IV. PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY CONFERENCE

Growing Up in a Fragile World: Children, Youth, Faith and Spiritual Resilience

Presentations and Abstracts

26–28 November 2026 • Babeș–Bolyai University, Faculty of Reformed Theology and Music, Cluj-Napoca

THURSDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2026

PLENARY LECTURE

Prof. Dr. Bert (Hubertus) Roebben – Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

The Space of Desire. Religious Education in the Footsteps of Meister Eckhart – a way to proceed today?

09:20–10:20 • Room 20, ground floor

Abstract

In his encounter with Catholic religious education (RE) teachers Pope Leo referred to RE as a safe space in which young people learn to listen to restless hearts: "People cannot live without truth and authentic meanings, and young people, even if at times they seem apathetic or insensitive, behind a facade of apparent indifference, in reality often hide the restlessness and suffering of those who 'feel too much' and too intensely, without managing to give a name to what they experience" (Vatican News, April 26, 2026). In this paper we will discuss the restlessness and inarticulateness of young people (and often also their teachers in RE), when dealing with existential issues in these harsh times. The philosophical and theological hermeneutics in Meister Eckhart's (1260–1328) German sermons offer an interesting framework for reflecting on personal formation in RE today. His ideas on identity, language, ethics, work, and trust open a "space for desire", that goes beyond academic performance and the transfer of knowledge. Relying on the mystical language of Eckhart, existential questions among young people are reframed as ways of reaching out to transcendence. The approach is based on the idea of radical existentialism as a valid framework for good RE. This paper is the culmination of many years in-depth study of Eckhart by the author, accompanying his academic work on RE teacher education at the University of Bonn and being the momentary chair of the "European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education" (www.eftre.net).

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Simon János – Protestant Theological Institute, Cluj / Reformed pastor

The "Too Good" Child – Parentification and De-parentification from the Perspective of Contextual Pastoral Care

10:30–11:30 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

In parentification, a child may assume responsibilities within the family that exceed what is appropriate for their age; from a contextual perspective, however, it is not the burden itself but the lack of recognition for it that makes the situation destructive. Following Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, the presentation interprets the phenomenon in a relational-ethical framework: out of existential loyalty, the child seeks to care for the parents, while the asymmetry of responsibility in the parent-child relationship may become distorted. Responsibility assumed in a situation of need may even have a maturing effect if the family notices and acknowledges the child's efforts; without such recognition, however, destructive entitlement and lasting strain may develop. Distinguishing between active and passive parentification also helps interpret contemporary forms of excessive performance expectations and overprotective

parenting. De-parentification therefore does not mean taking away the child's opportunity to care, but recognizing what the child has given and restoring the parents' primary responsibility. At the same time, the pastoral caregiver must avoid becoming a "better parent" in a way that places the child in a loyalty conflict, and should also reflect on possible parentification in their own history. Finally, the presentation examines the possibility of exoneration, which may help interrupt intergenerational patterns of hurt and overload.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Becsky Borbála – Psychotherapist, senior clinical psychologist, mental health professional, Christian pastoral counsellor

"Being a Model Before Having a Choice." – Image of God, Burdensome Spirituality, and the Limits of Spiritual Resilience in the Life of a Pastor's Child

10:30–11:30 • Room 219, 2nd floor

Abstract

A child growing up in a pastor's family encounters a distinctive feature of faith formation that is sharper as a theological issue than as a psychological one: the child receives a role before receiving a choice. The congregational community assigns the child a value-bearing position in advance and, as Edwin Friedman observed, even extends something of the pastor's sacred status to family members. From a systemic perspective, the pastor's family is a place where the family system and the ministry system do not merely touch but partially overlap—the parsonage is a living space in which the boundary between the two subsystems is not merely weak but absent. The presentation begins from a concept of spirituality according to which faith essentially means arriving in a relationship with God, and in this arrival the first step belongs to God; the human part is the response. When this order is reversed, faith becomes a performance of piety. Accordingly, the image of God is not a freely constructed human product but the way in which a person responds to revelation; from a pastoral-psychological perspective, however, it is also a relational representation shaped by early attachment experiences and capable of distortion even in doctrinally impeccable forms.

At the intersection of these two readings stands the image of God that Gábor Hézser calls the demon-god of performance: a god who blesses only those who drive themselves to exhaustion, while devotion to this god may receive considerable recognition in Christian settings. The thesis of the presentation is that the pastor's family can become a medium for transmitting burdensome spirituality precisely at this point—not through false teaching, but through the structure of role and relationship. This leads to a conceptual proposal. Spiritual resilience is fruitful when it denotes sustaining relational and communal functioning, but becomes risky when it turns into yet another faith-related performance expected from the child. The measure of sustaining spirituality is not whether someone is doing well, but whether the relationship endures even when they are not. The presentation is theoretical and does not report original empirical data; it transfers the conceptual framework of the doctoral research to this question. It concludes with a pastoral-care implication: the question "What does God want from me?" may be an endpoint, but never the starting point.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Nagy Eszter – Babeș–Bolyai University, Faculty of Reformed Theology and Music

Committing in a Fragmented World – Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Relationship Commitment

