

## BRIDGES... Number 4, 2008: Part 2: "Telling the Stories..."

Please enjoy – and take to heart the inviting challenges that are inherent in – Charles Haeussner’s lively account of the important connections which can be made when we travel and as we learn. ☺, Joyce

In September 2007, my wife and I, and two other friends from our Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, visited Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Several years before our congregation, the Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church, had sent a mission group to Prague to begin a relationship with the ECCB and its Diaconia. Although our trip in 2007 was scheduled as a holiday, I could not pass up the opportunity to meet with people from those organizations and to give an updated report to our congregation upon our return home.

I had met John and Joyce Michael when they visited our church a few years ago and felt confident contacting them by e-mail. Through their efforts, we were able to meet with leaders of the ECCB and its Diaconia, as well as to attend several events, including a street fair that featured several non-profit social service centers. As a result of meeting with local people, walking the streets of Prague, visiting historic sites, and reading more about the Czech Reformation, I came away with a new appreciation for the history of Protestantism and the reformed tradition. The Protestant Reformation had its origins in Prague; persevered throughout the Counter-Reformation, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, World Wars I and II, and Communism; and finally emerged as a vital agent of service in the new Czech Republic. I realized that there was an under-appreciated story here that needed to be told to my friends at home.

My wife and I are also active in a newly-formed Network with the Presbyterian Churches in Iraq, and I kept comparing the history of the Czech Republic with current events in Iraq. Christians there are being forced to renounce their faith, close their churches, flee their homes and country, or face persecution and even death. These are some of the same things that Protestant reformers in Bohemia and Moravia had to endure across the centuries. However, the ECCB emerged, and the Diaconia was re-created to help those who need their services. The Protestant community of the Czech Republic can be a guide, hope, and role model for Iraqi Christians who are currently struggling against radical Islam.

Wherever we go and whatever we learn, we cannot keep it to ourselves. God has blessed us with opportunities to travel, learn, and share with others. Soon after we returned to Pittsburgh, Carol and I started a MISSION:POSSIBLE Sunday School Adult Education Class in which we spent one week discussing the ECCB and the

Diaconia. During that session, members of the Czech mission group who had traveled to Prague several years ago reflected on various locations that they had visited. We also shared photographs, a PowerPoint presentation, a display table, and handicrafts. Faces of the people and children in various centers, current church leaders and mission workers in Prague, and the well-attended street fair brought the ministry of the ECCB and the Diaconia to life. We talked of the PC(USA)’s Czech Mission Network and distributed copies of its newsletter and BRIDGES.

In subsequent weeks, there were presentations on other hands-on missions with which our church is directly involved, including the Network for Presbyterian Churches in Iraq, medical mission trips to Haiti, and work trips to New Orleans to help the people who were affected by Hurricane Katrina rebuild their homes.

For the past five years, our Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church has celebrated a Moravian Love Feast on the last Sunday of the year. This gives us a wonderful chance to recall the reformed tradition that began with Jan Hus and the Protestant reformers in the Czech lands. We sing Bohemian and Moravian hymns; read passages of scripture about love; share a common meal of sweet buns, coffee, and hot chocolate; and talk of the *agape* love that was shared by Christians in the time of the Apostles, and by Moravians as they formed their community in Herrnhut, Germany and began a vital missionary movement. Using a PowerPoint presentation, I was able to illustrate this history, to describe the challenges faced by Czech Protestants, and to bring everyone up-to-date on the current life of the ECCB and its Diaconia. I used slides from Presbyterian churches in Iraq to compare the story of Czech Protestants with the present-day struggles of Iraqi Christians in their war-torn world. We prayed for peace, reconciliation, and the expansion of the kingdom of God through our efforts at sharing and service.

Small visits can lead to great involvement as people learn and become more active. Each of us has an opportunity to be a missionary everyday and in every location, regardless of where we are. We pray that the love feast may become a daily act of loving our neighbors as Christ instructed us through service and sharing, and may this love spread throughout the world, so that our love will be visible to all.

-- by Charles F. Haeussner, M.D.