

SERVANT LEADERS

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Florida Interlude

by Jarda Tusek



Photo, Sara & Jarda Tusek, courtesy Karel Prihoda

Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs in the US and Europe since 1985

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My wife Sara and I have lived and worked in Florida since 1993. We originally came here with our business, the International Leadership Institute (ILI), to work in partnership with the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, the University of North Florida, Jacksonville University's Institute for World Capitalism and hundreds of area businesses to deliver executive education programs for Czech and Slovak Business leaders, the Business Leadership Forum: USA (BLF).

Brief BLF History

We had begun these BLF programs, endorsed by the US government's Executive branch (by VP Al Gore and Ambassador Shirley Temple Brown) and the government of the Czech Republic (by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, our chief Czech partner) in 1991 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Our partners there included the World Trade Center, Chattanooga and Covenant College, a small Christian liberal arts college with a visionary President, Frank Brock, who wanted to help the Czechs and Slovaks, newly-liberated from communism, become Christians again.

The BLF programs were a success from the outset, due to the hard work and dedicated care of literally hundreds of Americans and Czechs. The Americans included volunteer host families, hundreds of sponsoring American businesses that accepted BLF interns (including such industry leaders as Barnett Bank, Westinghouse, and CSX), many American churches and universities who welcomed the Czechs and Slovaks, and ILI employees, friends and supporters such as the *Chattanooga Business Journal* and *Jacksonville Business Journal*, which published articles on program participants.

On the Czech and Slovak sides, the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, various chamber of commerce in Bratislava, Ostrava, Trencin and Nitra gave generously of their time and resources to promote the BLF programs to leading executives. The Olomouc Training Centre was our greatest friend in organizing meetings for prospective par-

ticipants, and facilitating their visas and other governmental requirements.

In all, ILI delivered more than 50 BLF programs, with over 480 participants, in the years 1991—2003. Most of these program were based in Florida, in the Jacksonville area, giving us the chance to get to know the First Coast area in some depth.

Transition Complete

The major focus of the BLF programs was on economic and political development in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Thanks to relatively well-developed industrial infrastructures and highly-educated inhabitants with some experience of world economic competition from 1918—1939, and then again 1945—1948, the Czech and Slovak governments made rapid progress in bringing their countries into the "first world" of competitive open-market economies with democratic political structures. By 1996, the heyday of the BLF programs was over. The Czech ministry of Industry and Trade, under the leadership of then-Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus,

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declared the economic transition complete; we didn't sign a new contract that year for BLF programs. This was a sad moment, as we had perfected the delivery of the BLF programs over six years of planning and evaluation, and we were hardly ready to say they were over.

US Department of State

For the next seven years, we used our business expertise working with the US Department of State as a training provider for participants from countries further east in the former soviet empire: Macedonia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and Lithuania. These less-well developed economies had a rougher transition than the Czechs and Slovaks. We delivered programs for specific industries (banking, technology, pension funds) to executives selected by US AID offices, again focusing on economic development and political freedom. Our Czech and Slovak programs slowed down to a few Travel-and-Learn programs each year, hardly the high-energy, all-encompassing pace of the BLF programs in the first half of the 90's.

A Comfortable Place

By the dawn of the new millennium, it seemed that our original business mission was fulfilled. We were firmly established in the beautiful state of Florida. Sara had found a wonderful niche as an English and Journalism teacher at Providence School, a ministry of New Life Christian Fellowship. I had found many ways to use my managerial and language skills in Jacksonville. We were in a comfortable place in our lives, and could,

with a clear conscience, plan our retirement. Yet we knew in our hearts we were waiting for instruction from the Lord, for our next adventure, one that we were sure would be even bigger than the business that brought us to Florida in the first place. And we knew it would not be in Florida.

To the Czech Republic

We know that we are not finished with our mission of helping the Czechs and Slovaks. The economic and political transition that we were part of was exciting and necessary, but now there's another even more vital transition. This transition is spiritual, from self-reliance to reliance on God, the creator and ruler of the universe, the author of life and the "prime mover" of eternity.

The Czechs are not ignorant about God. They have been a Christian nation since the 9th century, when Saints Cyril and Methodius came from Macedonia with the Gospel. The Protestant reformation began in Bohemia; martyrdom, crusades and religious wars followed, giving Christianity questionable credentials.

Our challenge is not that of missionaries traveling into the interior of a wild country, seeking tribes who've never heard the Gospel. We can't go with medical clinics and wells, bringing Western sanitation to illiterate, poverty-stricken people who will gladly take just about anything offered to them. We are going to minister to sophisticated, skeptical Europeans who may see us as offering just another version of an old, tired idea.

It will take all our experience, all our knowledge and skills, all our resources, to fashion our new Czech mission. It will be a mission of love, delivered to people who don't even know how much they are hurting from not knowing God. In practical terms, we expect to simply move ILI to the Czech Republic, continuing our educational work, but with a new twist woven into our daily interactions with the Czechs—the premise that knowing and following God, in the person of Jesus Christ, will give your life purpose and meaning beyond economic success and political freedom.

We already have a network of Christian contacts there, including our close German missionary friend Christof, who ministers in the church my grandfather helped build, Betlémská kape in Zizkov, a Prague neighborhood with a Czech Brethren heritage. There are a number of effective English-speaking Christian ministries already operating in the Czech Republic; we will interview the leaders of some of these ministries for our current book, the second of the *Three Things You Can't Do in Prague* trilogy.

We are grateful to our friends at Christ the Redeemer Church in Ponte Vedra Beach, especially to Archbishop Daniel Williams, for their interest and willingness to discuss with us various methods of doing mission work in the Czech Republic. And we look forward to that time, in the next few years, when the Lord will give us our "marching orders" to the Czech Republic and our Florida interlude will end.

