

...BRIDGES... Number 2, 2006: A Noble Way

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

When 2006 arrived, I supposed that my translation of a book entitled *Five Circuits Through Prague in the Footsteps of the Czech Reformation* would be completed by the end of February, so that I could attend to more "routine" tasks in a timely way. However, preparing that detailed text for publication was more time-intensive than I expected, and, when all was said and done, it was nearly the end of April before my work was finished. Along the way, I composed several BRIDGES in my mind, but now that I have time to put these into writing, I hardly know where to begin. You see, John and I are now in the United States for several months of "mission interpretation." The opportunities and challenges of this part of our work have been underscored by the fact that immediately after we arrived in Ohio, we were profoundly saddened to learn that deep budget cuts mean that a number of good friends and cherished colleagues will no longer be present to assist us with projects and to receive our greetings when we visit the national church offices in Louisville. In light of the life-changing measures that are being implemented within the ranks of the very people who support and enable our daily work and life in the Czech lands, I wondered how I could rhapsodize about an insight gleaned from a "Czech encounter." Yet, as the days went on, I knew that I must rhapsodize in honor, and on behalf of, the people at the Worldwide Ministries Division who have taken great care to attend to day-to-day details in recent months, even as the likelihood of impending changes must have cast a dark cloud over even the most routine tasks.

For example, in early February, we learned that the health insurance requirement for obtaining a Czech visa has changed for the third time in six years. Within ten days, we would need a statement from the church guaranteeing insurance coverage. "We must phone Brunhilda," I declared. "If she can send a letter in the next couple of days, we should have plenty of time." I heard John's voice "light up" as Brunhilda herself answered the phone, and, in her warm and inimitable way, assured him that a letter would be sent that very afternoon. We appreciated her efficient response, but, over and above that, we were grateful for the personal and encouraging words of greeting that she extended to us. We will miss her deeply.

On another occasion, I sent a note to everyone who was present at the formation of the Czech Mission Network in 2004, regarding a person who had expressed interest in participating in that group. In no time at all, Les Sauer had replied. "I will add that information to our data base," he promised, before giving me the name of a person whom he had just met. "I think that she would enjoy receiving Bridges," he wrote. Les' involvement with 26 mission networks must have confronted him with an overwhelming volume of e-mail and personal contacts. Yet, he treated each person and every bit of correspondence as if it was a cherished treasure. No connection was overlooked and 'no person was left behind' by this master web-spinner. He will also be deeply missed.

At 5:30 a.m. on April 23, I went to the Prague

airport, to meet a participant in PC(USA)'s Young Adult Volunteer Program who has Czech roots. Sarah is serving in Cairo, Egypt, where satisfying experiences directing a school for refugee children have been darkened by biases against single, young, American women. Sarah is strong, vivacious, and intelligent, but Victor Makari sensed her weariness and encouraged her to come to Prague for a breather. It was delightful to watch Sarah sparkle as she roamed freely through Prague without being harassed or threatened. Again, in the midst of a crushing work load, Victor recognized a need and enabled a connection that brought joy to Sarah and renewal to John and me.

Although WMD is sometimes viewed as being a cumbersome administrative body, I have consistently found people like Brunhilda, Les, and Victor (who will continue to coordinate work in the Middle East) to be anything but cogs in an impersonal machine. Indeed, the people that I have met at WMD all seem to realize that the command to "love our neighbor as we love ourselves" means that we are called to see, hear, and care for the individual person as he or she is, even when our own futures are uncertain and our own souls are weary. Let us take up the mantle of these caring church leaders, and build on the foundations that they have established by unselfishly utilizing our time, our insights, and our resources in a Christ-like mode of service that will transcend our most instinctive anxieties.