



## MINUTE FOR MISSION

August 1, 2005

### Faithfulness During the Dark Age

During the years when the mission work of the Presbyterian Church was being born in the United States, Protestants in the Czech lands were living through a difficult period. The eighteenth century was the era of Recatholization, a period that is referred to as the “dark age” up to the present day. At that time, the Czech province was identified as a heretical land. It would take most of the eighteenth century before Protestants could profess the faith of their fathers—with some risk, yet under the protection of the law. In 1781, the Edict of Toleration, which permitted non-Catholics to live legally in the Czech lands, was issued, although Protestants remained an afflicted segment of society. About that time, mission—as service in the name of the message and gospel of Christ—was also undertaken.



The Rev. Joel Ruml is the new synod senior of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

That mission was carried out despite the strong pressure that was directed against the Protestant faith by the Roman Catholic Church. Our ancestors were disinclined to reconcile themselves to the fact that in their time they would have to replace the truth for which Jan Hus laid down his life with a faith that used force to spread the gospel.

In that era, an interesting method of caring for the souls of the intractable Protestants worked well. To this day, places where Protestants gathered illegally—mostly in forests, cliffs, or gorges—exist throughout the whole

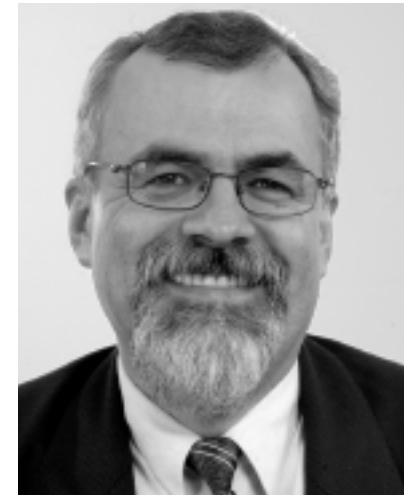


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Czech Republic. They secretly passed the word that an “undercover” preacher would be visiting them so that they could meet at night, profess their faith, and be strengthened by the Lord’s Supper. Then the preacher, who had surreptitiously ministered to those who had gathered, hurried on along a prearranged route to meet with other clandestine Protestants waiting for his service. The itinerant preacher knew of various hiding places along his path that had been prepared in case he was betrayed or followed. For the most part, clandestine preachers came from freer quarters and regions, and their preaching, pastoral, and missionary pilgrimages sometimes lasted an entire week.

Although no Church of Czech Brethren existed at that time, its present members acknowledge with admiration and appreciation those who risked so much for the message of the gospel and were prepared to make sacrifices for their way of professing Christ. This appreciation naturally extends to those who came to our land as preachers and, out of love for Christ and for freedom of conscience and conviction, dispensed hope drawn from the gospel. For many members of the contemporary church, the example of such faithful and strong ancestors was a source of support in later periods of subjugation and oppression when it was necessary to hold on and not fall short.

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*Do you have a mission story to tell? Would you like to read inspiring stories of Presbyterians in mission? Visit the Witness Season Web site: [www.pcusa.org/witness](http://www.pcusa.org/witness). New minutes for mission are posted on the 1st and 15th of each month.*

*For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-7228, ext. 5689, or [Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org).*

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