10:30–11:30 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

"Should I stay or should I go?"—the question expresses both the dilemma of relationship commitment and the vulnerability of long-term relationships. The presentation asks what it means to commit and what role is played by attachment experiences, shared faith, and the factors identified in Caryl E. Rusbult's Investment Model: relationship satisfaction, investment, and the perceived attractiveness of alternatives. The theoretical section is complemented by a brief presentation of findings from an empirical quantitative study involving 487 Hungarian-speaking young adults over the age of 18 who were in a relationship or marriage. The results indicate that the components of Rusbult's Investment Model were significant predictors of commitment, and that groups formed according to shared religiosity

differed significantly in relationship satisfaction. A pastoral-psychological interpretation of the findings draws attention to the possible role of shared values, faith, and fidelity in responsible relationship decisions and in coping with relational difficulties.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Simon Réka – Lutheran Theological University, Doctoral School

Innate Spirituality as a Dimension of Human Nature

11:40–12:40 • Room 219, 2nd floor

Abstract

Today, the concept of spirituality is at once closely connected with religious—and specifically Christian—tradition and, in secular contexts, partly independent of it. This diversity of usage raises particularly important questions for religious education, since participants in learning encounters may understand spirituality in very different ways. Interpreting the concept is therefore not only a theoretical issue but also a matter of practical relevance for religious education.

The presentation reviews major directions in spirituality research that have developed since the second half of the twentieth century. A new impetus was provided by a 1944 education act in Great Britain requiring schools to foster spiritual development. Legislators did not define spirituality, yet the implementation of the law, in the diversity of school contexts, made it necessary to investigate what spirituality is and how it is experienced. No consensual definition has emerged in this process; many theories instead describe characteristics and forms of lived spirituality, while already pointing toward approaches that may offer new perspectives for religious-educational theory and practice. Particular attention is given to interpretations that understand spirituality as an innate dimension of human nature. This is illustrated through David Hay and Rebecca Nye's theory of children's spirituality, which conceptualizes spirituality as "relational consciousness."

On this basis, the presentation argues that spirituality is a dimension of human nature that is enriched and shaped by religious life lived in community and by personal faith practice. This understanding offers religious education a framework in which a term that has partly detached from its Christian roots in postmodern usage can nevertheless contribute to and become an instrument of religious education, while supporting the development of personal resilience.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Ságor Gyöngyi – Benedek Elek Pedagogical High School, Odorheiu Secuiesc / Ecumene Doctoral School, Babeș–Bolyai University

Religious Socialization in the Congregation. Catechetical Forms of Spiritual Accompaniment in the 21st Century

11:40–12:40 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

In the twenty-first century, congregational catechesis is undergoing a significant paradigm shift. The traditional school-like model of instruction is being replaced by an approach centered on religious socialization and the spiritual accompaniment of the individual. In this context, catechesis primarily means nurturing the child into the congregation—the natural communal environment in which rituals, shared prayer, and loving relationships shape faith. The shared Christian narrative—the story of salvation—forms the identity of the community of believers through remembrance, reflection, and practice. Learning the community's language and symbolic system is an integral part of participating in its life. This shared world of meaning opens up spaces in which individuals can interpret their own life of faith. The central core of congregational life is worship itself, which becomes the primary setting of faith enculturation and the bearer of these elements. For worship to become a genuine experiential context for living faith together, it must embrace the whole community, with every generation present. It is the primary and indispensable place of shared faith experience. Other forms of catechesis function as liminal and communal spaces that initiate individuals into further stages of faith development and promote the integration of personal faith.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Albert Csilla – Reformed religion teacher, institutional leader, psychotherapist in supervision, bibliodrama practitioner, supervisor

The Religious Education Teacher as a Companion of Children's Faith and Resilience: Pastoral-Psychological Supervision as a Developmental Intervention among Hungarian Reformed Religion Teachers in Romania

11:40–12:40 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

Adults who regularly accompany children and young people on their journey of faith play a key role in their faith development and spiritual resilience. Among them, the religion teacher is especially important, often fulfilling pedagogical, spiritual, and pastoral roles simultaneously. If the teacher is struggling with burnout, role uncertainty, or isolation, however, this may indirectly weaken the spiritual security of the children and young people entrusted to them. The presentation therefore focuses not directly on children but on the adult who accompanies them: the religion teacher. It presents doctoral research exploring and interpreting how pastoral-psychological supervision, as a developmental intervention, affects the professional and vocational identity, reflective capacity, and burnout-prevention capacity of Hungarian Reformed religion teachers in Romania. The theoretical framework is provided by Michael Klessmann's model of pastoral psychology, which works in dialogue between theology and psychology, complemented by biblical and Reformed theological foundations (Calvin's concept of the sense of God, the Heidelberg Catechism, Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and Huber's theology of vocation and gratitude). The qualitative, action-research-oriented design follows a diagnosis-intervention-reflection cycle using semi-structured interviews, reflective diaries, participant observation, and focus-group discussions. A preliminary contextual survey of 50 participants has already confirmed that the support environment of Hungarian Reformed religion teachers in Transylvania is less institutionalized than that of pastors. The research also addresses a gap internationally: literature on pastoral-psychological supervision has so far developed theory and practice almost exclusively for ordained ministry, while intervention-based research tailored to religion teachers in a Central and Eastern European minority context has been lacking. The presentation introduces the study's theoretical and theological foundations and the results of the preliminary survey, arguing that pastoral-psychological support for religion teachers—in the form of supervision—is an indirect yet essential contribution to the faith security and spiritual resilience of the children and young people in their care, thereby linking the conference's child-centered focus with the development of adult companions.

