

# Developments in the Reformed Church in Hungary

Contribution to the CPCE Oslo consultation on diversification of ministry

## Focus

A selective case study rather than a full national report:

- two recent developments
- three wider questions for CPCE discussion

## Key lens

A church in the middle of reflection and re-ordering:

- legal clarification of ministry
- rethinking ministerial formation around competencies

# 1 Recent development: legal clarification of ministry

## *Lelkész vs. lelkipásztor*

The 2024 law sharpens the distinction:

- *lelkész* = “a person entrusted with the care of souls and with spiritual matters” (broader category linked to theological qualification)
- *lelkipásztor* = “the shepherd of souls,” a person who shepherds, leads, and cares for the community; the biblical and metaphorical background is stronger: Christ as the Good Shepherd, the shepherd as the leader and guardian of the flock, the congregation as a flock (used officially from the 18th century; narrower legal category tied to ordination, registration, and active service)

## Why it matters

This is more than terminological tidying.

The law distinguishes more carefully between qualification, ordination, registration, authorization, and actual service.

At the same time, the legal definition does not automatically exhaust the theological understanding of ministry.

# Legal consequence: preaching as ordered ecclesial act

## General rule

Preaching (*igehirdetés*) is classified as pastoral service.

Core acts - including preaching and the administration of the sacraments - ordinarily require a formal pastoral service relationship.

## Practical implication

Lay people are excluded from regular preaching in the legal sense.

Exceptions remain tied to theological qualification or formal ecclesial authorization.

Reception in the church was not uniform.

## 2 Recent development: rethinking ministerial formation

In 2023-2024, especially in the Year of the Pastoral Vocation, the church reflected intensively on the pastoral profile and on the relation between theological education and actual practice.

A church-wide survey among pastors and MDiv students was also used to identify the competencies actually needed in ministry.

### Participating higher education institutions

Debrecen Reformed Theological University (HU)

Károli Gáspár University (HU)

Pápa Reformed Theological Academy (HU)

Sárospatak Reformed Theological University (HU)

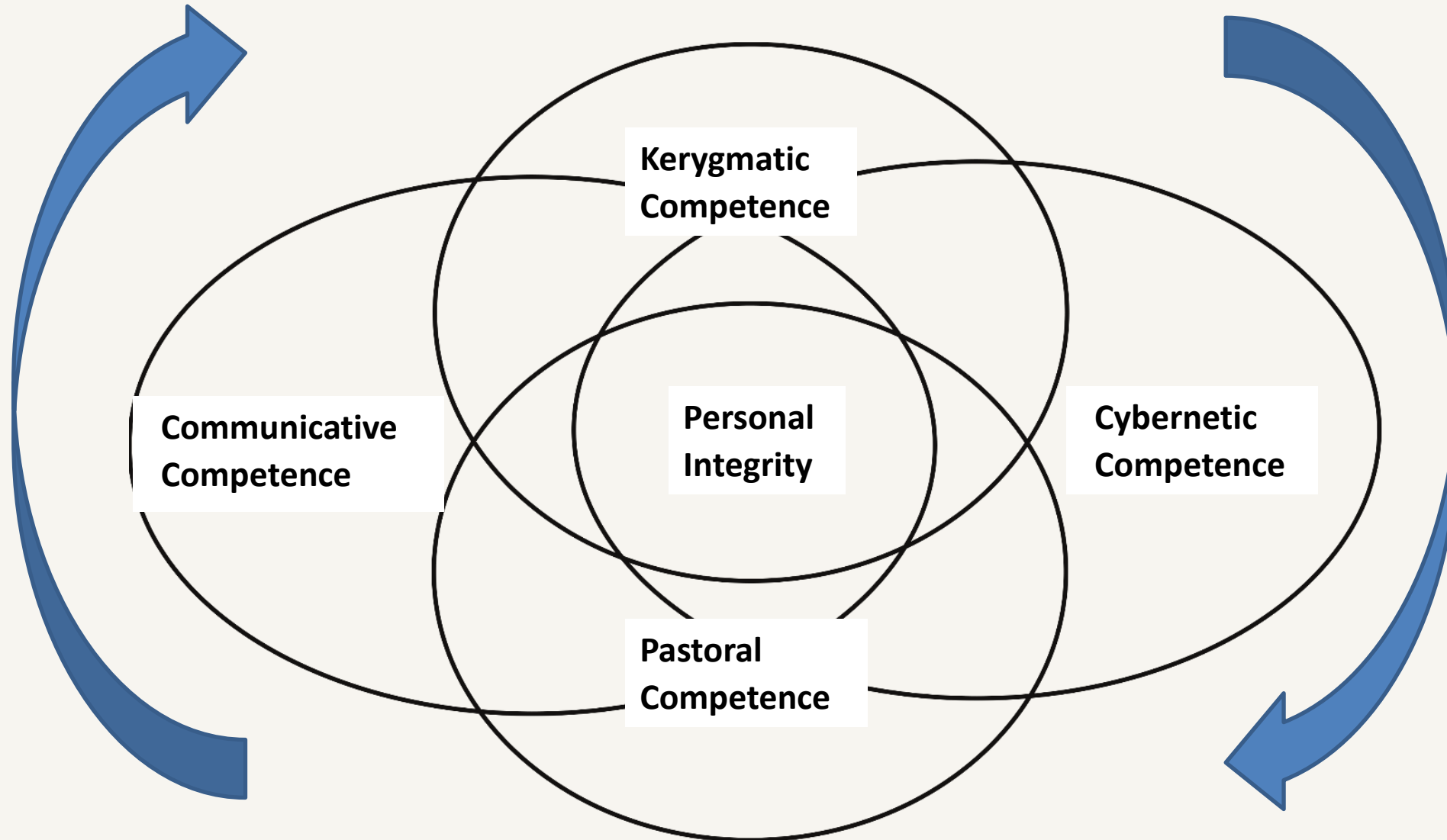
Protestant Theological Institute in Cluj (RO)

