



## Region 1 Director's Annual Report for 2025

6 March 2026

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

It is an honor to represent the members of the First Catholic Slovak Union as Region 1 Director. I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside the Executive Board and my fellow directors in advancing the mission of our Society. Region 1 continues to benefit from the dedication and energy of its members, whose commitment to fraternalism, faith, and Slovak heritage keeps our traditions alive for future generations. I extend my sincere appreciation to all members throughout my region for their continued enthusiasm, volunteer spirit, and steadfast support during 2025.

In my role as Region 1 Director, I carried out the responsibilities outlined in the bylaws of the First Catholic Slovak Union, including attending meetings of the Board of Directors and those convened by the President. Throughout the year I also attended district and branch meetings across the region, working closely with district presidents and branch officers to support initiatives that strengthen participation and engagement.

One highlight of this collaboration continues to be the Region 1 Summer Picnic, which has grown into a meaningful annual gathering where members from multiple branches come together in a spirit of friendship and fraternity. These opportunities to connect help strengthen the bonds that unite our society and encourage continued involvement from members of all generations.

In addition, as an active member of Branch 746 and District 4, I remained closely involved in local activities and worked alongside fellow officers to organize events that foster community, promote Slovak culture, and encourage participation from both longtime members and draws in the new members and the youth.

Working together with the leadership of Districts 4 (NJ) and 16 (NY), we organized several memorable events during the year. Among the highlights were a summer outing to a Somerset Patriots baseball game and the planned pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine in West Haverstraw, New York.

Throughout the year, branches and districts across Region 1 were actively engaged in a wide range of charitable and community service initiatives. Many of these efforts were featured in the "Fraternalism in Action" section of the Jednota newspaper, highlighting the meaningful ways our members give back to their communities. Among these initiatives were food drives supporting local pantries—an effort long championed by District 4 as well as parish volunteer activities and charitable fundraising events. Branch 746 continued the tradition of preparing and selling traditional Slovak baked goods, including nut, cheese, and poppyseed rolls, to the local Slovak parish. During the Advent and Christmas season, members across the region participated in charitable initiatives such as the "Giving Tree" programs at their local parishes, donating clothing, toys, and essential items for families in need.

Many branches also maintain the beautiful tradition of requesting Holy Masses for deceased members as well as for the intentions of living members. For example, Branch 746 offers monthly Masses for its members, and Branch 45 often coordinates Masses on the same day as branch meetings encouraging members to first attend the Slovak-language Mass before gathering for their meeting. These Masses strengthen our close

relationship with local parishes while making the presence and mission of our Society visible within the wider parish community.

These acts of generosity reflect the spirit of service that has always been central to the mission of the First Catholic Slovak Union. As members of Jednota, we recognize that supporting our communities not only helps those in need, but also strengthens the bonds among our members and reinforces the values of faith, charity, and solidarity upon which our Society was founded.

Another important way we shared the vitality of Region 1 was through the pages of the *Jednota* newspaper, where articles and photographs highlighted the many activities taking place across our branches. I would like to thank branch and district officers who regularly share stories and updates. I was also pleased to contribute several articles throughout the year that showcased the dedication and enthusiasm of our members, as well as educational pieces about important pilgrimage sites in Slovakia—such as Litmanová—and reflections on figures of faith and inspiration, such as Blessed Anna Kolesárová.

Encouraging membership growth and greater youth participation has remained a priority for me as Region 1 Director. I am proud to report that through my recruitment efforts many new members joined during 2025, including young adults who are attending meetings and participating in events. These new members join a strong foundation of dedicated individuals who have supported Jednota for many decades. Seeing this blend of long-time members and new working together is truly encouraging for the future of our society.

Region 1 continues to be a vibrant part of our society. The growing involvement of younger members in branch and district activities demonstrates that our traditions and fraternal spirit remain strong. Numerous activities are organized each year by branches, districts, Slovak-American parishes, and Slovak organizations. While the list is not exhaustive, I would like to highlight several notable events from 2025 that reflect the energy and dedication of our Region 1 members.

