

...BRIDGES III... May 2004

prepared as a Supplement to the Czech Working Group Newsletter and as a Service to the American Working Group by Joyce Michael, Mission Co-worker with PC(USA)

The month of May is rapidly disappearing, and I am just now beginning to write this month's "edition" of Bridges. I might apologize for its late arrival. However, you may be encouraged by the fact that this update has been delayed because a significant amount of face-to-face bridge-building has been occurring in the Czech Republic in recent weeks. A few verbal snap-shots may provide you with a taste of a remarkably "international" period.

Anticipatory events in March and April

In mid-March, Burkhard Paetzold, who is the Worldwide Ministries Division's regional liaison for this part of Europe, was in Prague to visit with leaders of the ECCB, its Diaconia, and the Protestant Theological Faculty. Burkard also met with the pastor of the ECCB church in Prague-Vinohrady, the director of the Czech Ecumenical Council of Churches, and with the head of an ecumenical agency for volunteers called SERVIS. A visit to the site of the new church that is being built in a massive housing project in the southern part of Prague and lunch with the ECCB's advocate for Roma rounded out Burkhard's adventure in nurturing the ties that bind the PC(USA) and the ECCB.

On April 29, a small group of individuals from Germany, Poland, Britain, and the United States assembled in Prague to discuss their common heritage and unique features with representatives of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Lively conversation ensued, and new understandings emerged.

The next day, a different group of guests from the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy arrived in Valašské Meziříčí to participate in the dedication of the ECCB's beautiful new hospice, which will also serve as a training center for caregivers from throughout the Czech Republic. Several of the church and governmental representatives who were part of that event related the opening of the Hospice to the impending entry of the Czech Republic into the European Union. The promise of international harmony was also quite evident to John and me as international guests and

Czech hosts spent a relaxing evening together at a nearby church retreat center before returning to Prague the next day.

Throughout May

On May 5, John and I were honored to greet six Presbyterians from Sun City Arizona who had expressed interest in renewing some long-standing relationships with the ECCB while they touring Prague. Nadeje Mandysova (emeritus director of the Czech Ecumenical Council of Churches), Ruzena Cerna (the ECCB's advocate for Roma), and I spent the morning acquainting this congenial group with some of the current trends within the ECCB. Thus long-term connections were strengthened (and new relationships were established with members of the group who were visiting the Czech Republic for the first time).

On May 12, the PC(USA)'s coordinator for mission work in Middle East and Europe, arrived in Prague to participate in the 31st Session of the Synod of the ECCB. During his five days in the Czech Republic, Dr. Makari listened carefully, and responded thoughtfully, to a number of groups and individuals who winsomely shared their insights into Czech history, culture, and faith with him. An especially important conversation about ways to strengthen connections between the ECCB and PC(USA) took place when Dr. Makari spent the morning with the American Working Group. In addition to expressing commitment to fostering a close relationship between the two denominations, Dr. Makari also suggested a number of ways in which the strengths of the ECCB could be shared with Middle Eastern nations and with the American Church. An exciting new day seems to be at hand!