PLENARY LECTURE

Dr. Lucski Márta – Reformed Theological Academy, Pápa

Faith, Spirituality and Self-Esteem – The Role of Spiritual Resources in Developing Healthy Self-Esteem and Body Image

12:50–14:10 • Room 20, ground floor

Abstract

Amid constantly changing living conditions and social expectations, maintaining healthy self-esteem and body image is becoming increasingly difficult, especially for young people. Idealized standards of physical appearance and the pressure to attain them may intensify anxiety, fear, and psychological strain. The presentation examines how socially transmitted ideals of beauty affect young people's self-esteem and explores the relationship between lifestyle, body image, and self-esteem. A key question is how young people can be supported in coping with anxiety and in reducing the pressure of external and internal expectations. The aim is to identify possibilities for developing and sustaining balanced, positive self-esteem. In this process, faith and spirituality may function as resources that contribute to physical and psychological well-being and to the development of a more realistic and accepting self-image.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Simó Irma – Clinical psychologist, art therapist, supervisor, mental health professional

Art Therapy as a Synodal Practice in the Service of People on the Margins

15:10–16:10 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

People in the twenty-first century live within a compounded matrix of crises; the "border-zone existence" characteristic of the metamodern age calls for a new, resilient mode of being (D'Souza–Renner, 2016). While individuals experiencing existential anxiety are becoming increasingly open to spirituality, the prevalence of mental disorders continues to rise (WHO, 2011). In this fragile reality, caught between different social models, the desire for transcendence and the search for meaning are often suppressed or seek expression outside the framework of Christian teaching.

My research aims to help people living on the margins and experiencing physical, psychological, and spiritual need move toward inner integration. Beyond individual self-exploration, this process is intended to lead toward an encounter with the transcendent and, through this, toward integration into community. A Christian sacred art-therapy method based on biblical narratives can thus become, as a synodal practice, an effective instrument of the Church's mission on the margins. One focus of my research concerns the theologically grounded attitude of the "thinking heart" and the theme of "spiritual vulnerability" within the synodal process. Consciously embracing these does not weaken but rather increases the inner existential stability of group participants. Such vulnerability creates the spiritual space for Christ-like dialogue that dissolves rigid hierarchical distances.

A second focus is the transformative power of the wounds of Christ. Drawing on the theology of Tomáš Halík and Jürgen Moltmann, the existential wounds of the world and of the individual are understood as the wounds of Christ himself. The presence of a companion or helper who accepts their own brokenness and possesses appropriate spiritual competence, together with making wounds artistically visible, does not increase despair; rather, it becomes a starting point for experiencing faith in the resurrection and for inner spiritual healing. The presentation shows how art-therapy groups, workshops, and interactive exhibitions may become practical instruments of Tomáš Halík's "listening church" (ecclesia audiens) for young people. By walking together with young people and those who are excluded—that is, through synodality—not only can individual spiritual resilience grow, but the community's communicative relationship with society can also be transformed, making God's healing love visible.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Orbán Imola – Psychologist, pastoral psychologist, trainer, methodological adviser and developer

Possibilities of a Visual Art-Therapy Approach in Processing Adolescent Anxiety, Performance Pressure and Loneliness

15:10–16:10 • Room 219, 2nd floor

Abstract

The presentation is based on the theoretical framework and empirical findings of my doctoral research, as well as on experiences from art-therapy-oriented processes conducted with adolescent groups. The research starts from the recognition that adolescent anxiety, performance pressure, and loneliness cannot be interpreted solely as psychological symptoms; they are closely linked to existential questions of identity, self-worth, relational security, future orientation, and the meaning of life. These questions are also present in school settings, while institutions are often still searching for appropriate temporal, spatial, relational, and methodological frameworks in which to receive them.

The central question of the presentation is how activities facilitated within an art-therapy approach can contribute to creating reflective and sustaining spaces in which adolescents' personal experiences can become visible and observable without being burdened by immediate verbalization, pressure to interpret, or a psychologizing approach. In this context, visual creation functions as a mediating medium: it creates connections between inner experience and its perceptible form, between individual experience and communal reflection, and between psychological, pedagogical, and spiritual layers of meaning.