**The Slovak Ball 2025:** As Chair of the Slovak Ball, I extend my sincere appreciation to the FCSU Board and the many Jednota members from Region 1 who supported this important cultural event. The 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Slovak Ball, organized by the Slovak-American Cultural Center, was held on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at The Royal Manor in Garfield, New Jersey. I would like to highlight that in addition to a large contingent of Jednota members attending this event, the Slovak-American Cultural Center's Board, made up entirely of volunteers, including several dedicated Jednota members from Branches 45, 716 and 746, generously contributed their time and energy to making this annual celebration possible.

The evening featured lively music and dancing to the folk band Srdcovka, who traveled from Slovakia, and welcomed more than 430 guests from across the US. Distinguished attendees included H.E. Peter Hulényi, Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations, and his wife Tatiana; Consul General Milan Vrbovský and his wife Zuzana; Kevin Collins, Executive Secretary of FCSU; and Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, President and CEO of the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library. The evening was further enriched by the presence of Broadway performer Luba Mason (Branch 716) and her husband, internationally renowned musician, actor, and humanitarian Rubén Blades, whose attendance added to the festive and memorable atmosphere. Clergy in attendance included Fr. Štefan Chanas (Branch 45), Fr. Francis Čonka (Branch 746), Fr. Tadeusz Mierzwa (Branch 746), Fr. Peter Bujdoš (Branch 746), and Fr. Marek Višňovský (Branch 24).

**Districts 4 and 16: Somerset Patriots Baseball Game:** On July 13<sup>th</sup>, Districts 4 (NJ) 16 (NY) organized a summer outing to a Somerset Patriots baseball game. Members from Branches 45, 290, 716, and 746 gathered to enjoy a beautiful summer day at the ballpark. With more than 40 Jednota members in attendance, the event provided an excellent opportunity for fellowship and informal networking among members and families.

**Region 1 Annual Summer Picnic:** I was pleased to organize, with the excellent support of Branch 746, the Region 1 Summer Picnic held on July 20<sup>th</sup> at Al Kalla Park in Linden, NJ. This annual event has become a cherished tradition, bringing together members from Region 1 for an afternoon of fellowship, traditional Slovak food, and family-friendly activities which include a visit from a local ice cream truck. This year more than 70 members attended, including a large group of young adults and families. During the picnic, Branch 746 proudly presented annual scholarships to three outstanding students—Nicole Stas, Liana Stas, and Theresa Zentko—each receiving \$1,500 in recognition of their academic achievements and commitment to community service.

**Slovak Country Club Labor Day Celebration:** On August 31<sup>st</sup>, I was invited to join members of District 16 at the annual Labor Day celebration at the Slovak Country Club, affectionately known as “Slovak Village.” Branches 45, 716, and 746 participated in the event filled with fellowship and fun. The newly appointed Consul General of the Slovak Republic in New York, Ms. Beatrice Szabóová, was also present and addressed attendees about the strong and enduring ties between Slovakia and the Slovak diaspora in the United States.

**60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel:** On September 13<sup>th</sup>, I joined fellow members of the Board of Directors in attending the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative Mass organized by Branch 856 at the Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel. The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Kulick, and I was honored to participate by offering a reading in Slovak during the liturgy. Slovaks from New Jersey and surrounding areas also attended including member of Branch 746 and Fr. Štefan Chanas (Branch 45).

**Slovak Heritage Festival:** The 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Slovak Heritage Festival took place on Sunday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, at the Middlesex County Fairgrounds in East Brunswick, New Jersey. The festival once again welcomed thousands of visitors and was honored by the presence of H.E. Peter Pellegrini, President of the Slovak Republic, along with other distinguished Slovak government officials. Many members from Region 1 attended and helped represent FCSU Financial, sharing information about our organization and connecting with members of the broader Slovak community. Congratulations to the dedicated organizing team, including Jane Konzelmann (Branch 716), Co-Chair of the festival. Mrs. Nina Holy (Branch 716), Chair Emeritus, was warmly welcomed, and her presence served as a reminder of the festival’s proud history.

