

because it was built during times of war at the edge of the bloody Isonzo Front. In 1999, the Republic of Slovenia proclaimed the Memorial Church of the Holy Spirit in Javorca to be a cultural monument of national importance due to its cultural, artistic, historical, architectural, landscape and other exceptional characteristics.

The Memorial Church of the Holy Spirit in Javorca is recognised as an exceptional cultural monument in Europe as well, and was given the sign of European Heritage (intergovernmental initiative) in 2007. In 2018, it received the European Heritage Label, because Javorca is a unique place to remember fallen soldiers regardless of their origin and culture. It expresses the call for peace, reconciliation and symbolise the unifying power of collaborative artistic creation and construction.

The unique Art Nouveau architectural jewel, a monument to peace and a symbol of harmony, is being preserved despite the harsh and trying mountainous environment. It invites visitors to admire its beauty and ponder its fragile but moving anti-war message, warning us all to never stop striving for peace.

Everyone who visits the church, a unique memorial of peace and concordance in a wonderful mountain landscape, certainly feels no regret of his decision. Since it is distant from the main roads, the *Tolminski muzej* (Tolmin Museum) drew it nearer with the occasional exhibition. Its history and builders, as well as architectural and art historical peculiarities were presented.

MA, Damjana Fortunat Černilogar



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA  
MINISTRSTVO ZA KULTURO



tolminski muzej

## Memorial Church of the Holy Spirit – »the Basilica of Peace«

### The exhibition was on display:

Tolmin (Slovenia), Tolminski muzej Museum,  
18. 6. – 30. 10. 2016

Vienna (Austria), the Museum of Military History,  
3. 11. – 27. 11. 2016

Gorizia (Italy), Lojze Bratuž Cultural Center,  
1. 12. 2016 – 31. 1. 2017

Villach (Austria), Town Hall of the Municipality  
of Villach, 17. 1. – 11. 3. 2018

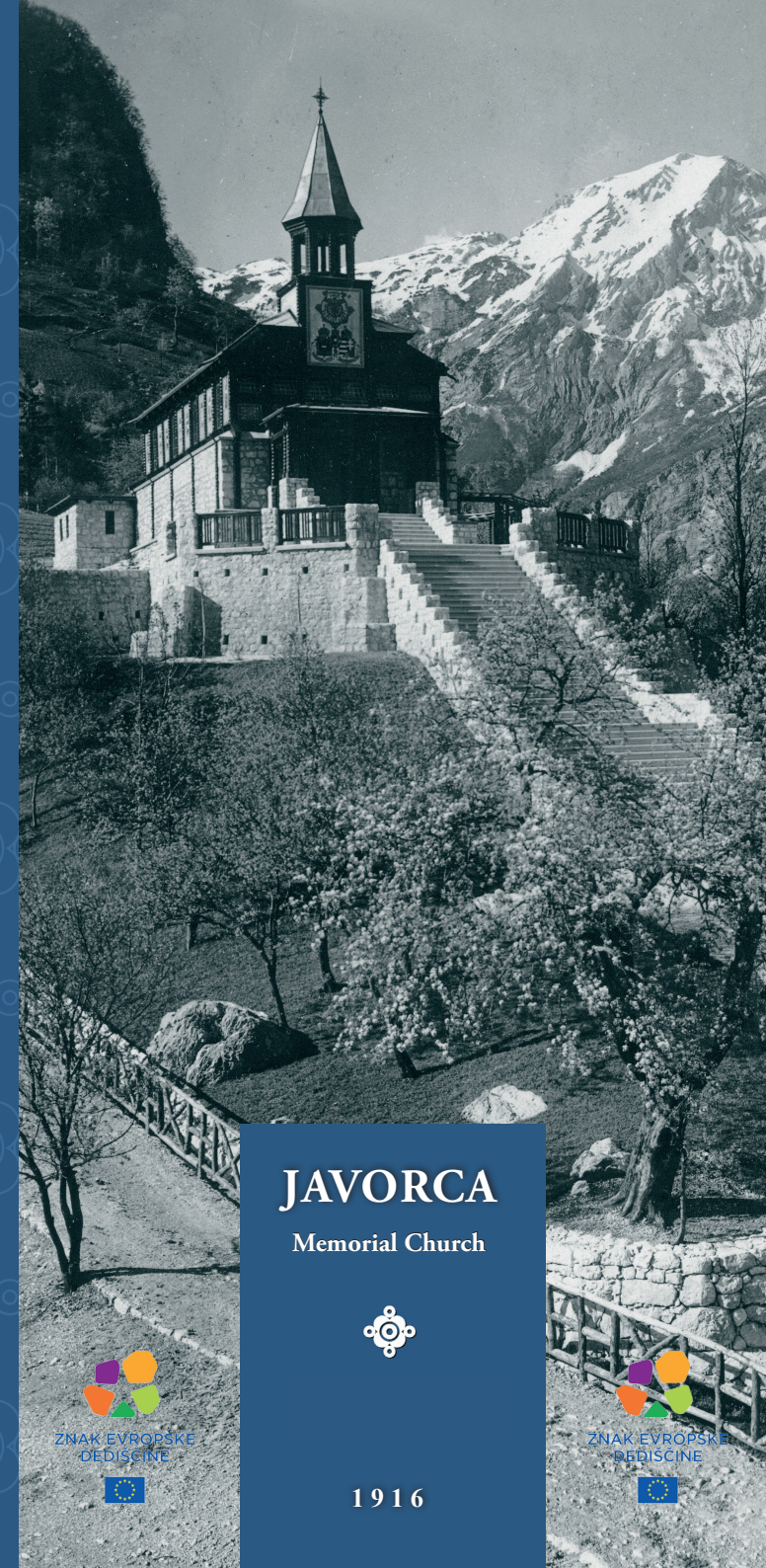
Prague (Czech Republic), Military Church of St.  
John of Nepomuk (Praha 1 – Hradčany),  
27. 6. – 20. 9. 2018

