

...BRIDGES... Number 9, 2008: "In Their Own Words"

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

I was surprised recently when someone "in the know" said that I really needed to do more than merely translate BRIDGES. "You should also write some of your own interpretive reflections," he advised. I was virtually speechless, since I have written most of the 60+ BRIDGES that have been sent since 2003 when the American and Czech Working Groups authorized me to prepare twelve up-dates each year. Occasionally, I have quoted translations of ECCB texts to which you would not otherwise have access, and from time to time, I have worked with reflections written by members of PC(USA) congregations. However, writing BRIDGES is one of the few occasions that I have to "speak for myself," and I greatly enjoy that discipline. Of course, I receive particularly positive comments when I use an article for BRIDGES that one of you has written. Since this tells me that you value hearing from one another as well as from me, I want to let a few of the participants in the Presbyterian Women's Global Exchange speak for themselves by quoting portions of some of the e-mails that they have sent to me following their September adventure, which took them to Ukraine and Hungary, as well as the Czech Republic.

Mary Beth Lysobey from the Sun Synod exclaims: "...The trip has changed my life. I wish I could take it again, knowing what I know now. I would learn so much more. I do know that we can learn much from our European sisters and brothers. "Their reaching out in mission is so awesome when you consider their churches came 'out of hiding' less than twenty years ago after more than forty years under communism."

Rev. Neva Rathbun from the Rocky Mountain Synod says: "I give thanks to God for the excellent opportunities that you arranged and helped arrange for the Global Exchange group.... I feel that I was especially blessed with many opportunities to fellowship with Czech people and graced by their friendliness and genuine hospitality. The mission work that has begun is enlightening and generates much enthusiasm in my heart to share stories of what God is doing."

Anna McIlwain from the Synod of the Living Waters writes: "Your teaching us the wonderful song with its strength and hope and yes, even a touch of sadness added so much to my experience of learning what it means and has meant to be a Christian in the Czech Republic. I actually taught the "Give Us Wisdom, Give Us Courage" song at my first presentation.... In addition, the visits from Czech women meant a lot to me, and I really appreciate...the wealth you found for us in Milada Horáková's letter to her family before she was executed. All of these additions will add so much to my presentations."

Beverly Roselieb from the Synod of the Southwest declares: "My mind is still so full of the experiences we shared...in all three countries! I was one of those fortunate enough to have visited the prison.... I am glad you included Vendula's name in your letter.... Please assure

her that I was most appreciative of her efforts on our behalf and most impressed with her work with the men who come to chapel. It was a joy to experience their music and their testimony."

Christine Fuller of the Synod of the Trinity brings the experiences that the women had after leaving the Czech Republic to life: "The remainder of the trip went well, in spite of a lot of rain..... I think the time in Carpath-Ukraine was heart-rending for all of us.... Their lives are quite difficult. Still, the spirit of optimism and determination to serve God in whatever way they can surmounts any challenges. I stayed in the home of a young family with one child and another on the way. They had bought their home three years ago and are finishing it as they have money and energy. The floors were covered with hand-woven rug strips. The bathtub and washer were installed in the bathroom. The toilet is an outside privy in the garden. It's a long time since I used one of those! But they were most gracious and welcoming, and we were able to have a very pleasant meal and visit...."

Joyce's conclusion: The life-changing power of the Global Exchange is aptly reflected in the awareness that we have much to learn from our Central European brothers and sisters, as we enter into their stories, embrace their songs, and affirm their commitment. May you be inspired and invigorated by the thoughtful paragraph in which **Beverly Roselieb's** concludes: "...The Christian commitment of both the Czech and Hungarian people to one another and to those in need is so amazing such a short time after being under Communist rule. Somewhere in my reflections, I recall someone saying something about a hymn "A Fire Burning in our Hearts." I certainly saw and felt evidence of that as we experienced firsthand all that is being done through the Diaconia and the churches there."