in Nitrianske Pravno and Belušké Slatiny [22], and eventually to northern Bohemia. The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul were only able to return to the premises of the school after 1989. Their chief job description came to be the nursing of sick and immobile sisters, to provide a constant service to the poor, homeless, prisoners, help to deprived families and teaching at schools.

### **Nursing School in Nitra (1946–1950)**

After the end of the Second World War and the refusal by the state to restore the nursing school in Košice, the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul succeeded in opening a second nursing school in Nitra [23]. The school launched its two-year nursing course on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1946, and the hospital put a room at their disposal. In 1948, the nursing school moved from the hospital to another building in Námestie slovenskej vzájomnosti Square, where it remained until 1952. The Nitra hospital was in fact dependent on the nuns who worked there as nurses. Before and during the Second World War, the director or other state authorities often asked the headquarters in Ladce to send nurses and other auxiliary personnel to the fast-growing hospital [24, 25, 26].

The physicians at Nitra hospital and the sisters of the Company with a pedagogic education and experience in nursing the sick taught at the school. As there were no suitable textbooks, the lectures were written down and then copied. In the first school year, the majority of students were Vincentians who had more than five years of practical experience as nurse but needed the degree title of certified nurse. Despite their daily studies they still provided a night service at the hospital, this was a heavy workload. Among the subjects taught were: religion, ethics and the history of nursing, anatomy, physiology, bacteriology, pathology, hygiene, nursing techniques, dietetics, pharmacology, care for infants and children's diseases, internal diseases, infectious diseases, surgery, gynaecology and obstetrics, eye diseases, throat, ear and nose diseases, skin diseases, nervous and mental diseases, laboratory examination methods, physical treatment and massage, X-ray and radiotherapy, social care, healthcare laws, civics, administration, nursing service to families, nursing at war. Slovak, English and Russian languages were optional subjects, from the 1948/1949 school year political education was added. From the first course, despite the demanding conditions, 28 nurses were successful and earned a certificate.

Before the school was opened for the 1947/1948 academic year it was necessary to carry out some recruitment activities as there were few potential students from amongst the Vincentians. The school placed advertisements in medical magazines, expressing an interest in girls from Catholic families to whom it would provide both nursing training and “spiritual guidance and the correct approach to the sick” [27]. The two-year programme was started by 16 lay pupils and 7 Daughters of Charity, as well as other 10 nurses from practice who wished to receive a year of supplementary training. From this school year, the school also acquired a social branch; its classroom was located in an unidentified church school in Nitra, where the Vincentians worked.

The entrance examination for the 1949/1950 year was overseen by Sister Lýdia Chladná. When it was over, she passed all the paperwork on to the lay headmaster – this position was occupied by the Headmaster of the grammar school, Alojz Rakovský.

The nuns working in the school were deported from Nitra on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 1950. Sometime before that, several young sisters had started to work at the hospital, because the Superiors of the order had assumed that it would be difficult to replace the nurses, thus they managed to avoid deportation to the concentration convents [28]. The Daughters of Charity continued to work in Nitra hospital as nurses until 1956, when on the 11<sup>th</sup> November the hospital was raided by the elimination committee and the 75 nuns who were working there at that time as medical staff had to leave immediately. They were only

allowed to take their personal belongings before getting on the buses that had been arranged in advance by the authorities.

In 1948 the school was nationalised and renamed as the Two-Year Nursing School in Nitra. In 1950, a three-year study programme was introduced and the school was again renamed as the Nursing School. Finally, in 1955 the study programme was further extended to a 4-year programme followed by a school-leaving examination.

### **Nursing School in Trenčín (1947–1950)**

The nursing school of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in Trenčín was the third nursing school founded by the Company of Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. It was established under a Decree from the Commission of Healthcare, No. 203-15347/1947, of the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1947 [29]. The school provided a two-year course of study and provided both theoretical and practical instruction. In addition to the loss of the school in Košice, the chief reasons for the establishment of this nursing school were the large catchment area of the State Hospital in Trenčín and the shortage of certified nurses who had a formal nursing-school education. Until 1948, care for patients in Trenčín hospital was provided by nurses who had undergone short-term nursing courses.

