

...BRIDGES... Number 11, 2008: "A Musical Foundation"

by Joyce Michael for the ECCB's American Working Group & PC(USA)'s Czech Mission Network

It has been an "American Autumn" here in Prague, as we have welcomed two illustrious groups from the Presbyterian Church (USA). In September, the careful preparations and respectful spirit of this year's participants in the Presbyterian Women's Global Exchange impressed and encouraged their Czech hosts. PC(USA) participants in October's Partnership Conference were equally insightful and sincere as they began to explore the possibility of forming long-term relationships with ECCB congregations. The sense of good-will generated by both of these visits, is still bearing fruit, and it is my prayer that the Czech and American folks involved in these two events will find creative ways to support one another as they cultivate long-term relationships. I perceive that such cooperative endeavors already have a strong foundation insofar as, in a deep sense, these special groups are already bound together musically.

You see, I wanted the Presbyterian women to leave the Czech Republic overflowing with words and tones that have special significance for ECCB congregations. Thus, I chose a cherished chorus, which we learned to sing in Czech and English by repeating its tune and words at nearly every worshipful moment we shared. The incredible richness of the voices of the participants in the Global Exchange made those musical moments quite meaningful.

However, the melody did not end there. I used the same chorus to connect separate sections of the devotions on the theme of walking together that I was invited to share at one of the Partnership Conference's concluding sessions in the Krkonoše mountain community of Janské Lázně. Perhaps the melody of that evening will resound again as you read my written text:

"Give us wisdom, courage, too,
For days of fear, for days of trouble,
To go with you across the chasm,
Give us wisdom, courage, too."

Walking together is being there for, and with, one another when life's circumstances lead us to join the Psalmist in 'crying aloud to God, **aloud** to God, that God may hear us. In the days of trouble, we seek the Lord; in the night, our hands are stretched out without ceasing; our souls refuse to be comforted. We think of God, and we moan. We meditate, and our spirits faint.' (Ps 77:1-3)

At such times, we may do well to take the words of Božena Komárková to heart. That Czech advocate of human rights reminds us that "...Christ's sacrifice put him in solidarity with humankind and the world to the point of death in a place for outcasts.... Thus, our responsibility for our brothers and sisters, for the world, and for the task of ...standing in for those who do not know of God's grace has been set forth,"

Walking together means going with our brothers

and sisters across the chasm. Thus, we may whole-heartedly sing:

"Give us wisdom, courage, too
To forego everything for the truth,
To remember the suffering people,
Give use wisdom, courage, too."

Professor Jakub Trojan of the Protestant Theological Faculty similarly reminds us that walking together requires us to bring graceful truths to life. He declares: "In light of our faith, we are obligated to eliminate the most flagrant manifestations of injustice and poverty, the most blatant displays of human brokenness, and underlying systemic inadequacies. Criticism of everything that destroys the lives of our neighbors and of our creation is part of faith."

These words remind us that hope for wholeness necessarily arises out of brokenness. Thus, we may recall Isaiah's vision of the transformation that may come to those who walk together on life's difficult paths. "Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes; who are deaf, yet have ears. Let the nations gather together, and the peoples assemble." (Is 43:8-9)

Again and again, the hope for wholeness arises out of brokenness, so let us sing anew:

"Give us wisdom, courage, too
For the times of daily living,
May our love shine brightly therein;
Give use wisdom, courage, too." Amen.

At Janské Lázně, there was not much time to rehearse that chorus, so initially our tones were rather discordant. But then, Tomáš Najbrt, who had come to introduce us to the many medieval instruments that he so skillfully plays, picked up a lute and accompanied our faltering voices. Tomáš thus provided the foundation that was needed to transform our wavering sounds into a graceful melody. May this example of the manner in which wholeness arises out of brokenness be a good foundation for all of our fragile efforts.