

...BRIDGES ... Number 8, 2006: A Worthy Commendation

prepared on behalf of the ECCB's American Working Group and the PC(USA)'s Czech Mission Network

I rarely devote one of these up-dates to a single individual. However, at the end of April, I heard of an event which was so special that I knew that an up-coming BRIDGES must be focused on a gallant leader of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Thus, at this time, I want to introduce you to a truly remarkable person.

There are some people whose ways of being are an intriguing mixture of level-headedness and abandon; other folks' endearing qualities become evident after years of acquaintance; and other persons display multi-colored shades of temperament that are almost impossible to grasp. Yet, a few rare individuals, such as the Deputy Director of the ECCB's Diaconia, radiate a spirit of wisdom and grace that is recognizable right from the start.

I had heard of **Eva Grollová** long before I met her at a meeting of the American Working Group or the editorial team of the ECCB's *Czech Protestant News*. I cannot quite remember which of these two groups had convened on the day in question; yet, I still recall that Eva's thoughtful remarks and ready smile quickly revealed why her many friends in the United States speak of her with such affectionate regard and deep respect.

Of course, every member of the Diaconia's national staff is admirably devoted to finding practical and creative ways to develop, oversee, and support all thirty-three of the social service centers through which ECCB congregations help show God's love to persons who are handicapped, ill, elderly, alone, or in other situations of need. Many of you will recall the passionate manner in which its director, Pavel Vychopen, describes the crucial role that the Diaconia may play in reaching out to the highly-secularized Czech society, and others of you will remember additional diaconal workers whom you have met in the Czech Republic. Yet, Eva's gifts are unique in some significant respects.

Those of you who know Eva probably have a favorite memory of extraordinary times that you have been able to spend with her, and I am no exception. Indeed, I am privileged to recall traveling back to Prague with Eva following the dedication of ECCB's new Hospice in 2004. After presiding over the celebratory opening of that splendid facility in

the northeastern part of the Czech Republic, Eva joined a group of international guests for an over-night stay at a nearby church retreat center and a side trip to Litomyšl the following day. Then, she took that group to the site of a new ECCB church which was in the process of being built next to a secular social service center located in the midst of a large communist-era housing complex in the southern section of Prague. Notwithstanding the intense activity that must have characterized preparations for the dedication of the hospice, Eva was eager to show us the progress that was being made on that building. You see, she is a key member of that pioneering congregation, so she wanted to get people excited about that ground-breaking project (**which will be dedicated this coming Sunday, October 8**). Upon leaving that site, Eva's hospitable spirit continued to prevail, as she drove John and me to our apartment, although that "detour" delayed her return to her own family.

This is just one example of the tireless dedication and kindness that Eva consistently displays, whether she is responding to work colleagues, international guests, people in need, or church friends. Thus, I was not surprised, but am delighted to tell you, that on Tuesday, April 25, Eva went to the Dutch Embassy in Prague where she had been invited to speak about diaconal work. Upon arriving, she found herself in the midst of family, co-workers, and friends. In their presence, Ida L. Van Veldhuizen-Rotehbucher, the Netherlands' ambassador to the Czech Republic, presented Eva with a commendation for outstanding service to society – the Order of Oranje-Nassau – given in the name of Her Majesty, the Dutch Queen Beatrix. In that moment, majesty recognized humility, and the greatness of service was honored. May other friends of Christ who similarly have eyes to see join Eva in fostering grace and peace in gentle and trustworthy ways.