Art-facilitated activities may therefore provide one possible point of connection for interdisciplinary cooperation. They can open a shared methodological space among pedagogy, psychology, pastoral psychology, religious education, and art, within which adolescent vulnerability can be understood not merely as a problem but also as an

experience oriented toward meaning-making and connection. The analysis of empirical findings and group processes focuses on the role of autonomy of choice, expectation-free creative situations, personal meaning-making, and the facilitator's presence. The presentation also identifies the pedagogical and helping-profession competence boundaries of such activities and the conditions for their safe use.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Portik Noémi – Doctoral School, Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, Babeș–Bolyai University

Creation as a Tool of Hope – The Role of Creative Activity in Youth Pastoral Care

15:10–16:10 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

Our research focuses on the use of contemporary art movements in youth programs and groups. Our hypothesis is that free creative activity—most fully enabled by contemporary art—creates a space and opportunity for young people that can foster psychological and spiritual healing. It may also enable a deeper relationship with oneself and has community-building potential. Alongside the theoretical foundations, our research draws on experience gained in youth-group leadership and on the internal work of our creative group, which has been operating for three years and has included young adults alongside middle-aged participants. Beyond the ongoing groups, several youth programs have also enabled us to experience the constructive power of creating together. We therefore intend to present these results in detail.

Within contemporary art, we pay particular attention to land art, whose closeness to nature may lead young people from the digital world toward simple beauty. The experience of silence and beauty is also important, as a natural counterweight to noise and visual pollution. We therefore examine how silence and beauty appear in contemporary art movements, how they can be incorporated into youth education, and how they connect with different spiritual traditions. A second hypothesis is that a relationship can be identified between contemporary art movements and young people's spiritual searching, thereby giving this search a universal dimension. In our digitally and artificially designed world, human beings show an unprecedented hunger for what is real, natural, and deeply free. The emergence of various rituals can also be interpreted as an attempt to respond to this hunger. We believe that free creative activity, free from performance pressure and often from pragmatism, can open a path that is not merely preventive but can also facilitate the discovery and acceptance of existing inner wounds and help individuals begin a process of healing.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Andrei Imelda-Paula – Ecumene Doctoral School, Babeș–Bolyai University / Reformed pastor

Youth Community as a Holding Space

16:20–17:20 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

I am doctoral candidate Andrei Imelda-Paula, a Reformed pastor. I graduated from the Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj in 2021. I served for three years in the Reformed Congregation of Sighișoara, first for one year as an assistant pastor and then for two years as an associate pastor. Since 2024, I have served as associate pastor of the Reformed Congregation of Cristuru Secuiesc. In the same year, I was admitted to the Ecumene Doctoral School, where I research alternative forms of worship for young people. Ministry among young people has always been and remains especially important to me; I experience it as a gift from God that I can help guide the post-confirmation age group into spaces shaped by God's purposes and work. I lead a weekly Bible study through which trust develops from one meeting to the next, while non-routine occasions can strengthen that trust even further. This building of trust has a twofold movement: it begins in trust in God and extends toward other people, while trust experienced in human relationships can in turn deepen trust in God.

My presentation addresses church and school communities as safe spaces and considers how church communities—particularly youth groups within congregational life—can empathetically and loyally create spaces that provide safety and a sense of home for young people.

The paper also highlights freedom as an invitational space, offering young people participation, active presence, and eventually service; through this, the community increasingly becomes a place they have chosen for themselves.

Theologically, it is clear that the call comes from God's Holy Spirit, while the response—just as in the calling of disciples—is made by the individual in freedom.

Finally, I offer practical exercises, games, and conversation starters that demonstrate ways of creating and maintaining safe space in youth communities. These practices are based both on relevant literature and on activities experienced and tested in my own ministry.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Kisiván Csaba – Doctoral School, Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology, Babeș–Bolyai University / Roman Catholic priest, theologian and philosopher

From Fragility to Resilience – Existential Youth Pastoral Care at the Boundary of the Postmodern and the Metamodern

16:20–17:20 • Room 219, 2nd floor

Abstract

Today's young people are formed within the tension between postmodern deconstruction and "loss of meaning" on the one hand, and the metamodern rediscovery of the metaphysical on the other. Following an arc "from fragility to resilience," my presentation outlines an existential-theological framework that begins with reality and responds to it in seeking authentic ways of transmitting faith and forms of pastoral care arising from such transmission.

A frequent error of theology is to force reality into the "cells" of its own abstract categories. In contrast, I propose a phenomenologically grounded existential theology that understands reality as "event" (actualitas), the arena of encounter. Here the human being is not merely an observer of the world but an inseparable participant in it. Within the hermeneutical circle of youth pastoral care, the events of life—crisis, suffering, and joy—and revelation mutually illuminate one another.

This approach guides youth ministry and youth pastoral care "from fragility to resilience." Rather than treating symptoms, it places the question of meaning at the center of the existential vacuum, integrating Viktor Frankl's logotherapy and the resource-oriented perspective of positive psychology. In this context, experience of God is not an exclusive mystical privilege but radical attentiveness to the events of the world. The pastoral caregiver accompanies young people as a representative of the ecclesia audiens, the listening church: uncertainty is met not with dogmatic judgment but with the courage to understand and search together. The aim is an interdisciplinary pastoral-psychological synthesis of theology, psychology, and philosophy that can make the Gospel an "authentic sign" in the context of our age, opening everyday experience toward the dimension of eternity and thereby providing a meaning-oriented foundation for the psychological accompaniment and pastoral care of young people.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Bartha Éva – Ecumene Doctoral School, Babeș–Bolyai University; doctoral student, clinical psychologist, supervisor, trainer

Church-Based Addiction Prevention among Adolescents – Pastoral Experiences Interpreted from a Pastoral-Psychological Perspective

16:20–17:20 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

This short presentation presents one sub-area of my doctoral research, which examines the possibilities and pastoral-psychological challenges of church-based addiction prevention among adolescents, incorporating the experiences and practical approaches of Reformed pastors. The qualitative study involved nine pastors aged 25–45 working in different areas of congregational, school, youth, and diaconal ministry. Thematic content analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews focused on adolescents' patterns of substance use and digital-media consumption, their religious connectedness, and the pastoral competencies, resources, and opportunities for cooperation required for prevention.