Rijeka (Croatia), Maritime and History Museum  
of the Croatian Littoral, 12. 12. 2018 – 5. 2. 2019

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# JAVORCA

Memorial Church



1916



## Memorial Church of the Holy Spirit in Javorca – »the Basilica of Peace«

In 1916, at the edge of the Isonzo Front area, in the valley of the Tolminka River, the soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Brigade, belonging to the XV Austro-Hungarian Corps, built a memorial church following the design and plans by the Viennese artist Remigius Geyling. When choosing the location, it was important to make the church invisible to the enemy, and for it to be equally distant from all of the Brigade's frontline positions at Vodil vrh, Mrzli vrh, Sleme and Rdeči rob.

The church was built with voluntary contributions from the soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Brigade. They carried out all of the works on a voluntary basis, during the hours dedicated for rest behind the lines. According to the *Wiener Zeitung Nr. 137* from 1917, the costs of the construction were estimated at 16,000 crowns, which in times of peace would be equal to 100,000 crowns. The soldiers began preparing the construction site on 1 March 1916. The foundation was set at the end of March and following the mass of 4 April 1916, a document with the message explaining the purpose of the memorial church was built in underneath the entrance portal of the church. Lieutenant Géza Jablonszky from Budapest played an important role as the head of the construction site.

The basement of the church is made of stone blocks and stands on a foundation made of rock. A wooden building, made of large quantities of spruce and larch wood, was erected on the foundation of stone. The wood was brought by rail from Bohinj to the Most na Soči train station, then transported to Polog and carried to the construction site in Javorca, where the wood was processed. At the edge of all wooden beams and barks, scotches were burned into the wood's surface for additional decorative effect. The church was built in 184 days, with

an apse that is 18 metres long and 7.4 metres wide. The aisles are 6 metres high, and the nave is 7 metres high. Eternit (fibre cement) was used for the roof covering. Seventy-eight steps made of stone and cement lead to the church. When the church was finished, a park was built around it with a stone wall and a carved wooden pergola. Above the entrance rises the bell tower with a sundial, the Austro-Hungarian coat of arms and the inscription PAX (peace). The outer walls are decorated with twenty stylised coats-of-arms of the crownlands of Austria-Hungary with Rijeka and Trieste. In the church lobby, there are twelve wooden pillars. The interior of the church is very pretty, with decorative patterns in blue, black, gold and white covering the pillars, walls and ceiling. The sole neutral tone is the grey colour, which covers the mosaic floor, encircled by blocks of black granite. The lines running across the floor are, to an extent, reflected in the supporting ceiling construction and the ceiling beam panel. This gives a feeling of strength to the entire space and completes the construction in the visual sense. Above the altarpiece there is an architecturally original tabernacle made of polished and processed black stone. A Tyrolean carver created the doors made of linden wood following the design by Geyling. Above the floor is a stylised, mosaic image of the Holy Spirit depicted as a white dove. The church was dedicated to the Holy Spirit, which represents a symbol of peace, wisdom and love in liturgy. The completing network of the apse and the hanging lamp are made of wrought iron. The wooden frame of the altarpiece, the fillings and the cross with the carved Christ made of linden wood were made by Anton Perathoner who followed the design by Geyling. A candleholder made of gilded oak wood stands atop the layered composition. Above it, one finds a glass mosaic – the only decoration in the church not made by the soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Brigade. Directly in front of the altarpiece stand three oak chairs upholstered with leather, and four wooden benches behind them. The

aisles are inclined towards the apse and their side walls are decorated with Geyling's images of angels. On the facade, at the outer entrance, and inside there are inscriptions informing the visitor of why this church was built, who built it, when it was built and under whose command. The inner walls of the church are covered with oak panels, which bear the burnt-in inscriptions of the unfortunate 2,565 Austro-Hungarian soldiers who lost their lives in the area.

The memorial church in Javorca was officially opened on 1 November 1916. According to the records of Marija Rutar, the last mass in Javorca was supposed to take place on 17 August 1917, but was cancelled at the last minute. Between 1916 and 1917, newspapers reported on the church several times and the construction was well documented.

The church in Javorca stands at 571 m a.s.l., in a landscape with unfavourable weather conditions, which requires ongoing maintenance works. Major restoration works have been carried out four times. In 1934, the first restoration works were carried out by *Ufficio delle fortificazioni del Corpo d'armata di Udine*. At that time, they added the inscription *Ultra cineres hostium ira non superest (Beyond the ash the anger of the enemies subsides)*, which gives a special message to the church. After WWII, the church was well maintained for a while by the local Franc Gregorčič. Unfortunately, afterwards the church was left to decay. Between 1980 and 1981, the Gorica Monument Protection Institute fully renovated the church and returned it to its former glory. Unfortunately, a powerful earthquake hit the area of Javorca in 1998. Between 2004 and 2005, major renovation works were carried out to repair the damage caused by the earthquake. In April 2016, ten years after the last renovation of the church, restorers began restoration works again.

The Memorial Church of the Holy Spirit in Javorca is exceptional not only due to its artistic value, but also