

### ...BRIDGES... Number 3, 2006: In the Footsteps of the Reformation

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

While translating *Through Prague in the Footsteps of the Czech Reformation*, I was filled with a strong desire to walk the five circuits that compose this historical "guidebook." Translating the book's factual content was a fairly straightforward endeavor, but accurately rendering its directions was a more "delicate" undertaking. For example, since "u" can mean "near, at, in, next to, on, with, over, alongside, by, about, beside, or around," selecting the correct preposition was difficult in cases where I was not already familiar with the location being described. Thus, even after working carefully with a map, I realized that I could not submit my translation to the publisher until I had traced each of the circuits on foot. I hope that my memories of those excursions will give you a sense of the vital ways in which the Czech Reformation continues to inspire interest and devotion.

Perhaps the most memorable of these outings occurred at dusk on a cloudy evening in February. I left John's office, where I had been working in isolation, around 4 p.m., intent on checking a few directions that were too subtle to be confirmed with a map. Upon arriving at the Old Town Square, I was glad to discover that most of my renderings had been accurate. Moreover, I experienced a certain sense of exhilaration as I recalled the events that made familiar places particularly note-worthy or even hallowed. No longer was I trapped in words and lost in detail. I was out there where it all happened! It was already too dark for me to read my text as I walked along, but since I seemed to be remembering my questions and resolutions pretty well, I left the square and headed toward the river where I soon had located all of the sites that were in doubt. Upon re-entering the square, I soon happened upon a group of tourists who had stopped beside of the Hus Memorial. Although I could not tell what language they were speaking, I was certain that an act of remembrance was taking place as that little group spontaneously began to sing a quiet hymn of praise. How curious that I should come to this place at the very time that an impromptu celebration of Hus' legacy was taking place. I was humbly grateful.

My next excursion took place on Good Friday, when I returned to the Old Town Square where a throng of people had assembled in spite of strong winds and heavy rain. My destination that day was a memorial plaque on the Old Town Hall which lists the leaders of the Protestant uprising who were executed at that spot in 1621. As I stood near the 27 mosaic crosses that have been placed in the cobblestones to memorialize the deaths of those brave men, my studied concentration was broken as I listened to a young Czech man

recounting the story of that sad occurrence to two English-speaking guests. Although some secular tour guides do not seem to have a very profound sense of the significance of Hus and the Czech Reformation, this man was bringing that movement to life with rich detail and respectful reverence. The story lives, I gratefully concluded as I left that important location

From time to time throughout the other walks that I took on Easter weekend, I experienced moments of wonder as I stopped at hitherto unknown – or at least unnoticed – sites. However, the most meaningful journey of all took place on a blustery Easter Monday when John and I made our way to White Mountain, where the defeat of the Protestant troops in 1620 eventuated in the Thirty Years War and the start of the Counter-Reformation. We had been to the park near the memorial at White Mountain several times without being aware of the exact location of the battle. This time, however, we followed the directions as humble pilgrims, and, lo and behold, we were not alone. As we approached the field which leads to the memorial mound that marks the battle site, we saw several other pilgrims making their way down from that special place. "People still come here – to this distant place at the edge of Prague – even when the wind is whipping and rain is falling," I marveled. The story of White Mountain and the legacy of Czech Protestantism could not be stamped out even when it appeared to have been silenced. The heritage of Hus and those who championed his commitment to Truth could not be pushed into oblivion. Thus, people still make their way to White Mountain and other reformation sites in order to ponder the chalice and to give thanks for the heritage of unity before God, and in Christ, that it symbolizes. Thanks be to God.