The findings indicate that curiosity, peer pressure, and the need for autonomy play a decisive role in young people's experimentation with alcohol, illicit substances, and alternative nicotine products. At the same time, pastors perceive excessive digital-media use as the most serious risk because of its negative effects on attention, personal

relationships, anxiety levels, and spiritual depth. Adolescents' church belonging often appears as an inherited identity, yet crises, trauma, and existential questions are associated with greater openness toward faith and pastoral relationships.

The study shows that effective church-based prevention rests on a safe and accepting relational space in which empathic accompaniment is combined with clear value orientation. Participants are open to using structured prevention programs, but emphasize the limits of their competence, the need for targeted further training, cooperation with professionals and experts by experience, and parental involvement. The pastors' resources include trusting relationships, witnessing young people's development, voluntary engagement, and continuity of ministry; these are also significant in preventing burnout.

From a pastoral-psychological perspective, authentic presence, communal belonging, and intergenerational dialogue can be understood as protective factors. Although the findings cannot be generalized because of the small, exclusively male sample, they provide practical guidance for developing a relational and resilience-based model of church prevention.

FRIDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2026

PLENARY LECTURE

Dr. Thoma László Róbert – Károli Gáspár University, Budapest

How Do We Support Our Students' Healthy Development by Attending to Our Own Mental Well-Being?

09:00–10:00 • Room 20, ground floor

Abstract

As helping professionals, pastors, and religious educators, it is essential that we grow both in our knowledge of God and in self-knowledge. When we become stuck in one area, we often compensate through the other; at times, however, we may become stuck in both. What does growth in self-knowledge mean in everyday life, and how is it interwoven with knowledge of God? What fundamental categories and areas of biblical anthropology need our attention if we are to reflect on ourselves in a biblically grounded way? Which mental-health themes cannot be avoided because they may directly affect our work with students?

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Prof. Dr. Sonja Danner – Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Wien/Niederösterreich, Universität Wien

Growing Strong, Staying Brave: Fostering Resilience in Generation Alpha

10:15–11:45 • Room 219, 2nd floor – presentation in English

Abstract

Generation Alpha has arrived in schools. These children were born between 2010 and 2025 and are growing up with digital devices and social media. News that spreads very quickly, fake news, bullying, and harassment, among other things, are part of everyday life for many, just like loneliness and mental health issues. In schools, teachers are fighting a losing battle when it comes to students' ability to concentrate, because TikTok and other media consumed by children and teens exacerbate attention deficits. The result of "FOMO" (fear of missing out) is that students don't turn off their cell phones for 24 hours. In Austria, there is already an interfaith training program for spiritual care in school designed to support children and adolescents in challenging situations and strengthen their resilience. They strive to create a brave space in schools where students can speak openly about how they are feeling. The methods that help them in this regard include a form of conversation known as "Kurzgespräch" (brief systemic conversation), working with the Holy Scriptures—when the kids are in religion class—and many low-threshold activities. In the future, it will also increasingly be their role to support young people as they find their way out of isolation. The question is: How can we support our students?

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Tatai Csilla – Clinical psychologist, child psychologist

From SEN to Neurodivergence: A Guide from Diagnosis to Understanding the Child

10:15–11:45 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

Special educational needs (SEN) and neurodivergence describe the same reality from two different perspectives. We are often inclined to see a student with SEN as a "problem to be fixed," someone who needs to be developed in order to fit in. Through the perspective of neurodiversity, however, we can see the student's situation in a more nuanced way and understand how they function. In everyday school practice, the most important task is to recognize the child's unique neurological wiring and the invisible difficulties underlying their behavior; from there, a path opens toward addressing challenges and difficult situations.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. Kovács Szabolcs – Babeș–Bolyai University, Faculty of Reformed Theology and Music, Cluj-Napoca

What Are Students Telling Us? Mental Well-Being, Spirituality and Pastoral Presence at School: Evaluation of a Cross-Sectional Trend Study in Transylvanian Reformed Colleges

10:15–11:45 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

The research is a repeated cross-sectional study with independent samples conducted at two time points, in 2012 and 2026, comparing the psychological state, religiosity, school experiences, and help-seeking patterns of students in grades 9–12 at Reformed colleges in Transylvania. The study builds on historical items from the 2012 survey as well as contemporary indicators of psychological problems, school burnout, religious coping, spiritual school climate, digital-device use, and help-seeking. A central question is how students' mental well-being is related to the relational and spiritual credibility of the school, performance pressure, and the availability of pastoral care within the school.

