



PRAGUE UPDATE: MAY-JULY, 2007



by Jarda Tusek

Recently I visited Prague for 8 weeks. I was there for several reasons, the main one being to continue our preparations for the International Leadership Institute's planned relocation of our headquarters to the Czech Republic within the next few years. I also found time to devote to the development of our proposed Christian ministry in the Czech Republic.

Bridging Gaps

Among several Institute activities I focused on while in Prague was teaching Advanced English to a small group of Czechs who were interested in finding out "how to bridge the major gaps between cultures without really trying." This short-term conversational English seminar was offered through Betlemska Kaple (Bethlehem Chapel) of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in Prague 3 (Zizkov), which is led by my long-time friend Christof Lange. Rev. Lange is also a valuable advisor as to our plans to relocate to the Czech Republic, and what types of ministries will work in the

Czech culture. The seminar was an initial attempt to locate and begin to bridge the cultural gaps between Czechs and Americans.

Alpha Course

The Institute seminar in May was designed to "test the waters" for delivering a more ambitious English language program—Alpha. Developed by the Church of the Holy Trinity in Brompton, London, and delivered for the past decade by the Rev. Nicky Gumble, Alpha is an introduction to the Christian faith, meant to invite people into exploring Christianity. The light, humorous approach of the Alpha course provides a non-threatening way for curious people to find out about Christianity in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. My wife Sara and I intend to offer the Alpha course as the keystone of our ministry in the Czech Republic. We have participated in the course many times in the U.S., and each time learn something new about being a Christian.

The language course I taught at Bethemska Kaple lasted six weeks and provided the Czech participants with some ideas about American culture while helping them gain proficiency in conversational English. In addition, this course gave me important insight into just how large the gaps really are—an insight that was expanded and solidified by my experience of transferring my membership in the cooperative that's assumed ownership of the building I grew up in, Domazlicka 2 in Zizkov, Prague.

Domazlicka 2

After 17 years of running an international business in Central and Eastern Europe, I considered that I had some experience and knowledge of the conditions for doing business there. Yet none of my previous business dealings prepared me for the challenges of transferring my cooperative membership in Domazlicka 2.

Rev. Christof Lange, Milena Kozumplikova (Mayor of Prague 3), Jarda Tusek at the rededication of the renovated Betlemska Kaple, which received a substantial renovation grant from Prague 3 due to its architectural and historical significance.



Photo courtesy of Kamil Kadarabek

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Celebrating the rededication of the newly-renovated building of the Church of Czech Brethren "Betlemska Kaple," a historic treasure of European Cubist architecture in Zizkov. The inscription on the wall translates as "God is love."

Photo courtesy of Kamil Kadarabek

Prague Update

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The building at Domazlicka 2 was constructed during the First Republic, between the world wars, and is still solid, even after decades of neglect (1948—1989, during communist rule). As a state-owned building, it was administered by the city hall of Zizkov; however, city hall was never given the financial resources to do a proper job of maintenance and upkeep. Rents were absurdly low, in keeping with the absurdly low salaries paid to Czechs by their communist bosses. The entire economic and political system of 40 years of communism so demoralized and impoverished the Czechs that making the effort to repair and modernize the building was simply beyond the capabilities of the administrators.

Restoring Ownership

After the collapse of communism in 1989, the state made every effort to restore property to its rightful owners. The building at Domazlicka 2, however, was one of many in the Czech Republic whose fate was not so easily settled. Finally, in 2004, the building was included in the on-going privatization process, and the tenants were offered the opportunity to establish a cooperative which would purchase and administer the building. Gaining membership in the newly-formed cooperative has occupied much of my time, and has been the focal point of many of my visits to Prague for the past several years.

On this trip, I put into motion the sale of my membership in the cooperative. The experience of transferring my membership (which has yet to be concluded) has taught me some extremely valuable lessons about doing business in a post-communist country.

God makes the Impossible into the Possible

This long visit to Prague was really a trial run, to see if we will be able to move there permanently. I was challenged in every way on this trip—intellectually, psychologically and physically (I climbed Petrin Hill near Prague Castle many times, and several times climbed the 199 stairs to the top of Petrin Tower!).

In those eight weeks I came to understand the deep truth of this Bible verse: "And looking upon them Jesus said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'." (Matthew 19:26) From bridging the cultural gaps to dealing with the Czech legal system and business culture, I have found that, as Philipians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ, Who strengthens me."

High School Reunion

In recent years, a cherished tradition has been established of meeting with my Prague classmates (Class of '58) to exchange news and enjoy each other's company. The Institute has been able to bring many of my classmates to Florida for short visits, strengthening the ties from those years past. On this trip to Prague, I was most delighted to run into one of my "long-lost" classmates quite by accident. Michael Pavlik, like I, left Czechoslovakia in the 1960's. He, like I, lived in New York City, where he became a world-renowned artist. We had lost touch, until, by one of those "coincidences of God," we saw each other on Charles Bridge shortly after my arrival in Prague in May. Michael was also visiting Prague; he now lives in Guatemala with his family.

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