As one of the primary conditions for opening the school, the Company had to provide their statutes to the Ministry of Public Healthcare and Physical Education in Prague. Their statutes were identical to those of the nursing school of the Sisters of Mercy of Holy Cross in Bratislava [30]. As a priority, “persons with a spiritual vocation” could become students at the school. Applicants to study at the nursing school had to meet a number of requirements: a mastery of the national language, over 18 years of age, or with the approval of a parent or guardian, citizenship of the CSR, a clean record, graduation from a municipal school with good grades, and the necessary physical and mental aptitude to allow them to perform their duties within the nursing profession. At the same time, they were not allowed to care for a dependent child or have their own household. The first year was focused on theoretical instruction, in the second year the students dedicated themselves to practical training in the departments of the State Hospital in Trenčín. Physicians and senior physicians at the Trenčín hospital taught at the school. The nursing school did not have its own premises in which to hold the first year of theoretical instruction. The programme was to be concluded with a final examination. The students who successfully graduated from the nursing school received a nursing certificate. The final examinations were held in the main specialist subjects.

The school began its first two-year nursing course on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1947, 28 students were admitted in the first year. They were mostly applicants who were employed at the hospital as assistants or nurses without the required education that would entitle them to perform the profession of a certified nurse.

In the 1948/1949 school year the school opened two parallel courses, a first year and a second year. The instruction was provided in a school building on Ulica slobody Street and a building on Električná Street. The lay and monastic students lived together. In the 1949/1950 school year the instruction was held in a dedicated classroom at No. 2, Malinovského Street [31].

The theoretical instruction took the form of lectures. The practical training took place on the wards at the State Hospital in Trenčín. Each student had to pay for her own protective clothing that interns at the hospital were required to wear, as well as all the expenses related to their studies. The programme at the two-year nursing school in Trenčín ran until 1949/1950, when the school was nationalised.

## **DISCUSSION**

The history of the nursing educational system in the territory of today's Slovakia is a topic that has not been fully researched in detail. An obstacle to a deeper degree of research is the lack of availability and poorly preserved state of archive materials, or rather that not all the archives have yet been processed to a sufficient extent that they may be provided to researchers. Based on the existing research, the next direction for research should be focused on the termination of the activities of church nursing schools related to “Operation Nuns”, which was organised by the State Security Service in 1950. Its objective



was to eliminate the influence that the church had on the population. This was to be achieved through the concentration of monks and nuns in the same places, where they lived and worked under the supervision of the state authorities.

## CONCLUSION

Thorough and specialised training of healthcare personnel appeared to be one of the fundamental tasks required to improve the state of health of the population after the First World War. Through the foundation of nursing schools and the systematic education of certified nurses, care for the sick was greatly improved, although it still markedly lagged the level in other countries, especially Western European countries. The process of the establishment of nursing and healthcare-social schools in Slovakia, likewise, substantially lagged the progress in the Czech lands. The church nursing education system played an important role in the education of specialist nursing staff during the period of the first CSR. The first state social-healthcare school was founded in Martin, but the first nursing school was founded in Bratislava as late as 1929 and was administered by the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of Holy Cross. The Nursing School of the Company of Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Košice was the first to begin operations in 1932, but it was forced to terminate its activities three years later due to the cession of Košice to Hungary. In the following years, the Company made intensive efforts to found schools in Trenčín and Nitra, but their requests were continually rejected by the state authorities throughout the Second World War. Only in 1946 were they successful and finally received permission to open nursing schools in Nitra and Trenčín. The existence of these schools, like that of all church schools, was terminated by the repressive Communist government.

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