PLENARY LECTURE

Prof. Dr. Siba Balázs – Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, professor

From the Fig Leaf to Authentic Speech: The Role of Selective Authenticity in Human Relationships in the Light of Christian Faith

12:00–13:00 • Room 20, ground floor

Abstract

The presentation examines the tension between spoken words and inner reality, with particular attention to what we do and do not say to one another, and why. The concept of "selective authenticity" places at the center the question of how we can be honest while also taking into account the fragility of our relationships and the protection of the other person. Using the metaphor of the iceberg, the presentation shows that visible communication often rests on unspoken feelings, desires, fears, and tensions. Not every silence or omission is harmful; at the same time, problems that remain unspoken for a long time may emerge in other forms, for example in behavior, gestures, or conflict. Behind the psychological and communicative aspects of the topic lies a theological question: what does it mean to speak and to be present authentically on the basis of a Christian understanding of the human person? The final question of the presentation is how Jesus' injunction—"Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'"—can be understood in the everyday reality of human relationships.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. Kovács Réka-Rozália – Sapientia EMTE, Târgu Mureș

Growing into Adulthood in the Digital World

15:30–17:00 • Room 219, 2nd floor

Abstract

One possible internal factor maintaining workplace stress is performance-based self-esteem. When individuals make their own worth, acceptance, and identity dependent on professional performance, failure becomes not merely a work-related problem but a personal threat. In preventing burnout, therefore, reducing workload is not enough; relational safety, unconditional human dignity, and the development of a psychologically safe organizational culture also play an important role.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Prof. Dr. Kodácsy-Simon Eszter – Lutheran Theological University, Budapest

Religious Education in a Fragile World – Personal Development, Prosocial Values and Spiritual Support in the Narratives of Lutheran Religion Teachers

15:30–17:00 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

How can school-based religious education contribute to strengthening children's and young people's personal, social, and spiritual resources? How do the uncertainty and vulnerability of the social environment, questions of

congregational and denominational identity, and the dynamics of individual and communal values appear in religion classes held in public schools? Based on a 2026 questionnaire study involving 212 Lutheran religion teachers, the presentation examines how teachers interpret the role of religious and moral education in public schools. Their responses reveal pedagogical and educational considerations through which teachers understand the subject's role and significance in students' development. The study shows that personality development, value transmission, community connectedness, and religious socialization appear with different emphases within the aims of religious education. The findings also make possible a more nuanced interpretation of the points of connection between school-based religious education and congregational formation, as well as of the specific features arising from different institutional and pedagogical contexts. This may contribute to rethinking the educational and spiritual functions of school-based religious education and to professional discussion about the subject's place in schools. The presentation argues that the potential role of religious and moral education should also be understood within the broader context of spiritual resilience. By supporting personal and prosocial competencies, religion classes can become a safe and reflective space that strengthens children's relational embeddedness, value orientation, and coping resources. The findings also raise the need to reconsider repeatedly the aims of religious education in schools and congregations, and to define the professional role of religion teachers in public-school settings in a more differentiated way.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. Somfalvi Edit – Protestant Theological Institute, Cluj

What Does It Mean—or Could It Mean—to Grow Up Reformed in a World of Polycrisis?

15:30–17:00 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

The presentation addresses a painfully current issue at the intersection of family life and congregational pedagogy: the elemental power of "belonging somewhere," viewed against the situation of adolescents who have come to feel, "I want to be everywhere, but I am at home nowhere." One of the basic anxieties of Generations Z and Alpha is FOMO, the Fear of Missing Out. While they are constantly rushing, both physically and online, so as not to miss anything, they may fail to learn how to connect, how to form attachments, and how to exist securely—to feel at home in the created world. This naturally increases anxiety further, setting a vicious circle in motion. With the help of parents and grandparents, the Church has something to offer in this situation through its stability, relative continuity, liturgy, and firm and consistent voice on matters of vital importance. Its apparent "backwardness" may convey steadfastness and security to those who enter. Perhaps not widely recognized, one of the Church's basic tasks in the digital age will be simply to be genuinely and personally present beside the other person—in this case beside adolescents—so that they can learn and practice connection, attachment, a sense of security, and the confidence that can grow from these. "We are in the world so that we may be at home somewhere in it," wrote Áron Tamási. The presentation considers this enduring insight in relation to the possibilities of family and Church: what can they do together so that today's young people may find inner stability and an outward home in a rapidly changing world whose direction remains uncertain.

SATURDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2026

PLENARY LECTURE

Prof. Dr. Kocsev Miklós – Reformed Theological Academy of Pápa

The Congregation as a Learning Community

10:00–11:00 • Amphitheatre, ground floor

Abstract

The social and cultural environment of Christian faith has fundamentally changed, and congregations therefore need to rethink how they pass on their faith to future generations. The presentation asks what we can learn from this change for ourselves and for those who come after us. A central question is how present and future generations relate to Christian faith and how communities can respond to this uncertain situation. Instead of despair, the congregation can become a learning community that deliberately creates space for discovering and passing on the "God-story." Learning faith is thus not merely the transmission of knowledge, but a shared search, a process of reorientation, and the accompaniment of those entrusted to us. The presentation seeks points of orientation that may help congregations offer an authentic environment for learning and faith even in a changing world.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Balogné Dr. Vincze Katalin – Lutheran Theological University, Budapest

Empowering Words – A Religious-Educational Reading of New Testament Words from the khar Root

11:15–12:45 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

At the beginning of this century, Gerd Theißen suggested that the motivating power of the biblical message can also nourish today's postmodern public sphere, and that the text itself provides motivation for those who learn and teach how to read the Bible. It is therefore natural to highlight the implications for religious education of research focused on a biblical text. The study of New Testament words derived from the khar root—joy, grace, gratitude, and their derivatives—is instructive not only theologically but also pastorally and from the perspective of religious education. In my doctoral research I demonstrated that words from the χαρ root and the related conceptual field share the common denominator of giftedness or having received a gift, which appears with particular emphasis in the context of prayer, since these words characteristically express theological and prayerful reflection on being gifted.

