

## ...BRIDGES... Number 7, 2006: Caterpillars, Ants, and YOU!

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

This morning, a young girl walked by the apartment at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio where John and I are based for this portion of our itineration assignment. From her demeanor, I gathered that there was a living creature on the piece of paper that she was carrying so gingerly, and, in fact, it turned out that she had coaxed a caterpillar onto that page, so that she could show her discovery to everyone she met. As I watched that child, I was filled with a desire to follow a similar pattern with regard to letting all of you know about the up-coming gathering of the Czech Mission Network, which will take place near Cincinnati (in Erlanger Kentucky) on September 21 and 22. I have mentioned this event in the "cover-e-mails" that accompanied previous issues of BRIDGES this summer, with the hope that someone other than me would write a "sparkling" BRIDGES that would fill a number of you with a strong desire to attend that gathering. However, the steering committee has been working so diligently on preparing a dynamic event that this task has finally fallen to me.

However, I cannot appear before you with anything as fascinating as the caterpillar that I saw this morning, so I do not know how to enthrall you to take a couple of days, do a bit of traveling, spend a little money (actually, just \$99), and join us for this gathering. I might remind you that Will Browne, Jon Chapman, and Mark McCabe will be present to share the denomination's vision of mission partnerships with us. I might report that John and I have been asked to recall some anecdotes regarding humorous dissonances that sometimes occur when people from differing cultures meet up with one another. I might stress that Petr Peňáz, a pastor in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren who studied at Dubuque Theological Seminary, is coming all the way to Erlanger to give you a first-hand glimpse of our partner denomination in the Czech Republic. I might try to summarize the planned agenda so that you could have a picture of the various topics that will be considered through the rich array of addresses, presentations, and

opportunities for panel discussion and small-group sharing that have been specially designed to give participants a deeper appreciation of the ECCB and of ways that Presbyterians throughout this country can work together in forming, nurturing, and deepening partnerships with our Czech brothers and sisters in faith. However, space and time are limited, so I have decided to take a different tack, which requires that I pick up a second insect image that came to mind earlier this morning following a thoughtful phone conversation with a member of the steering committee of the Czech Mission network. A main topic of that conversation had to do with the impact that proposed changes in the structure of the GAC may have on the new Czech Mission Network. Understandably, there is some concern about where the network will find counsel and support when the structure of the GAC is realigned. Yet, it seems to me that if we consider the ant-world, there is little need to be anxious and much cause to be enthused.

You see, each spring, our apartment in Prague is invaded by ants who enter through the door to our balcony. Before they become too numerous, I take great delight in watching those little creatures scurry around. What initially appears to be random and haphazard movement eventually evinces a pattern characterized by purpose and energy. As I watch, I am particularly impressed by small ants who carry slivers of wood and other objects that are twice as big as they are. As those critters successfully tote their loads to the intended destination, I am bound to conclude that these ants' sense of direction and determination is something that we humans being might do well to emulate. Indeed, I would suggest that in this time, when we may be inclined to long for old structures that feel orderly and dependable, we may take a lesson from the ants. If we bring our very best creativity and keen interest in the preserving our connections with the ECCB to Erlanger, we not only will begin to find order and purpose in the midst of the randomness that seems to distinguish times of transition, we will also have the rare privilege of discovering a new sense of purpose and direction together. I urge you to take a hopeful leap and register for the up-coming gathering at [www.pcusamission.org](http://www.pcusamission.org). If tiny ants can carry huge loads as a matter of course, we can also accomplish great things, provided that we embrace the grand task that awaits us! YOU ARE INVITED to let yourself be carried along on the secure foundations of faith, hope, and commitment to the destination that God has in mind.