

...BRIDGES... Number 3, 2008: "Technological Conundrums"

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

During a recent visit by a three-member planning team that came to the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Ukraine to discuss the Presbyterian Women's up-coming Global Exchange, I had some "close encounters" with technological advances that I do not often experience. For instance, I had occasion to use a borrowed mobile phone for a Czech Mission Network conference call that took place while we were on the road, and I was fascinated by the little hand-held devices that my traveling companions used to receive and send e-mail while traveling on the train. Since it occurs to me that I may not be the only one who does quite not know what to make of such wonders of human ingenuity, I want to begin this up-date by sharing a "constructive criticism" regarding the intricacies of e-mail that I received last winter.

A great supporter of Czech connections has given me permission to share the following concern, which she expressed with a certain flair: "...I fail to see why Bridges always says it's from Jan Dus. You have an e-mail address. Why not use it? Blows my mind. Jan sends his own e-mail messages."

Since I am aware that other readers have had the same question over the years, I want to take this opportunity to clear up this technological mystery. Simply put, I cannot use my own e-mail address for BRIDGES because I do not send these up-dates myself. I forward completed BRIDGES to Jan's computer, and he distributes them, using the list of e-mail addresses that he keeps up-to-date. This arrangement was established by the American Working Group in 2002 when it gave me permission to write BRIDGES. Since I do not know how to send messages to 160+ people at one time, I am grateful to Jan for helping out in this way. Please be assured that I do not use Jan's name for any messages that I send from my own computer. I am honored to invite you to express appreciation to Jan for enabling BRIDGES to reach you in such an efficient way.

Unfortunately, the by-products of technological advances cannot always be addressed so easily, nor are they always as benign in their impact on our planet and our lives. Thus, I want to devote the rest of this BRIDGES to a paper on Climate Change that Dr. Jiří Nečas wrote on behalf of the ECCB in response to a request from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Dr. Nečas declares: "Climate change is indisputably one of the most serious of the current environmental problems. In addition, it is highly-politicized, especially in the Czech Republic where this question has a unique "flavor," resulting from President Klaus' positions. He not only denies any human

influence on climate change; he has also adopted a negative attitude toward the possibility of searching for ways to respond to climate change." After observing that "an awareness of our responsibility for the environment is growing within the ECCB," Dr. Nečas admits: "It is not easy for the members of the ECCB to objectively assess how they are doing.... Therefore, I would like to supplement this report with the outcome of...a public opinion poll that...had to do with practical ecological behavior."

The analyst of that poll states that "Christians can be an example for the entire society," before adding that "...this is a group of residents that is not so dependent on material values and surpasses the prevailing norm in adopting a more responsible approach to life.... In particular, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren may boast of especially good results. Its members use the most environmentally-friendly laundry detergent. They regularly use public transportation, limiting travel in private cars to the most essential minimum, and they separate their trash with care. In some of its manses, we even observed a complete set of waste bins for the separated trash of parishioners who do not have this option at home. Church members are periodically informed about this service in congregational letters that are printed on entirely recycled paper, and individual congregations are participating in programs like "green energy." They are installing solar panels on their properties, and are devoting considerable effort to insulating their buildings. Sunday school classes and confirmation studies, which are focused on love and respect for the whole of creation, are also encouraging."

May this affirmation of the possibility that "Christian values" really can make a difference in our stewardship of creation inspire you to celebrate and intensify your own conservational activities during this month when "Earth Day" is typically celebrated in the United States.