According to Ingo Dalferth, Christian prayer does not begin from an "anthropology of lack," but from an anthropology of giftedness. In educating young people it is important to make this explicit and to reflect on what members of a community may understand by having received gifts from God. Prayer can truly become an occasion of hopeful and trusting turning toward God when we know that both prayer and we ourselves are determined by God's prior turning toward us. The dimensions of "being accepted," which can be connected to the doctrine of justification as well as to the theology of creation, deserve emphasis not only theologically but also in religious education: grace, createdness, and our being made in the image of God can be interpreted from the perspective of life received as a gift, while the sanctified community can be understood as a community received as a gift, with all its challenges. It is right to rejoice in this, to give thanks for it, and to view charisms in this way. In religious education, this biblical perspective offers a foundation for holistic and positive pedagogical approaches and for inclusion, while also providing substantive points of orientation for prayer in religion classes, for teaching prayer, and for the religion teacher's self-reflection.

The aim of presenting the results of biblical research comprehensively and exploring the religious-educational implications of selected passages is to make the strengthening message expressed through khar-root words in biblical texts more consciously accessible to those involved in religious education and the formation of young people, as well as to further research.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Jákyné Dr. Csonta Réka – Episcopal Theological College of Pécs

Literature in Faith Education

11:15–12:45 • Room 219, 2nd floor

Abstract

Literature, as a product of culture, can serve as a source for catechesis if approached with appropriate care. This paper explores how this can be realized concretely today in different settings of faith education, in parish catechesis and in school religion classes. One question concerns the place of reading religious poetry today: what kinds of experiences can participants in catechesis gain if they are shown how a medieval theologian or a contemporary intellectual speaks about faith in God? A second question asks what added value may emerge when participants are encouraged to formulate their gratitude, requests, or complaints in a given literary form in a way that can also be experienced by others—in other words, when they are guided through the creative process of writing.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. habil. Püsök Sarolta – Babeș–Bolyai University, Faculty of Reformed Theology and Music, Cluj-Napoca

Our Children's Moral Decisions under an Unequal Yoke

11:15–12:45 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

The classical three-horse team of child-rearing and character formation—family, Church, and school—has in many cases become an unequal yoke in which the partners pull with unequal force and often toward divergent goals. In principle, everyone wants the child's ethical footprint to be as small as possible and for the child to grow into a healthy adult with strength of character. In practice, however, not every child is fortunate enough to have a family living by the same values that are taught in religion class; nor can school and Church support the theory in every respect, since both communities consist of people who themselves struggle under the unequal yoke dictated by the spirit of the age and whose decisions are shaped by many influences. How can we protect the child—stretched between the idols of the present age and the calling voice of a loving God—from wounds to the soul and distortions of character? The short presentation and workshop seek answers to this question.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. Csilla Imola Székely – Babes Bolyai University, Oecumene Doctoral School, Cluj Napoca

Postmodern Concept of God and Religiosity

11:15–12:45 • Room 313, 3rd floor

Abstract

This paper examines how the postmodern concept of God and religiosity have changed, from the crisis of modernity to the present-day metamodern cultural condition. Its starting point is that the image of God and the image of the human being shape each other: the way an era views the human being reveals the place it gives to God. The analysis draws on psychological, philosophical and theological sources and treats the modern, postmodern and metamodern periods as successive, interrelated stages. The legacy of modernity is alienation. The term originally meant the distance between humanity and God, but in the twentieth century it came to describe the experience of the human being estranged from the self. Depth psychology, behaviorism and existentialism offered competing images of the human being, and theological anthropology became merely one possible answer among many (Scheler). In the constructivist image of the human being, both the self and the concept of God become constructs, and religiosity becomes optional, provisional and confined to the present. The digital, networked era takes this further: both the personal character of relationships and the reliability of truth are weakened. As a response to postmodern relativism, the metamodern era restores the need for emotion, experience and community, which may also signal a renewed openness to transcendence. At the same time, globalized secular humanism, the post-truth phenomenon and posthumanism put the ego in the place of the worship of God, and so become the strongest intellectual rival of the Christian faith. Following Barth, Moltmann and Levente Horváth, the paper argues that biblical-Reformed anthropology offers a constant standard against the shifting images of the human being across the ages. It defines the human being through their relationship with God, not in terms of the self. The principles of imago Dei and simul iustus et peccator take seriously both

human dignity and humanity's need for redemption. For this reason, they can offer certainty to fragmented and lonely metamodern individuals.