**Slovak Pro Summit 2025:** On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, I participated in the third annual Slovak PRO Summit in New York City. FCSU Financial proudly served as a Platinum Sponsor of the event, which was held at IBM One Madison Avenue during United Nations Week. The summit brought together more than 200 Slovak and Slovak-American professionals for discussions focused on leadership, professional development, and strengthening ties between Slovakia and the Slovak diaspora. The event also featured a keynote by Slovak President, Peter Pellegrini. Our Executive Secretary, Kevin Collins, provided attendees with an overview of FCSU Financial and its mission. Several fellow members also participated in the event, including District 16 President Julie Ann Gurega Koval (Branch 45), Marcus Gurega (Branch 746), and Lucia Kapogiannopoulos (Branch 746), who serves on the Board of Slovak PRO and was part of the organizing team.

**Region 1 Pilgrimage to Marian Shrine:** A pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine in West Haverstraw, New York, was organized in collaboration with St. John Nepomucene/St. Frances Cabrini Parish, but unfortunately, due to inclement weather the pilgrimage had to be canceled. I look forward to supporting District 16 (NY) in their efforts to continue this meaningful spiritual gathering in 2026.

**Lipka Academy Christmas Show:** On December 14<sup>th</sup>, the students of Lipka Academy, the Slovak language school associated with Holy Family Church in Linden, NJ, under the leadership of Director, Marianna Fečová (Branch 746) presented their annual Christmas program celebrating the values of peace, joy, and community. The event brought together families and members of for a heartwarming Christmas celebration of Slovak culture and tradition. Branch 746 was pleased to support the school through a financial contribution, and I was honored to attend and present the donation on behalf of the branch. The event was also attended by Consul General of the Slovak Republic in New York, Ms. Beatrice Szabóová.

**Vilija:** As an enduring tradition, Branches 45 and 716, under District 16 (NY), 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 celebration at St. John Nepomucene Church was once again a wonderful success, with over 150 children and their families participating. District 16 (NY), along with Branches 45 and 716, played an instrumental role in organizing this beloved event that brings joy to families each year.

**LUX New York:** Members from Branches 45, 716, and 746 continue to support the mission of LUX New York, which provides Slovak-language religious programming from St. John Nepomucene Church, the last remaining Slovak church in New York City. In addition to weekly live-streamed Masses celebrated in Slovak and in English are broadcast. In addition, the last Saturday of each month there is a Slovak morning mass which is broadcast live to Slovakia, followed by a community lunch. More information about these programs can be found at: <http://www.luxnewyork.net>.

In closing, I would like to commend the branches and districts of Region 1 for their continued dedication to strengthening fraternal life within our Society. Through their efforts in organizing events, supporting parish activities, engaging in charitable initiatives, and preserving Slovak traditions, our members continue to embody the values upon which the First Catholic Slovak Union was founded in 1890, more than 135 years ago. The events highlighted above represent only a small sample of the many activities taking place throughout our region. Beyond these organized gatherings, countless acts of fellowship and support occur quietly throughout the year as our members attend wakes and funerals of fellow members, gather to pray for the rosary, and offer comfort and assistance to one another during times of illness or hardship.

I would also like to remember in a very special way our deceased members - Odpočinitie večné daj im, Pane, a svetlo večné nech im svieti. Nech odpočívajú v pokoji.

I am deeply grateful for the cooperation, support, and most importantly the friendship of our district presidents, branch officers, and members whose dedication makes these activities possible. Your willingness to volunteer your time and energy helps ensure that Region 1 remains a strong and welcoming community where members truly feel like family – úprimne ďakujem! For many who left relatives behind in Slovakia, Jednota has become a second family here in America—a place where traditions are preserved, friendships flourish, and members stand together in times of celebration and in moments of need.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the dedicated staff of the Home Office whose ongoing support makes our work possible.

As we look ahead, I remain committed to growing our membership, strengthening youth involvement and engagement, revitalizing inactive branches, and deepening the bonds of fellowship that unite our Jednota family—always guided by the enduring vision of our founder, Fr. Stephen Furdek.

Srdečne vám ďakujem za vašu podporu a spoluprácu a teším sa na ďalšie spoločné aktivity v našej Jednote.

Respectfully submitted,

*Sabina Sabados*

Region 1 Director