J. Selye University (SK)

# Static matrix of competence areas

Competence areas	Knowledge	Skills	Attitude	Autonomy and responsibility
Biblical and confessional				
Personal spiritual				
Homiletical and liturgical				
Teaching				
Poimonical				
Ethical				
Scholarly and general cultural				
Congregation-building				
Missional				
Diaconal				

## More dynamic arrangement of key competences (Prof. S. Fazakas)



## Transversal key competences:

independent of subjects: critical thinking, problem solving, cooperating, creativity, risk analysis, decision making, treating emotions, etc.

## Mistaken methodology?

The starting point is not the exploration of the dynamics of pastoral service (*ministerium*), but the legitimization of university education following the clerical paradigm.

Cf.

Three institutions or functions: gathering or organizing (*collectio vel constitutio*), governing (*gubernatio*) and conserving (*conservatio*). (2nd Helvetic Confession, ch17)

## A common minimum?

The process also sought common minimum expectations.

This was difficult because church districts and Carpathian Basin contexts differ historically, culturally, sociologically, and in minority experience.

Yet precisely this made mutual learning valuable.

The deeper issue was not only curriculum reform, but what it means today to be church, congregation, minister in different contexts, and what is ministry after all.

# A deeper issue behind both developments

## Juridical and theological impulses

On the one hand, there is a strong juridical demand for clarity: who counts legally as *lelkész* or *lelkipásztor*, who may preach, and under what form of authorization ministry is exercised.

On the other hand, there is a theological search asking what is ministry, and what it means to be church, congregation, *lelkész* or *lelkipásztor* in different contexts, and how vocation, formation, and ecclesial service (*ministerium*) belong together.

# Three questions for wider CPCE discussion

1. How should a strong understanding of ordained ministry be related to the growing differentiation of pastoral practice and formation?
2. How does Hungary's stricter legal ordering of preaching relate to broader Protestant patterns of ministry within the CPCE?
3. How can vocation and competence-based formation remain integrated rather than drifting apart?

# Summary

## **In one sentence**

In the Reformed Church in Hungary, current developments show a movement toward a more sharply defined legal understanding of pastoral ministry and a more competence-based understanding of ministerial formation - and these developments raise ecumenically important questions about public ministry, vocation, recognition, and the limits of diversity.

**Thank you very much.**