PLENARY LECTURE

Dr. habil. Joób Máté – Kassai Donát – Semmelweis University, Institute of Mental Health, Budapest

Understanding and Teaching Forgiveness in Childhood and Adolescence

13:00–14:00 • Amphitheatre, ground floor

Abstract

Forgiveness is one of the fundamental yet difficult-to-define phenomena of human relationships. It is not identical with forgetting or justifying an injury, nor does it necessarily mean restoring a previous relationship in unchanged form. It is therefore particularly important to ask what forgiveness means for children and young people, how their understanding of it changes during development, and whether forgiveness itself can be taught.

The presentation brings together developmental-psychological and pastoral-psychological approaches to forgiveness. Research involving children, adolescents, and young adults suggests that three interconnected developmental processes play a particularly important role in the emergence of forgiveness: emotional and behavioral self-regulation, coping with conflicts and injuries, and socialization within family and peer relationships. Children therefore do not simply learn that they "must forgive"; rather, they gradually become capable of understanding their injuries, their own emotions, the other person's perspective, and the complexity of the relationship.

Research also indicates that forgiveness can be developed through educational means. School programs based on Enright's process model have shown favorable changes even among primary-school children, including reductions in anger. Teaching forgiveness should therefore be understood not as a moral command but as support for an emotional, relational, and meaning-making process. Finally, the presentation considers the possibilities and limits of applying these insights in pastoral work with children and young people.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. Horváth Levente – Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj / Bonus Pastor Foundation

The Paradox of Unbreakable Brokenness – Psychoeducational Dilemmas in Developing Spiritual Resilience

15:30–17:00 • Room 312, 3rd floor

Abstract

Discourse on resilience and antifragility carries an uncomfortable presupposition: that young people are "faulty" and that the Church's task is to repair them. The presentation questions this presupposition and also subjects its own rhetoric to scrutiny: according to Girard's mimetic theory, the impulse to improve others can itself produce a scapegoat, and the position of the analyst is not exempt from this dynamic. Drawing on Kierkegaard, Frankl, and the later Maslow's understanding of self-transcendence, the presentation asks why the ideal of the "unbreakable self" is itself a form of despair and why the unearned experience of being held within a community of faith cannot be replaced by any program of self-optimization. The theological transferability of the concept of antifragility is critically assessed. The dilemma is twofold: how can the Church educate for resilience without education becoming accusation, and how can protection avoid becoming a new comfort zone? Finally, the author connects his DIHSein model of pastoral care—dialogical, incarnational, hermeneutical—with motivational interviewing, bibliolog, bibliodrama, and the relational ethics of Boszormenyi-Nagy's contextual therapy. The thesis is that the church community, within the field of the Spirit, is a space of reconciliation and exoneration: it does not release people from responsibility, but on the ground of forgiveness makes transgenerational responsibility possible—without accusation, within the relationship of call and response.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. Gorbai Gabriella – Babeș–Bolyai University, Faculty of Reformed Theology and Music, Cluj-Napoca

Teachers' Mental Health as a Resource for Children's Resilience

15:30–17:00 • Room 219, 2nd floor

Abstract

Protecting the mental health of children and young people is one of the most urgent educational and social challenges of our time. Amid accelerating social change, the effects of the digital world, performance pressure, and relational uncertainty, adults who can provide emotional safety, predictability, and sustaining relationships are increasingly important. In this process, teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge; they can also be major supporters of children's psychological resilience. Yet this raises a further question: who or what sustains the helper?

From mental-health and pastoral-psychological perspectives, the presentation examines the relationship between teachers' mental health and children's resilience. At its center is the recognition that teachers' emotional availability, self-knowledge, authenticity, and relational competencies are closely connected with the educational climate they are able to create. At the same time, chronic stress, emotional overload, and the risk of burnout threaten not only individual well-being but also the quality of pedagogical relationships.

Special attention is given to the internal and external resources of teacher resilience: self-reflection, emotional awareness, supportive professional communities, helping relationships, and the possible protective role of spirituality and faith. The presentation argues that strengthening children's resilience cannot be separated from supporting teachers' mental health. Creating and sustaining a holding pedagogical presence is not solely an individual responsibility but also an institutional and communal task. Investment in teachers' mental health therefore indirectly contributes to protecting the mental health of future generations.

SHORT PRESENTATION / WORKSHOP

Dr. Deák Enikő – Babeș–Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Cluj-Napoca

Relational Safety and Community Support in the Lives of Young People Leaving the Child Protection System

15:30–17:00 • Room 220, 2nd floor

Abstract

Leaving the child protection system is one of the most sensitive transitional periods in young people's lives. The challenges of becoming independent are often intertwined with relational losses, emotional insecurity, and a lack of social support. It is therefore particularly important to ask what personal, relational, and community resources help young people cope with difficulties, and under what conditions vulnerability can become an opportunity for development and a new beginning.

The presentation is based on the results of the doctoral research project Institutional Life Courses, Resilience and Social Integration among Young People Leaving the Child Protection System. Conducted in four Transylvanian counties—Harghita, Covasna, Cluj, and Mureș—the study combined quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze young people's resilience, social relationships, institutional experiences, and opportunities for beginning an independent life.